Death in a New Key: The Christian Turn of Roman Sarcophagi

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Christian sarcophagi were produced in Rome during a long fourth century for a narrow audience. Their iconography marks a discontinuity in a centuries-old medium, a turn away from pagan and profane themes towards biblical narratives and Christian ideas. Following their patrons and viewers, these sarcophagi “converted” to a new religion and visually expressed its novel conception of death. This dissertation approaches these monuments as autonomous historical documents that merit examination on their own terms, which is not to deny the importance of social, economic, religious or artistic developments. Some of these extrinsic elements of context are addressed in the initial chapters. In particular, inferences are drawn concerning the cohort of individuals who bought, occupied and saw these sarcophagi based on estimates of cost and the Roman income distribution. Visibility, conditions of access and the circumstances of reception are also examined. Following these contextual considerations, the study focuses on two distinct and chronologically separated groups of Christian sarcophagi. The first consists of monuments with the Jonah theme, the
single most popular form in the period before 350 CE. Jonah sarcophagi are representative of the widespread use of scriptural symbolic narrative, combining Old and New Testament allusions with other potential associations. The second group are sarcophagi displaying the so-called *travitio legis* (a modern Latinism), an important example of the late-century “conceptual” forms that allude to religious tenets without any specific scriptural anchor. This complex and controversial form of representation suggests a composite design, a conflation of images into a single form. Through a close reading of both the Jonah and *travitio legis* sarcophagi, the discussion elucidates various facets of reception and a range of over-determined and alternative meanings. The conclusion considers how the fourth-century Roman sarcophagi contributed to the construction of a Christian *imaginaire* of Christian death among their viewers.
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I. Introduction

Elaborate, figural Roman sarcophagi were produced and deployed from the early second century CE. They were bought, occupied and seen by a narrow cohort of the population occupying the top of an ever-steepening wealth pyramid. Over the course of a long fourth century, from the decades before Constantine’s accession to the years following the sack of Rome, the Christian population of the city grew from a small minority to an overwhelming majority, and sarcophagi “converted” along with their wealthy consumers. The resulting monuments are among the most massive, expensive, accessible, fascinating and beautiful vestiges of early Christian art.¹ They also survive in great number. Many hundreds of metropolitan sarcophagi made and deployed in Rome are available to modern scholars.²

This study is devoted to the implications of this metamorphosis in a centuries-old medium. Sarcophagi took a decisive Christian turn, corresponding to an equally dramatic transposition of the experience of death into a new key.³

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¹ All three words in this common expression are controversial. Ernst Kitzinger, Byzantine Art in the Making: Main Lines of Stylistic Development in Mediterranean Art, 3rd–7th Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1–2, did not like the qualifier “early” because it diminished the grandeur and importance of the works. Jaë Elsner, “Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Ancient Jewish Art and Early Christian Art,” The Journal of Roman Studies 93 (2003): 114, took issue with the adjective “Christian” as suggesting a real category that may not exist. And many historians are chary of calling antique or medieval monuments “art,” particularly after Hans Belting’s influential Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Anthony Cutler, “The Right Hand’s Cunning: Craftsmanship and the Demand for Art in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,” Speculum 72 (1997): 974n14, was more sanguine: “Once the important point is made, as it was by Hans Belting, Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst, that these works were not primarily gratuitous aesthetic gestures, it is not worth belaboring.” “Early Christian art” is sufficiently well understood to withstand all these criticisms so long as it is not essentialized.

² The number of extant early Christian sarcophagi is probably between 1,000 and 2,000, depending on the criteria adopted for classification. About three-quarters were made in Rome of which perhaps 80% were used there; the rest were exported. Since “Roman” can refer to an empire as well as a city, the term “metropolitan” will be adopted in this study.

³ Both the directional and musical metaphors are borrowed from twentieth-century philosophical discourse. The first evokes the linguistic turn particularly associated with the name of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the English analytic school. The second is homage to Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957). In her preface to the first edition of 1942 (xiii in the 3rd edition), Langer refers to a “shift in tonality” in philosophy, a transposition of its main themes, a substitution of new questions. These turns of phrase are apt to the thesis of this study.
1. Death and the viewer

Sarcophagi were monuments to death, the *causa causans* of the corpse, the coffin and the mourners. To the modern observer, sarcophagi are decommissioned antiquities, encountered either in the flesh as reconstituted spolia or in photographic reproduction.\(^4\) They are examined with detachment, purged of decomposition and tears, isolated from the reflections, memories and associations of their original viewers, removed from the presence of death.

Participants in funerals and commemorations undoubtedly experienced a range of mental states depending upon their relationship to the deceased, how long ago, at what age and in what circumstances death had occurred, individual personality traits, and the physical and social surroundings at the tomb. A premise of this study is that the suffering and grief experienced by fourth-century Romans was not dramatically different or less intense than other individuals’ in different times and places. The accoutrements of death may vary: the terms in which grief is expressed, the rites and rituals that channel, contain, rationalize or assuage the emotions of the survivor, the appearances and practices of mourning. Keith Hopkins struggled with two poles of a debate concerning antique grief, which he labelled as the cultural relativism of anthropologists and the assertions of human nature by psychologists.\(^5\) The former assume that emotions and experiences evolved along with rites and practices; the latter treat grief as a common and essentially permanent human (or even hominoid) condition. Hopkins placed himself closer to the latter group, and that choice is followed here.

Linking the externalized rituals of mourning with the personal experience of grief is an intermediate conception of “mentality.” Philippe Ariès, its best known historian, contrasted the modern fear and denial of death with a more harmonious attitude that prevailed at least from Homer to Tolstoy, possibly farther back into human pre-history and forward into

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twentieth-century England. In the old days, death was immediate, public, familiar, diminished, communalized and desensitized; people were resigned to its universality, inevitability and prevalence. Death, in a word, was “tamed” (la mort apprivoisée). Ariès’s analysis has been criticized for its too hasty dismissal of historical discontinuities over this very long period, over-simplification and a failure to pay sufficient attention to prevailing religious systems. Particularly relevant here is its quite summary and circumstantial consideration of the centuries preceding the High Middle Ages. The assertion of a broadly constant mentality across such a lengthy period represents an extreme trans-historical generalization perhaps coloured by a personal nostalgiedesorigines related to Ariès’s own biography.

Fourth-century Roman death was normally unpleasant, painful, inglorious and often more unpredictable than it is today. The most common causes were infectious disease and crude accidents. Occupants of sarcophagi rarely earned their places through battle, and few died in peaceful old age or of terminal diseases fulfilling a medical prognosis. Even Ariès conceded that death was “never experienced as a neutral phenomenon.” Ritual and the socialization of death by the community were strategies of domestication running against the wild tide of natural passions and torment. Death was always a mal-heur.

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8 The expression is used by Vovelle, “Attitudes devant la mort,” 28. One must be wary of in personam analyses or pop psychology, but Ariès’s Action française connections, the ambiguity in his post-War positions and his refocus from royalist politics to traditionalist history might provide at least one explanation for his views. See Patrick H. Hutton, Philippe Ariès and the Politics of French Cultural History (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

9 Ariès, L’homme devant la mort, 2.312–315. The play on words is an untranslatable conflation of misfortune and bad timing.
commonly expressed in Roman epitaphs, seeping through stilted linguistic conventions that seem to us, and probably did to them as well, ill-suited to the expression of strong emotions. Myths and rituals may manage or contain the fear, grief and sorrow of intimate death but the experience itself, immediately encountered, was never “tamed.”

The iconography of the Roman tomb is consistent with the pangs of death felt by the survivors. A peacefully sleeping Endymion approached by an eager Selena had a different impact and function in the villa than on a sarcophagus. In the sepulchral setting it provided consolation, perhaps evoking a tearful memory of a now forever lost marital companion. Consolation is not entertainment. It responds to rather than reflects or enhances the viewer's emotional state. Christian iconography of salvation was uplifting wherever it appeared — in the apse of a church or on the coffin of a dead family member — but in different senses. In the first case, its function was didactic and inspirational; in the latter, it responded with hope to the fears and pains of the viewer. These images were viewed in the near presence of a corpse, a locus of tension between affection and fearsome uncleanliness. While looking at the outside of the container, the visitor could not ignore what lay inside.

These observations are focussed on the original viewers. The examination of ancient monuments from this perspective no longer requires justification. No one could deny the importance of the funerary function and context of a sarcophagus, the religious affiliation and belief system of the beholder, the social or performative elements in the viewing experience and other factors generally grouped under the rubric of reception. The sarcophagus literature has nonetheless been far more focussed on questions of source and influence: the Christianization of imperial forms and pagan motifs, style history, the impact of patristic texts, and so on. Not only does this concern with genealogy tend to crowd out

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the viewers, it also fails to recognize their contribution even within that paradigm. The “influence” debate normally centres on the relative contributions of producers, the precursor and the artist, with an occasional nod to patrons, but routinely ignoring the consumer.¹¹ Yet the reactions of viewers must have had an effect on the appearance of the objects produced; conversely, widely diffused and well-understood visual or textual precedents were part of the competency viewers brought with them to the tomb. The qualifications are important. Arcane theological tracts of restricted circulation are unlikely to have been in the viewer’s mind as he or she regarded a sarcophagus. Models that might be traced into the production process may have been quite unknown to or ignored by viewers (did they really think of the pagan god Sol when they saw Christ lift his right hand?).

These two factors — the possible role of viewers as agents of influence and the impact on their viewing experience of other agents, traditions, texts or models — are elements of reception, but they do not exhaust it. For historiographic reasons, reception is commonly defined in opposition to authorial precedence. In the words of Madeline Caviness, it represents “a move from interrogation of all that lay 'behind' the creation of the work, including any sources believed by earlier scholars to fix meanings in it, to a consideration of the varied readings that have arisen from viewing positions in front of the work after its completion, during its display or use.”¹² This adversarial relationship may be relaxed, or the edges of the implicit categories advantageously blurred, by conceiving of the viewer as the principal node in a network of relationships. Whence the preference here for the term “engagement” over the potentially isolating “reception.”

The context of viewing was the tomb, and the patron was likely present both physically, as a viewer or deceased, and indirectly, as the financial and possibly conceptual promoter. Artisans were absent but represented by their handiwork. There is some tendency to

¹¹ Michael Baxandall framed the issue in adversarial and binary terms: “If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X.” Quoted by Bovey in her introduction to John Lowden and Alixe Bovey, Under the Influence: The Concept of Influence and the Study of Illuminated Manuscripts (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), VIII. This volume provides a useful collection of essays on the “influence” debate in the consideration of medieval manuscript illumination.

construct an agency triangle — producer, patron, viewer — but this is too neat and simplistic. First, it omits, or at least obscures, the interaction among visitors, the social and performative element. Funerary commemorations were quite unlike the solitary regard of a museum visitor. Prayers were recited, psalms were chanted, inscriptions and iconography were probably discussed along with the life and death of the deceased. It was a time and place of mutual consolation and shared grief.

Furthermore, the scope of the viewers’ relational engagements extended beyond the people present or represented at the tomb. Their closest and most intense nexus was with two non-human agents, both necessary conditions for reception. One was the deceased, now transmogrified from a personal participant in the visitor’s social and family life to a decaying thing and eternal spirit. The other was the sarcophagus. In his seminal *Art and Agency*, Alfred Gell argued that graven images (or for that matter other objects) should properly be considered agents if that is how the people interacting with these things regarded them.\(^{13}\) More recent considerations of non-human or material agency provide a useful scheme for considering reception as a compendious term that focuses on the viewer not as another discrete agent but as part of a redistribution of agency with an assemblage that includes other visitors, the deceased and the sarcophagus, as well as the absent actors.\(^{14}\)

One challenge to a consideration of sarcophagi and their viewers is diversity. The sarcophagus population — the patrons, deceased and viewers who bought, occupied and saw the sarcophagi under examination here — was, in many respects, relatively homogeneous, composed mainly of well-off Romans, generally Christians or Christian

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\(^{13}\) Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 16–20. Gell gingerly resisted overturning the philosophical conception of human agency entirely. He was prepared to consider objects to be secondary agents but nonetheless insisted that they are more than mere instruments of some “real” human agent.

sympathizers, living during a circumscribed period of perhaps a century and a half. This
group was not, however, entirely uniform. The social and political perspective of an
excessively rich senatorial family differed considerably from that of the comfortable office-
holder. Educational backgrounds varied, not always commensurate with wealth or status,
and even more diverse were the degree and nature of religious commitment. Viewers in
general and even the viewers of a single monument cannot be assumed to cluster closely
around any particular point on the scale of Christian devotion or to have settled within a
single doctrinal conviction. There could have been dissenting viewers, perhaps pagan or
non-believing relatives, although one would expect fewer casual or disinterested observers
in the private tomb than in the public space, or even the church. As remarked above,
viewers also varied in their relationship with the deceased and their own personal reactions
to his or her death and the commemorative experience.

Like the people, the monuments present both basic similarities and important differences.
The material is similar but there are notable differences in overall size and in consequence
the quantity of valuable marble consumed (chapter 1). The carving intensity, technique and
sculptural “quality” vary over the course of the period of production and among sarcophagi
produced roughly contemporaneously. At first blush the iconographical diversity may seem
limited, but the number of different scenes and the freedom with which they were chosen
and combined are significant. Even representations of the most popular narrative events or
figures, commonly lumped together as examples of stereotypical or stock images, present
significant variation. No two are ever quite the same. It is not obvious whether this is due to
peculiarities of the workshop or artisan (what we might call originality), eccentricities or
specific desires of a patron, or spontaneous variation. As an illustration, over 100

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15 Compare Paul Zanker, “Bild-Räume und Betrachter im kaiserzeitlichen Rom. Fragen und Anregungen für
Interpreten,” in Klassische Archäologie: Eine Einführung, ed. Adolf Heinrich Borbein, Paul Zanker and Tonio
Hölscher (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2000), 216–221, on “flaneurs” in the public space, and dissident and
disinterested observers in imperial Rome. The "plurality and unpredictability at work in contexts of reception"
is inferred from semiotic analysis by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” The Art
sarcophagus representations of the raising of Lazarus survive. In almost all cases, a miniature, doll-like Lazarus, fully swathed but for his exposed face, stands in the entry of a pedimented aedicule — either of a classical, triangular form or squared — perched on a stepped podium. Jesus stands to the side, sometimes frontal and in other cases turning towards the tomb. He gestures with a wand, staff or perhaps just his bare hand. Martha is usually kneeling before Jesus, in a pose anywhere from a slight bow to deep proskynesis. She may touch the hem of his garment or she may kiss his hand. Or she may be omitted from the scene entirely. Such variability is the norm.

So, too, the narrow chronological boundaries of Christian sarcophagus production are misleading. The apparent shortness of this period is the temporal analogue of an optical illusion, an untoward result of looking back from a distance of a millennium and a half. Psychological time did not pass more slowly in late antiquity; indeed, shorter life-spans and generations might suggest the opposite. The significant changes in the institutions, economics and spiritual concerns relevant to the subject of Christian sarcophagi impose another type of variability on the reception by or engagement of the viewers.

The constancy of death and engagement must, therefore, be tempered by the diversity among both viewers and objects viewed. The centrifugal force of individual difference must be resisted without denying its importance.

16 Arnold Provoost, De vroegchristelijke funeraire beeldtaal: Met chronologisch repertorium van de catacombenschilderingen in Rome en van de vroegchristelijke sarcofagen (Leuven: Onderzoekseenheid Archeologie K.U. Leuven, 2011), 1.40–41, counts 113 sarcophagi (plus 71 fresco cycles) with this scene. Ulrike Lange, Ikonographisches Register für das Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. Bd. 1 (Rom und Ostia) (Dettelbach: J.H. Röll, 1996), 66–67, lists 65 sarcophagi or fragments in Rep. I, to which one could add Rep. II.31 and 93, and Rep. III. 22, 37, 146, 218 and 511. See also Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort: Untersuchungen zu Jenseitsvorstellungen von Christen des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2010), 219–222. This scene illustrates as well the importance of regional preferences. It appears on a sarcophagus credibly given to a Toulouse workshop, Rep. III.514, dated to the early fifth century. Two examples made in Ravenna, Rep. II.378 and 379, also dated to the early fifth century, show a brick podium and a schematic tomb composed of two columns with capitals surmounted by an arch. While the architectural contexts are similar in the Ravennate representations, Christ is in a different posture and makes a different gesture in each.
2. On method

Michel Foucault likened history to archaeology, a metaphor that highlights singularity, specificity and phenomenology. The historian’s task is to problematize the concrete facts collected in “series,” to discover their contents, boundaries and chronologies. Only then can one determine their inter-relationships, accepting the inevitable temporal disparities and contradictions, to reconstitute a *discours*, a historical generalization of the most precise possible form, still rooted in and limited to individual particularity.¹⁷ These series, or more generally the history of literature or art, do not simply point to or derive from society, a *Zeitgeist* or some other global principle.¹⁸ Paul Veyne gave Foucault’s method the felicitous label “hermeneutic positivism.”¹⁹

It would be pretentious and inaccurate to describe this study as Foucauldian. Its aim is less lofty than the reconstitution of a discourse appropriate to early Christian art or fourth-century funerary practice. The conception of the autonomous series and the attention to concrete facts are, however, its methodological inspiration, and hermeneutic positivism could describe its aspiration. The self-imposed specificity of Christian sarcophagi is striking. They were primarily a metropolitan phenomenon, mainly viewed in Rome, produced and put into use within the confines of a long fourth century. Even narrower still is the window of wealth. Sarcophagi were elements in the visual display of serious economic status by a small element of the population. These monuments are further defined by their function as containers for the deposition of the body of a deceased and their location in a funerary space. Like Foucault’s series, the sarcophagi and their engagements with viewers were not

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¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 15 (the archaeology metaphor), 18–20 (his specific discussion of *séries*). Paul Veyne, *Foucault: sa pensée, sa personne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), 15, defines Foucault’s *discours* in this way: “c’est la description la plus précise, la plus serrée d’une formation historique en sa nudité, c’est la mise au jour de son ultime différence individuelle.” This nudity arises because the historical formation is bared of is over-arching and superimposed systems and hypotheses.

¹⁸ Veyne, *Foucault*, 39–40. The history of art is not “transitive” with respect to society or the spirit of the times. In a footnote, Veyne further explores this unusual use of the grammatical conception of transitivity, relating it to René Char’s proposition that a poet is like an intransitive verb; he has no object that completes him.

¹⁹ Veyne, *Foucault*, 27.
merely cogs on the wheel of fourth-century or late antique society and theology, or even early Christian art.

In an ideal world we would examine other “series” and reconstruct the form of relation between them.\textsuperscript{20} Having regard to the evidence available and realistic limitations of scope, however, this study, while not ignoring contextual concerns, notably questions of status, wealth, numbers, production and visibility, will address the more immediate challenge of grasping “the things themselves,” the physical objects and their iconography in relational engagement with their original viewers.

This restrained focus on fourth-century sarcophagi is premised on the view that they signal a discontinuity in funerary representation that is worthy of study in its own right. It is in tension with a significant body of recent historical scholarship that stresses continuity, like the \textit{longue durée} of Ariès’s “tamed death,” conceived as a solid structure that has withstood the pressures of historical variations for two thousand years.\textsuperscript{21} The merit of an autonomous examination of fourth-century funerary monuments is also confronted by the self-styled Late Antiquity movement (designated here by initial upper case letters), propelled by the work of Peter Brown.\textsuperscript{22} Late Antiquity represents an important new

\textsuperscript{20} Foucault, \textit{L’archéologie du savoir}, 19–20: “Le problème qui s’ouvre alors... c’est de déterminer quelle forme de relation peut être légitimement décrite entre ces différentes séries; quel système vertical elles sont susceptibles de former; quel est, des unes aux autres, le jeu des corrélations et des dominances; de quel effet peuvent être les décalages, les temporalités différentes, les diverses rémanences; dans quels ensembles distincts certains éléments peuvent figurer simultanément; bref, non seulement quelles séries, mais quelles ‘séries de séries’ – ou en d’autres termes, quels ‘tableaux’ il est possible de constituer.”

\textsuperscript{21} Ariès, \textit{L’homme devant la mort}, 1.36: “l’expression d’une même attitude globale devant la mort ne signifie pas qu’on lui reconnaisse une permanence structurale étrangère aux variations proprement historiques.... Mais il a résisté aux poussées évolutives pendant environ deux millénaires. Dans un monde soumis au changement, l’attitude traditionnelle devant la mort apparait comme une môle d’inertie et de continuité.”

\textsuperscript{22} While the notion of a long late antiquity may be attributed to Alois Riegl and other early twentieth-century art historians, Peter Brown launched Late Antiquity in its modern incarnation in 1971 with \textit{The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971). As a historical school it is closely identified with this work and his many subsequent publications, alone and with distinguished collaborators. Evaluations of Late Antiquity from scholars outside the mainstream of the movement range from cautious, to sceptical, to overtly hostile. Examples in the first categories include: Edward James, “The Rise and Function of the Concept of “Late Antiquity,” \textit{Journal of Late Antiquity} 1 (2008): 20–30; Andrew Gillett, “Rome’s Fall and Europe’s Rise: A View from Late Antiquity,” \textit{The Medieval Review} 07.10.12 (2007), \url{https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/6332/07.10.12.html?sequence=1}; Wolf Liebeschuetz, “The Birth of Late Antiquity,” \textit{Antiquité Tardive} 12 (2004): 253–261. The negative camp is represented by Andrea Giardina, “Esplosione di tardoantico,” \textit{Studi Storici} 40 (1999): 157–180; and in more
paradigm of historical research whose practitioners have appropriated and redefined the interstice between imperial Rome and the Middle Ages, challenging traditional periodization.23 One of its central tenets is a relentless (in the view of one commentator, obsessive) insistence on continuity over a period of five or six hundred years from the third century to the eighth, minimizing the significance of the disruptive events around which the "old history" was organized, notably the fall of the western Empire.24 This assertion of continuity does not imply immobility or even stability. A favoured expression is "transformation," apparently meant to accommodate such critical developments (focussing only on death) as the cult of saints, Christian deposition ad sanctos, and the importation of the dead into the city, certainly matters that cannot be regarded as mere adjustments of earlier Roman praxis.
A slightly different but overlapping and equally lengthy period was adopted by Jaš Elsner in exploring the passage from pagan to Christian art. In his hands, “transformation” refers to fundamental change, as viewed from two chronological end-points.\(^{25}\)

The cultural transformation which took place in the Graeco-Roman world between the reigns of Augustus and Justinian is, with the possible exceptions of the Renaissance and the “Greek Revolution” of the fifth century B.C., perhaps the most momentous change in the history of the West. It marks the passage from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

Across these six centuries Elsner perceives a consistent body of evidence. There is no “single 'pivotal' moment” but rather “a gradual, complicated and multifaceted process of change over several centuries" best understood by looking at its “poles.”\(^{26}\) While the precise periodizations differ, his argument falls within a venerable tradition that includes such scholars as André Grabar, Ernst Kitzinger and Hans Peter L’Orange of tracing the transition from Roman imperial to medieval art through an intermediate phase of “early Christian art.” Elsner’s use of terminology may seem to reverse that of Late Antiquity – continuity within transformation instead of transformation within continuity – but the chronological theory is similar.

At one level, Ariès’s *longue durée*, the Late Antiquity school and Elsner’s multi-century process merely recognize the fundamentally continuous character of human time. Life runs from birth to death; generation succeeds upon generation. As E.R. Dodds remarked:\(^{27}\)

> The practice of chopping history into convenient lengths and calling them “periods” or “ages” has of course its drawbacks. Strictly speaking, there are no periods in history, only in historians; actual history is a smoothly flowing continuum, a day following a day.

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\(^{26}\) Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 159 (emphasis is in the original).

The adoption by these historians of longer periods reflects the view that even such concentrated disruptions as plagues and invasions do not prevent the flow along time’s arrow, but it does not abandon the academic demand for retrospective organization. It also fails to recognize the plurality of history. As Michel Vovelle observed, the time of economic history, social history, the history of mentalities – all are imbricated like the tiles on a roof.  

The premise of this study is not that the long fourth century should be erected as a distinct historical period or a sub-period within late antiquity, either generally or for some particular purpose, like the mentality concerning death or the development of Christian art. It is, rather, that a group of monuments produced during that span of years and experienced in a specific context by a restricted group of the Roman élite and sub-élite has a serious and autonomous claim on our attention. Christian sarcophagi merit study for what they tell us about themselves and their consumers in a functional setting and historical moment; they are not just part of some sweeping evolution from the Ara Pacis in Rome to San Vitale in Ravenna or the Monastery of St Catharine at Mount Sinai.

As well as grouping monuments produced over several centuries, art historians also commonly collect examples of different media and function; sarcophagi are treated along with apse mosaics, catacomb paintings and domestic silver. While comparisons are unavoidable and often instructive, the Roman Christian sarcophagus, having regard to its particular use, consumer group, cost, technical characteristics and chronological scope of production, should not be homogenized among the various and varied expressions of “early

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30 Such comparisons appear in chapter 6, between traditio legis sarcophagi and related contemporary representations in mosaic, ivory, glass and paint.
Christian art." For example, assertions of pagan-Christian syncretism, whether additive or synthetic, are mostly inferred from very different objects, monuments and settings. The appearance of Bellerophon on a floor mosaic at Hinton St Mary in Dorset or Venus on the silver Projecta Casket of the Esquiline Treasure is of questionable relevance to sarcophagi upon which such imagery is almost entirely absent (as discussed in the Conclusion).

There is also reason to keep some respectful distance between sarcophagi and texts, works of theology, sermons, correspondence (usually between clerics), even epigraphy. The written word is the primary tool of historians of late antiquity, including but not restricted to those of the Late Antiquity movement, although Brown included 130 pictures within the 200 pages of his *World of Late Antiquity*. While this could be a sign of an intended elevation of visual evidence, Hjalmar Torp perceptively remarked that Brown treated images as mere “illustrations,” a claim that echoes Foucault’s rejection of “transitivity,” treating art as derivative from or pointing to something else, in this case texts:

...to Professor Brown, the various kinds of images, art works, and monuments of late antiquity in principle are illustrations, useful in driving home a point in a narrative essentially based on written evidence. Pictures serve as seasoning in an already tasty dish. The work of art conceived of and interpreted as a paramount source of historical inquiry is the *parent pauvre* of Peter Brown's captivating narrative...

Especially noteworthy is Brown’s claim that “[t]he upper-class culture of the Late Antique world had been exclusively literary,” citing as exemplary the lack of interest in “revolutionary mosaics” in churches of the period. This comment reveals, *pace* the author’s protestations, inadequate awareness of or lack of concern for visual and material culture, including the “upper-class” medium of the figural sarcophagus.

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31 So it was taken by James, “Rise and Function,” 22: “One of the strengths of *The World of Late Antiquity* is the way in which it introduced readers to art as a representation of late antique culture, which Brown did not so much by discussion as by careful choice of a spectacular array of photographs.”
33 Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 181.
34 Brown, “Reply to the Comments,” 79, wittily deflected Torp’s criticism of his use of the word illustration with the rejoinder/apology: *sit verba !*, but failed to respond to the fundamental methodological point.
The point here is not to criticize a highly-influential 1971 text of a respected historian. It is, however, fair to say that historians, of the Late Antiquity persuasion or any other, generally prefer the evidence of words to pictures. For the student of death trained in textual analysis, literary documents are more accessible and legible — “eloquent” is the word used by Frederick Paxton — than sarcophagi or other monuments.\textsuperscript{35} Of greater concern is how texts are used by scholars primarily engaged in the study of images, especially in late antiquity. Art historians may be equally guilty of treating the visual as subservient to the literary. A monument is a document and a document is a monument; sarcophagi and treatises are equally susceptible to examination as both objects and texts. Neither series is presumptively derivative from the other. And even affording them equal treatment, it is not inevitable that they can, should or need be “read” together. The issue is complex and a full consideration is not possible here, but some practical and theoretical reasons for caution should be noted.

First, the principal concerns expressed by writers are often not reflected on the monuments. For example in the depiction of the Jonah theme, the most common representation is the prophet reclining under a gourd plant, a scene that reflects the biblical text but is rarely evoked in the early literature.\textsuperscript{36} The most fundamental discrepancy is the ambivalence, hesitancy or even hostility towards Christian images altogether among theologians as against the unabashed and prominent role of such representations in the decoration of sarcophagi (and catacombs).\textsuperscript{37} In many cases, the claimed correspondence of

\textsuperscript{35} Paxton, \textit{Christianizing Death}, 8, remarked that “literary remains” were his main source and that “their reception and treatment by the people who used them and passed them on give eloquent testimony to the hopes and fears of late antique and early medieval men and women.” Peter Brown, “\textit{The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art}” by Thomas F. Mathews,” \textit{The Art Bulletin} 77 (1995): 502, adapts the same terminology in reverse, describing late antique images as “silent, or at least tongue-tied,” a point highlighted by the art historian Mathews in his “Reply to Brown.”


\textsuperscript{37} On the attitudes of theologians and clerics images, see chapter 4, note 23. The debate among modern scholars remains open, but even those who argue these positions were not hard and fast concede there was some reticence and conflicting views in the literary sources that is absent in the archaeological record.
image with text is self-fulfilling; the pictures are interpreted and understood on the assumption that they must express what is found in the words composed by different people, for a different audience, often at a different time.  

The very last comment reflects a second difficulty: even where texts and images address a common subject, they may not be contemporaneous. An often-remarked example is the early literary focus on Christ’s crucifixion and its near-absence in the visual record until the fifth century (with no examples on Roman sarcophagi). Yves Christe, who relies heavily on theological literature in his analysis of representations of the Apocalypse, concedes a décalage of the opposite sort: the literary tradition focussed on this theme only after it was already present in monumental form.

A third issue relates to the different spheres in which texts and images were produced and consumed as well as their often disparate functions. Ariès’s study cited a host of texts that could be fanciful, prescriptive, apologetic or polemic rather than positively descriptive of the practices or beliefs of their readers. Divining the mentality of “tamed death” from medieval chansons is like inferring modern sexual practices and mores from Hollywood cinema. In the case of early Christianity, the literature is almost entirely the work of theologians and their correspondents. These speculations or admonitions are rarely addressed to the deceased or bereaved. This is the case not only for tracts and treatises but also sermons. Although these last have the advantage of being more likely to have

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38 Exemplary of the use of a broad range of theological texts to determine the meaning of images is Martine Dulaey, *L’initiation chrétienne et la Bible (1er–Vie siècles): 'Des forêts de symboles'* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2001). See the discussion in chapter 5, page 200.


commanded the attention of the kinds of people who regarded sarcophagi, that is not the setting for which they were devised; nor should one hastily assume that the preserved texts faithfully reproduce what was factually said.\textsuperscript{41} None of this literature tells us much about funerals, iconography or habits of mind in connection with death. Epigraphy might seem the most promising source, but while epitaphs do provide clues regarding religious attitudes they are not the “royal road” one might hope. Not many go beyond uninformative, stereotyped formulae, very few are preserved on sarcophagi, and none provide any direct link with the imagery.\textsuperscript{42}

In sum, words and images cannot be kept entirely at arm’s length, but nor should the literary sources and funerary spaces be collapsed. In the words of Beat Brenk, “It is certainly wrong to assume that Christian art is a mere visual gloss on Christian doctrine.”\textsuperscript{43}

The argument in this study, then, is that the fourth century witnessed a visual inflexion point. It was not an artistic Archimedean fulcrum, Elsner’s “pivotal moment,” but nor was it just one illustration among many of a broad trend occurring over the course of six hundred


years. For the experience of family death among a specific cohort of Roman Christian society, marble sarcophagi reveal a discontinuity, a *rupture* that may or may not parallel the evidence of texts. Foucault once remarked that “one cannot speak about anything at all in every period; it is not easy to say something new.” These monuments did say and their viewers did hear something new.

A final aspect of methodology concerns the role of the historiography. The study of early Christian art in general, and Christian sarcophagi in particular, has been so extensive and intensive that engagement with the scholarly literature is unavoidable and can be enlightening. It is unsurprising, having regard to the subsequent history of Christianity, that this literature is coloured by teleology. It is also replete with agendas. These are rarely explicit and may reflect the religious persuasions or theoretical biases of the historians and institutions. A full examination of the historiography of early Christian art would be a gratifying and useful exercise, as well as a substantial undertaking, and that is not the purpose of this study. However, most of the issues addressed will include some consideration of, and often revolve about, the relevant academic literature. In many cases, the most productive approach to the particular problem is through adversarial advocacy: stating and then challenging traditional interpretations and overly rigid dichotomies.

### 3. Dating

In 1977, Cyril Mango reviewed a volume of Ernst Kitzinger’s collected essays in the Times Literary Supplement. The author, he observed, was knowledgeable, subtle, meticulous and wrote good English but his approach to dating early Byzantine monuments was “disconcerting,” displaying a tendency “to draw sweeping conclusions from insufficient evidence.” Kitzinger responded with a defence of stylistic dating, to which Mango was

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44 Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir*, 65. This observation itself was not something new but an expression of French Annalist views going back at least to a similar comment by Lucien Febvre.

allowed a rebuttal. There he conceded that this procedure could be justified if it rested on “a sufficient body of accepted facts,” firmly dated monuments; Kitzinger’s chronology, however, was undermined by the widely divergent opinions of recognized experts. Aside from being a good read (“Professor Kitzinger charges me with ‘naive positivism.’ I do not disclaim in this context the label of positivist, but why naive?”), this exchange between eminent scholars highlights the perils of dating late antique monuments.

At first blush the general consensus regarding the chronology of Christian sarcophagi — for the corpus as a whole, iconographical types, and often even individual examples (especially in exhibition catalogues) — may seem comforting, but it is not based on what Mango would consider “accepted facts.” Most scholars nevertheless either regard the issue as settled or ignore it entirely. This discussion will propose some modest improvement by replacing judgments of individual monuments with a probabilistic approach.

Art historians generally date monuments using a comparative method. Around a core of secure examples they group others similar in style, form or iconography. The result is more or less robust depending upon the size of that core and the reliability of the comparisons. Unfortunately, there are very few Christian sarcophagi of certain date and several serious conceptual and practical challenges in the process of comparison.

Absent extrinsic documentary evidence of the kind sometimes available for later medieval monuments, secure dates may be sought in epigraphy. Guntram Koch identified about twenty-four such sarcophagi that bear inscriptions, usually names of the reigning consuls, from which a date can be inferred.46 Most of these, as he observed, are small fragments, lost objects known only from more or less reliable drawings, or pagan sarcophagi on which Christian inscriptions were carved later. Of the twenty-four, no more than ten provide any real basis for constructing a chronology. Moreover, even this diminutive sample is

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46 Guntram Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 355–361. Provoost, Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal, 1.12, provides a similar list, the only significant addition being the porphyry imperial sarcophagus of Constantina. Apart from naming consuls, inscriptions very occasionally provide other extrinsic information, like a prosopographic reference. Koch’s list includes a few of these, but with the caution that either or both the individual identification and the associated date is uncertain.
unrepresentative. Although the majority of Christian sarcophagi are generally assigned to the period before the death of Constantine (337), there are no chronologically informative inscriptions before 334. Most are after mid-century.

Nor can it be assumed that the date inferred from an inscription is necessarily the date when the images were carved. The sarcophagus might have been made earlier or later. There is no evidence to suggest that relief carving on Christian monuments was performed at the quarry before the chests were imported to Rome, but production could still precede the inscription, for example where one spouse later joined his or her pre-deceased partner. Wealthy Romans who were neither superstitious nor psychologically inhibited, desirous of ensuring a luxurious deposition and unprepared to rely on their families to provide it, might well have negotiated the production of their own sarcophagi. It sounds like the kind of thing that might have happened although there is no direct evidence for it.

47 The theory of “pre-fabrication” is particularly associated with J.B. Ward-Perkins, as in his last published paper, “Nicomedia and the Marble Trade,” reprinted in Marble in Antiquity: Collected Papers of J.B. Ward-Perkins, ed. Hazel Dodge and Bryan Ward-Perkins (London: British School at Rome, 1992), 23–69. All the evidence is too early for application to Christian sarcophagi. For example, of the hundreds of known Roman shipwrecks, only four include sarcophagi, and all of these are dated before 250 CE. See A.J. Parker, “Cargoes, Containers and Stowage: The Ancient Mediterranean,” The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology 21 (1992): 89–100. Patrizio Pensabene, “Il fenomeno del marmo nel mondo romano,” in I marmi colorati della Roma imperiale, ed. Marilida De Nuccio and Lucrezia Ungaro (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), 58, suggested that the Eutropos grave plaque (ill. 1), made for a marble carver and found in the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter in Rome (now in the Museo Lapidario of Urbino, Inv. 40674) could depict the sculptor putting the finishing touches to a roughed-in chest. (Regarding the grave plaque, see Giancarlo Gori, Mario Luni, Benedetta Monteverchi and Anna Lia Ermeti, “Le collezioni Fabretti e Stoppani,” in 1756–1986: il Museo archeologico di Urbino, ed. Giancarlo Gori and Mario Luni (Urbino: QuattroVenti, 1986), 55–57, fig. 4–5; Marilida De Nuccio and Lucrezia Ungaro (eds.), I marmi colorati della Roma imperiale (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), cat. 222 (entry by Gori); Fabrizio Bisconti and Giovanni Gentili (eds.), La Rivoluzione dell’immagine: arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio (Torino: Intesa Sanpaolo, 2007), 176–177 [cat. 38, Gori]). This tentative example does not suggest any prefabrication including Christian imagery. Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 65, states flatly that no partly-manufactured Christian figural sarcophagi have been found.

48 The clipeus on a monument from the catacomb of Praetextatus, now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Rep. I.87), includes the completed portrait of the husband and only a roughed-in face for the wife. The inscription mentions him and includes an empty space presumably meant to commemorate her. It is reasonable to conclude that this sarcophagus was in use, not sitting in a workshop, during the widowhood (duration unknown) of the survivor. See Josef Engemann, Untersuchungen zur Sepulkralsymbolik der späteren römischen Kaiserzeit (Munich: Aschendorff, 1973), 77–78. Serial occupation of a chest produced for the first spouse may also be suggested by the terms of an epitaph, as where a devoted husband declared having made a sarcophagus to hold Florentia, his wife of ten years, and “eventually for me.” ICUR 10.26571. See also, from Spoletto, CIL 11.4975 (= ILCV 965).

49 The formula vivus sibi fecit appears on a number of inscribed plaques, suggesting that they were prepared during life. Only two examples, however, are classified as Christian, one in Rome (ICUR 4.11956). Paolo
Apart from chests commissioned in advance, it is also generally supposed that sarcophagi were sometimes bought ready-made, “off the rack” so to speak, partly on the basis of the “unfinished” character of many monuments and especially the large number of apparently incomplete portraits. The extent of this practice is unknown; it may not have been as widespread as sometimes claimed, but it undoubtedly occurred.

The reverse type of temporal discrepancy, a sarcophagus produced after rather than before death, must have been common. The inscription on the ostentatiously Christian sarcophagus in Tolentino of the *clarissimus* and praetorian prefect Flavius Ilius Catervius (Rep. II.148) dates both his initial deposition (shortly after 379) and his placement in his sarcophagus. It could suggest a delay between of forty days or something much longer, depending upon how one reads it. If a sarcophagus was made substantially after the

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Liverani and Giandomenico Spinola, *The Vatican Necropoles: Rome’s City of the Dead*, trans. Saskia Stevens and Victoria Noel-Johnson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 32-35, argue that prior commissioning was common, particularly of elaborate monuments, considering this to be the best explanation of the many “unfinished portraits.”


51 Maintaining an inventory of finished or partly finished goods would have been expensive and the producer bore the risk that the iconography, style or form might no longer be attractive to consumers. Particularly in the early period, commercial economics did not favour pre-production of sarcophagi with Christian imagery for a small customer base (chapter 2). It seems especially unlikely that an elaborate or unusual piece would have been carved without a customer committed to its purchase. Engemann, *Untersuchungen*, 77, expressed this view regarding the sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua (Rep. I.747, ill. 22); the same argument is made with respect to the so-called Dogmatic Sarcophagus (Rep. I.43; ill. 103) by Liverani and Spinola, *The Vatican Necropoles*, 35.

52 *CIL* 9.5566 (=LCV 98): “quievit in pace... XVI kal(endas) no vem) depo/situs est IIII k(a)llen) d(e)e(cm)b(=)res Septimia Severina c(larissima) femina) marito dulcissimo ac sibi sarcofagum et pant(h)eum cum tric(h)oro disposuit / et perfecit.” Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, 78–79, 79n34, thought this might imply that the sarcophagus was made between October 17 and November 28, although he recognized that the dates could also refer to different years. The latter possibility might be supported by the fact that the inscription records the commission by the prefect’s spouse of not only the sarcophagus but also a mausoleum with three niches to put it in. Dresken-Weiland. “Tod und Jenseits,” 162–163, interprets the inscription as indicating that the mausoleum was built over the succeeding years. A number of other inscriptions refer
deposition, its carving may reflect practices current later than the date recorded in any inscrip-
tion. These sources of uncertainty concerning the relation between the date inscribed and the actual date of carving may be ignored if the implicit delay is only a matter of months or even years. However, a gap on the order of a decade would cast further doubt on the already slim value of the epigraphic evidence.

In the circumstances, it is not surprising that inscriptions have not been exclusively or even primarily relied upon as the foundation for dating Christian sarcophagi. Considerable stress has been laid on stylistic and formal comparison with representations in other media, notably public monuments that seem more susceptible to reliable dating. One may question the generally unstated assumption of synchronicity in technique between relief sculptures like the Decennalia Base of 303 and the Constantinian parts of the Arch of Constantine, probably consecrated in 315, and private funerary monuments. If sarcophagus workshops did adapt stylistic and formal models visible in public spaces they might not have done so immediately, and they might not have stopped doing so for some time since the prototype remained available. Such concerns are almost entirely absent from the literature. Parallels with the Arch of Constantine, in particular, have been elevated from hypothesis to "well-known fact." Comparisons with public monuments often include provincial examples that were not likely visible to the sarcophagus sculptors.

separately to the dates of death and deposition, but in these cases the second date is always only a matter of days after the first: ICUR 10.26312, ICUR 1.501, ICUR 1.3575, ICUR 2.5176.


Dagmar Stutzinger undertook a more “scientific” approach, a meticulous comparison of portraits on Christian sarcophagi with those on public monuments and especially coins (which, on a parity of reasoning, should be limited to coins circulating in Rome). One should not confuse this effort with the technique of portrait comparison used for the study of some earlier Roman sculptures. The fourth-century confrontations are not with other likenesses of the same individual, identified from another source, but rather assertions of similarity in facial features, forms, optical effects, hair styles, etc. between a sarcophagus and some other object. For example, having identified what she regarded as a new stylistic standard and spatial organization in imperial portraiture on coins around 310, Stutzinger posited that this numismatic development establishes a *terminus post quem* for similar forms on funerary relief sculpture. Even if this were the case, which is not self-evident, the time required for its propagation into the sarcophagus corpus remains an open question. A delay of several decades would be quite serious, given that production only lasted for something over a century.

These stylistic or formal comparisons rely upon a regular and predictable chronological sequence. Paul Veyne described a similar process applied to third-century representations as taking the “stylistic temperature,” comparing the “baroqueness” of one work to another: if the second is more baroque than the first it must be later by some appropriate interval to permit the incremental adoption of the style. Yet there is no reason to assume that observable characteristics are attributable entirely to chronology rather than, for example, the identity and continuity of the workshop. The comparative method is undermined by any

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N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1986), 89. Comparisons are also sometimes made to such other media as catacomb painting and mosaics. These present their own dating challenges and the farther one travels from funerary relief carving the more difficult it becomes to predict whether, and if so at what rate, form, style or iconography might have percolated to the Christian sarcophagi.


56 The methodology of comparison can be expanded further, from style or form to iconography. In this case, it necessarily strays to other media and quite different functional contexts rendering the assumption of synchronicity all the more tenuous.

retrospective, conservative or innovative practices among craftsmen and by revivals, "classical" or otherwise. It is noteworthy that the few securely dated sarcophagi do not suggest any such orderly development. 58

A different strategy was proposed by Arnoold Provoost. 59 Instead of standing closer he moved farther back, constructing a chronological classification according to six "contexts" to which he assigned specific date ranges. These contexts are based on the grouping of recurring themes and motifs. Three things distinguish Provoost’s work from other comparisons: its quantitative approach, 60 the abandonment of style as a basis for comparison, and the linkage of themes with the prevailing “cultural-anthropological

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58 Some of these difficulties were remarked by Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage II. Italien mit einem Nachtrag Rom und Ostia, Dalmatien, Museen der Welt (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), XIV; Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort, 322; Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 353–354, 360–361. John M. Huskinson, Concordia Apostolorum: Christian Propaganda at Rome in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries: A Study in Early Christian Iconography and Iconology (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1982), 13, observed that Roman workshops "did not all follow the latest fashion" and produced retardataire types throughout the fourth century. I am reminded of a sobering discovery by Cecil L. Striker, “The Findings at Kalenderhane and Problems of Method in the History of Byzantine Architecture,” in Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life, ed. Nevra Nicipoğlu (Leyden: Brill, 2001), 107–116, that a Byzantine church dated to the middle of the ninth century was actually built at the end of the twelfth. He attributed the error to an assumption of “progress” in Byzantine architecture that regarded the cross-domed style of this building as having been superseded.


60 Although his quantitative approach is welcome, Provoost’s analyses present some potentially serious technical issues. To choose one example, Provoost, “Apostolic World of Thought,” 162, observed that if one plots the number of Christian sarcophagi (i.e., those he considers Christian under a rather liberal classification) over time one obtains “a sort of Gaussian curve, which seems to guarantee the correctness of the classification according to contexts.” The distribution he projected was, in fact, far from Gaussian, since the high point is context 3 (250–325 CE), and only 1% of the sarcophagi are earlier while 45% are later. Indeed, a normal distribution around some particular year would not seem to guarantee correctness as it would contradict Christian demography and common assumptions (including Provoost’s) regarding fourth-century sarcophagus production.
situation,” reflected in such labels as “advancing organization” (context 3, 250-325 CE) and “beginning stabilization” (context 4, 325-375 CE). Each context is related to a sequence of historical events or developments (rise of house churches, peace or persecution, imperial edicts and rescripts, etc.). Yet whatever else this system may usefully do, it does not actually establish an independent methodology for dating. Provoost concedes that notwithstanding the drawbacks of the traditional dating based on “internal criteria” (style, morphology, iconography), for lack of a viable alternative, he follows it anyway.  

In sum, the current state of the dating of early Christian sarcophagi is discouraging. There is no foundational “body of accepted facts” for building a chronological superstructure into which individual sarcophagi can be securely inserted. Instead, received wisdom leads to blatant circularity: common stylistic or other traits both corroborate and follow from the accepted chronology. “Objective” periodization assigns labels that assuage the historian’s desire to anchor dates with people or events but the dating is still based on comparative connoisseurship. This is as true for Provoost’s “contexts” as for the more common approach of repackaging accepted dates into periods defined by imperial markers.

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61 Provoost, Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal, 1.11n17, concedes that his catalogue generally follows the Repertorium dates “without discussion”: “In principe heb ik de dateringen die in de Repertoria voorgesteld worden zonder discussie overgenomen.” See also Arnold Provoost, “Pastor or Pastor Bonus?: The Interpretation and Evolution of Pastoral Scenes in the Late Antiquity,” Church History and Religious Culture 84 (2004): 4.


It is understandable that even scholars who recognize the problem generally accept the prevailing chronologies, often reluctantly and sometimes with a few suggested specific modifications. Absent new discoveries there is no obvious solution. Two possible improvements may, however, be considered. Both accept more uncertainty in the dating of specific monuments as the price of providing a better general understanding.

The first, relatively simple, adjustment is to be less precise. Leaving aside the rare sarcophagus that is assigned to a specific year based on an inscription (which, as noted above, is probably too audacious since the monument could have been produced before or after), the Repertorium and most other traditional sources ascribe approximate dates expressed either by a descriptive formula like “mid-fourth century,” or most often as a range — a decade or a quarter-, third- or even half-century. Precisely to reduce error, Dresken-Weiland has recently expressed a preference for thirds of a century over the twenty-five year bands most common in the Repertorium volumes (including her own). Wider ranges reduce the likely impact of such factors as the persistence of workshop practices or retardataire styles, although without resolving problems like formal or iconographical revivals. If Christian sarcophagi were produced in Rome from the late third century to the early fifth, expanding from quarters to thirds of a century only reduces the number of bands from six to five. A more aggressive approach is to classify most sarcophagi as either “early” or “late” around a fulcrum situated circa 350 CE. Conservativism and

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65 Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort, 322. Periods defined by imperial reign may be either longer or shorter. The ones used by Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 209–214, are 32–42 years (pre-Constantinian), 28 years (Constantinian), 20–30 years (post Constantianian), 30–40 years (Valentinian-Theodosian) and open-ended (“later”). Provoost, Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal, 1.14–15, also defines his “contexts” with unequal lengths, although none shorter than 50 years: 1 (30–150 CE), 2 (150–250), 3 (250–325), 4 (325–375), 5 (375–500) and 6 (after 500).

66 Provoost, Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal, 1.14–15, defines his “contexts” with unequal lengths, but none are shorter than 50 years: 1 (30–150 CE), 2 (150–250), 3 (250–325), 4 (325–375), 5 (375–500) and 6 (after 500).
revivals remain problematic and the choice of a mid-century breaking point is artificial, but with less information so is there less error.

The second refinement is conceptual rather than mechanical, substituting a stochastic model for the usual monument chronology. Instead of trying to date individual monuments, this approach constructs a probability function for a defined group. For example, if one-quarter of a particular class of sarcophagi are generally dated to the second third of the fourth century, the model merely asserts that one-quarter of all the sarcophagi in that class were probably produced during that period. This stochastic model does not provide a date range for any particular monument but a series of probabilities that depends on the shape of the curve representing the chronological distribution of all the relevant sarcophagi.

The proposed model is inspired by Provoost’s statistics, and like his work it relies, for lack of anything better, on the dates assigned by others. Both the object and the result of the probability function are, however, different from Provoost’s project. He used traditional dating to populate a “context.” Here, those dates merely serve as data from which to estimate the probability of similar sarcophagi having being produced during a given period.

The formation of the class is clearly of great importance. The sarcophagi must be “similar” in an uncontroversial way. The examples used in this study were chosen with that requirement in mind. Sarcophagi with the Jonah theme or the traditio legis representation are, subject to a small number of doubtful cases, relatively easy to define. In the first case, an external reference is available in the form of the book of Jonah; in the latter, the definition is by convention (see chapters 4 and 6).

4. Nomenclature: nomina sunt omnia

Any consideration of early Christian art must describe objects, images, and the ancient experiences of both in a modern language to which they are foreign. The translation is

67 This heading is inspired by a somewhat different but related usage of this expression by Polymnia Athanassiad, “Antiquité tardive: construction et déconstruction d’un modèle historiographique,” Antiquité Tardive 14 (2006): 319.
always imperfect, sometimes misleading, but unavoidable. In order to mitigate the damage, historians must be sensitive to the terminology employed in their academic discourse, and it should be carefully chosen, taking into account likely subliminal connotations, the meanings being at least broadly circumscribed. All too often, undefined and ill-considered expressions become obstacles rather than aids to understanding, exacerbating rather than alleviating the decontextualization of monuments. This may be inadvertent, the result of inadequate reflection on the implications of the chosen translation for alien intellectual and emotional states. It may also be purposeful, not in the sense that the writer means to mislead, but as the result of conformity with prevailing scholarly or “scientific” norms.

This Introduction does not provide a glossary of the many potentially ambiguous words that will be encountered in subsequent chapters, some of which will be considered as they arise (e.g., “mass production” in chapter 1, “visibility” in chapter 3, “biblical” in chapter 5, “eschatology” in chapter 7). Its aim is, rather, to address a few particularly important and ubiquitous elements of terminology and also some more general concerns, notably classical neologisms.

   a) Jews, Christians and pagans

Christians promulgated this tri-partite division of the world as early as Acts 18:4. It was in common use in the fourth century and expanded to a four-fold division (to extract the heretics from the Christians) by the fifth. The function of these group affiliation designations might be persuasive or apologetic; sometimes they were a technique of self-identification; often they served to designate, and perhaps deprecate, the “other.” Many scholars have commented upon the ambiguity and imprecision of the categories. Their boundaries are fuzzy and may appear different depending upon whether one is looking in or out. The potential implications of this taxonomical porosity are of two kinds. First, it

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68 The canonical references do not use the term “pagans” but “Greeks.” This matter of nomenclature will be discussed below. On the four-fold division of Roman society, see Peter Brown “Christianization and Religious Conflict,” in The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 639.

might affect the reliability of the rule used to determine the content of the category, who is in and who is out. The conclusion below is that with some reasonable tolerance for uncertainty at the margins, each of these three terms is acceptable for the purposes of this study to identify a group of individuals. Fuzzy boundaries are still boundaries. The second issue is linguistic, the appropriateness of the nomenclature. Here again, these words are considered adequate to serve the purpose assigned to them.

Jews are the oldest and least controversial category. Modern preoccupations with whether they should be defined by religious, social, cultural, historical or ethnic characteristics, or some combination thereof, are not apparent in ancient Rome. Jews were regarded as a distinct collectivity sufficiently identifiable by a single word in the (generally malevolent) eyes of the law from the first century on. They maintained this distinct group identity vis-à-vis the state. Constantine and his panegyrists show no signs of confounding Christianity with Judaism. There is an unresolved debate over the “parting of the ways” between the two religions, but Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra makes a persuasive case that separation in Rome

Zemon Davis, quoted at 447. She remarks, specifically using the example of Judaism, that the boundary may look sharper to those in the centre. In fact, the divergent perception may go either way. Sometimes it is those on the outside (like imperial legislators) who perceive the boundary to be sharp, as discussed below.

70 See Ammon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987), for a compendium and analysis of third- and fourth-century laws dealing with conversion, Jews keeping non-Jewish slaves, Jews serving in public office, participation by non-Jews in Jewish cults and various other measures, all of which presuppose that Jews were susceptible of being identified to implement these decrees. Jews were liable for various public levies and they were subject to a special tax, the *fiscus Iudaicus*, enacted in the first century and repealed from some uncertain date, or possibly transformed into some a different penalty applicable to the same group. Taxation is rarely a model of certainty, but these levies would have been unadministrable unless tax collectors could recognize without undue controversy the people against whom they were imposed.


72 Studies of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity are numerous; they do not suggest any confusion with Judaism. See Jan N. Bremmer, “The Vision of Constantine,” in *Land of Dreams: Greek and Latin Studies in Honour of A.H.M. Kessels*, ed. A.P.M.H. Lardinois, Vincent Hunink and Marc van der Poel (Danvers, MA: Brill, 2006). Eusebius gives no impression that Constantine conflated the two religions to any degree, although the biographer’s agenda would not have been well served by highlighting imperial syncretistic inclinations.
was largely accomplished before the end of the third century. Later patristic sources sometimes remark a blurring of boundaries, as in diatribes against Judaizing Christians, but in the vast majority of cases the texts assume an understood separation of identity sufficient to support undefined reference to the religious affiliations.

Since this study is concerned with monuments, it must take seriously Jaš Elsner’s argument that the classification of some late Roman images as Christian or Jewish may be misguided precisely because of the fuzziness of religious identity. The caution is valuable, and the existence of sectarian hybrids and adherents of intermediate, indeterminate and perhaps unknown sects should not be ignored. The number and significance of marginal or ambiguous monuments may, however, be exaggerated. It is, in any event, insufficient reason to reject the existence of a reasonably discrete population of Roman Jews.

The second classification is more complex. “Christian” was an epithet invented to isolate a new and troublesome minority, although it was quickly adopted by the very groups to which it had been applied. As with respect to the Jews, edicts and persecutions indicate that imperial authorities thought they knew a Christian when they saw one. There is no denying the many sects and schisms into or by which Christianity was divided, even riven. The depth and character of individual commitments were also variable; some nominal adherents retained a greater or lesser attachment to other belief systems, whether traditional Roman practices, Judaism, a mystery cult, or a philosophical school. Undoubtedly some Christians did not allow the label to others because their flavour of Christianity was considered heretical or their commitment insufficient. But if rigorous Catholics refused to call Arians Christian, the Arians thought they were, and were so

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75 See Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt, 2nd ed. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1908), 1.410–414. *Christiani* was used by both Roman authorities and in popular discourse as early as the first century. The word appears in Acts 11:26, with the claim that it was first used in Antioch to designate Paul and Barnabas who were teaching there.
regarded by non-Christians. So-called Judaizing Christians were also considered Christian both by themselves and by their late-century critics.

Keith Hopkins observed that “ambiguity of religious identity was particularly pervasive in a polytheistic society, because polytheists were accustomed to seek the help of strange gods occasionally, or in a crisis, or on a wave of fashion.” From this perspective, it is unsurprising that Christianity was home to a wide variety of cults, sects and heresies. Hopkins accepted “the porosity and fluidity of Christianity at the periphery, and the diversity at its core” as facts of Roman life, but this did not prevent him from proceeding on the basis that the general category “Christian” could be taken as unproblematic. One might cite a similar approach on the part of a contemporary witness, Ammianus Marcellinus, who noted Julian’s command that the priests and adherents of the different Christian groups be allowed to express their dissensions in the pursuit of some common ground, the Emperor “knowing as he did from experience that no wild beasts are such enemies to mankind as are most of the Christians in their deadly hatred of one another.”

Hopkins and Ammianus, both looking at the category from the outside — one as a scholar, the other as a pagan — were comfortable treating various disputatious groups as all being “Christian” in some meaningful sense. The unstated, but reasonable basis for this view is that diversity and fuzziness need not destroy the coherence of the class. Before reaching a firm conclusion to this effect, it is necessary to look across the divide to the third element in the triumvirate.

76 Ammianus Marcellinus labels both the Nicaean pope Liberius and the Arian emperor Constantius as “Christian” (15.7.6 and 21.16.18).
79 Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.5.4 (translated by John Carew Rolfe).
"Pagan" presents both identified problems: certainty of content and appropriateness of nomenclature. The long-standing academic debates regarding its use invoke etymology, sociology, fuzziness, and (post-) modern sensibilities. As to the first, a great deal of ink has been spilled regarding the linguistic derivation of the Latin *paganus*, a matter not obviously relevant to its modern usage. In a recent and comprehensive review of the question, Alan Cameron concludes that the two early connotations of the term — a rustic or a civilian — were not inherently pejorative, or at least no more so than other words used by Christian writers to describe non-Christians. As *paganus* came into common use, it acquired the convenient and not necessarily charged meaning of “outsider” (the post-colonial “other”).

The fact that those to whom the word was applied did not generally use it does not eliminate its utility, either then or now.

No doubt “pagan” is a fuzzier category than either “Jew” or “Christian.” Indeed, it is not entirely clear what kind of category it is. It is not a religion as that concept has been understood by the other two affiliations. The Roman “state religion” was a collection of practices, albeit not decoupled from belief, characterized by flexibility and ecumenism, accepting of a wide variety of local and family cults in a way that would be impossible in systems premised on orthodoxy, whatever their sects and fault-lines. Furthermore, when “pagan” is used as a residual category it sweeps in not only the multitudinous varieties of this state religion but also unrelated mystery cults and other affiliations. The term paganism, to quote Cameron, “flattens out the diversity of religious experience” and is

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80 Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14–25. See also Pierre Chuvin, “Sur les origines de l’équation *paganus* = païen,” in *Impies et païens entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge*, ed. Lionel Mary and Michel Sot (Paris: Picard, 2001), 7–15. Early legal usage is ambiguous. An edict under Constantius (CTh 7.21.2, dated 353) refers to a pagan or decurion who bribes his way to military rank. The context may suggest that the word simply means “civilian” (as it is translated by Clyde Pharr). The first of a long series of laws that clearly address pagans as opposed to Christians appears only in 370 (CTh 16.2.18).

81 A lone exception seems to be a correspondent of Augustine named Longinianus (Ep. 234), who called himself a pagan with what Cameron, *Last Pagans of Rome*, 27, calls “irony.” Neil McLynn, “Pagans in a Christian Empire,” in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau and Jutta Raithel (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 573, expresses the same judgment as Cameron in relation to this letter, adding that Longinianus is “the only self-styled pagan on record.”


therefore of no use in studying non-Christian religious practices; he defends, however, its relevance to a discussion of Christian attitudes.\textsuperscript{84} If society is divided in three and all the Jews and Christians are reasonably identified, then “pagan,” or indeed any other term, can logically and efficiently describe the rest, whether or not it constitutes a coherent description of some distinct form of religious or spiritual attachment.

This concern with uncertainty and incoherence leads into another critique of the word pagan: it goes against the twenty-first-century multi-cultural grain.\textsuperscript{85} “Pagan” is a term devised by one group to define and eventually stigmatize their rivals: “Pagans did not know they were pagans until the Christians told them they were.”\textsuperscript{86} Yet the alternatives are no better. The non-Christian non-Jews are called “Hellenes” in Acts and Pauline letters, but that word can also be pejorative, depending on who is using it and to what purpose, and it becomes confusing once the bulk of Christians are ex-Gentiles. “Polytheism” falsely suggests a more definite group than what is actually intended, excludes a variety of non-Christian cults, and adopts a modern dichotomy in religious experience and practice that is ill-fitted to the fourth century. Almost all commentators return, in the end, to “pagan.”\textsuperscript{87}

The real challenge to the Christian and pagan categories comes not from language or early usage but rather a claim that the marginal cases are so numerous as to render the classifications of doubtful utility. Maijastina Kahlos has argued that in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, these terms were a false dichotomy constructed by polemicists on both sides in an effort to deny the reality of interdependence and divided loyalties.\textsuperscript{88} She proposes an important and separate group she calls incerti who are neither fish nor fowl, or

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\textsuperscript{85} The linguistic sensitivity is modern but the factual heterogeneity of polities is not. Rome, as a result of conquest, enslavement, trade and a continuing influx of foreign labour required to maintain its population (chapter 2), must in the fourth century have seemed more like Toronto than Reykjavik. See William Hardy McNeill, \textit{Polyethnicity and National Unity in World History} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 3–29.

\textsuperscript{86} Henry Chadwick, quoted by Cameron, \textit{Last Pagans of Rome}, 173.

\textsuperscript{87} Including John A. North, “Pagans, Polytheists and the Pendulum,” in \textit{The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries: Essays in Explanation}, ed. William V. Harris (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 134-137. North accepts (unlike Alan Cameron) that “pagan” is pejorative in modern usage but nonetheless prefers it to “polytheist.”

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perhaps both fish and fowl, individuals who partook to varying degrees in both the Christian and pagan systems, including, significantly, their funerary practices. A slightly more complex model to similar effect is proposed by Cameron. He posits not one but three intermediate groups: between the fully committed at either end are the “center-Christians” and “center-pagans” and in the middle, “those who for one reason or another resisted straightforward classification.”

Whether these perspectives undermine the “Christian” category depends, in the first instance, on number. How many people were true incerti, falling squarely within Cameron’s central group, not properly regarded as Christians (or pagans) with pagan (or Christian) tendencies and subsidiary beliefs? Cameron suggests that this cohort could have been “rather large” at first and that its shift into the center-Christian group likely started in around 340 CE, which would still leave the committed and looser adherents to constitute a reasonable membership for the categories of Christian and pagan. His suggesting timing for a transition out of the middle seems earlier than the claimed shrinkage of Kahlos’s incerti, although she provides no quantitative conjecture (not even one as vague as “rather large”).

The crossover phenomena for which there is any real evidence — Christians serving in official positions in the state religion, examples of mixed iconography — are neither numerous nor entirely convincing. Accepting to act as a pagan priest might make someone a bad Christian in the eyes of an orthodox clergy, but this quasi-political decision would not, in and by itself, extract him from the category altogether. As for juxtaposed iconography, these cases are notoriously complex and it is unclear whether they represent the patronage of incerti or space or objects shared by people with different affiliations. Sarcophagi, it should be noted, do not betray much religious ambiguity (as discussed in the Conclusion).

In sum, the labels Jewish, Christian and pagan have sufficient content and clarity to convey the desired information, always with the caveat regarding grey areas and fuzzy boundaries. Whether politically correct or not, they are the best available. A number of individuals,

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89 Cameron, Last Pagans of Rome, 176–177.
perhaps in the earlier part of the century even a significant number, might fall into a “none of the above” category, but they may be safely left in the margin in a study devoted to Christian sarcophagi.

A final matter of vocabulary concerns the term “syncretism.” Strictly speaking it refers to the reconciliation of different belief systems, not merely the toleration or even attraction to practices or imagery associated with a competing religion. Assuming the inscription on Projecta’s casket is a reliable confirmation of her Christian religion, its depiction of Venus is a case of syncretism only if she, or the viewers, actually mingled a commitment to the pagan cult with their Christianity. The word will be used with care in this study.

b) Sculptors, craftsmen and designers

If sarcophagi can with appropriate caution be called art, who were the artists? This progression is more than a mere lexical transformation. Too little is known about how Roman sarcophagi were made to apply the modern occupational description. The creative function was probably distributed among skilled sculptors, designers (about which more below), masters and supervisors. In a collaborative endeavour, perhaps the collective should be called “the artist,” but it is simpler to avoid the word. Particular trades and skills, like sculptor, will be named and when referring more generally to producers, the terms artisan and craftsman employed. The group undertaking is called a workshop, without meaning to indicate anything about its size or organization.⁹⁰

In English, only “craftsman” among these occupational designations implies gender. It will not be avoided because while women were certainly engaged in artisanal occupations in Rome, and one suspects that the extent of their participation is understated in epigraphic and documentary records, none of the relevant occupational designations refer to them.

⁹⁰ Probably the equivalent of the Roman officina, although F. Warren Wright, “Roman Factories,” The Classical Weekly 11, no. 3 (1917): 17–18, reported that while this word was used from Republican through late imperial Rome for a bevy of establishments from modest workshops to large-scale operations making everything from metal-work and armaments to shoes, chemicals, dies, perfume and food, as well as brickworks and quarries, there is no mention of workshops for the production of sarcophagi or sculpture. The sarcophagus workshop is discussed in chapter 1.
The dressing and carving of marble were probably male preserves. Women undoubtedly figured among the supervisors and designers, especially in family-owned enterprises. One professional designation that is found in both genders is *officinator* or *officinatrix*, referring to the head of a workshop.91

Before leaving the language of production, additional attention is required to designations of the agent(s) who planned the form and iconographical content of sarcophagi. Where did Christian programs come from? One source could be the customers. Although many were recent converts (see chapter 2 on Christian expansion), their training might have been sufficient for them to participate in the choice of iconography, assuming they were also familiar with current fashions in sarcophagus decoration.92 A second source is what Beat Brenk called “art-friendly clerics.”93 A third idea, which could overlap with the other two, is a “programmer,” Bruno Klein’s *Programmentwerfer*, an adviser more knowledgeable than either the customer or the craftsman and collaborating with one or both of them.94 Klein drew an analogy to hastily written instructions to the illustrator now visible beneath the eroded paint on leaves of the Quedlinburg Itala manuscript.95 He regarded these as a

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93 Brenk, “Art and *Propaganda fide*,” 718–719. He proposed that such advisers took over from the patrons after around 313 CE. Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, 206–209, also suggested that Christian consumers initially picked their own iconography but deferred the increased involvement of clerics or some element of the church hierarchy to around 350, accompanying the shift to more “theological” or dogmatic imagery, particularly in Rome.


written counterpart to the oral directives conveyed to sculptors in fourth-century sarcophagus workshops.

The manuscript instructions are undoubtedly fascinating in their own right, but the comparison is not very helpful. First, the written descriptions were probably added by the scribe or workshop master. This would suggest that both programming and executing functions were situated within the sarcophagus workshop, without the intervention of an outside programmer or designer, like a cleric. Second, the illuminations relate to a text (Samuel and Kings); the events and *dramatis personae* were fixed. This is not to minimize the importance of the choice of scenes and their placement, but the challenge was different from the circumstance of the sarcophagus workshop. A third reason to discount the Quedlinburg Itala comparison is that its instructions do little more than identify the relevant scene, without telling the painter nearly enough to explain the visual result.⁹⁶

“Designer” is therefore used in this study in a generic sense, to designate the person coming up with the design, whether patron, outside cleric, workshop master or sculptor. "Programmer" and "adviser" will not be used in connection with sarcophagus production.

c) Patrons, occupants and viewers

The term “patron” carries considerable period baggage. Roman “imperial” monuments have been argued to reflect a “multiplicity of voices,” a politically and socially complex collective élite patronage;⁹⁷ medieval “patrons” and “donors” may have been far more

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⁹⁶ Additional information is contained in gold labels identifying certain key figures and objects that seem to have been written by the illuminators themselves. See Levin, *Quedlinburg Itala*, 18, 23. For example, the instruction for the first picture on f. 1r says “make a tomb” but the gold label specifies *monimentum rachel* (consistent with 1 Sam. 10.2).

active in the construction of the monuments than these labels suggest;\(^98\) renaissance and modern patronage are phenomena quite different from their earlier namesakes.

There are many ways to initiate or promote the production of a monument, most commonly by providing money or ideas. The latter was alluded to in the discussion of “designers” above: clerics, lay advisers, well-informed friends and relatives and the purchasers themselves could have fulfilled functions associated with formal or iconographical patronage. Financial support was largely a family matter. Unless the deceased had funded production before his or her death, the burden normally fell on spouses, children and parents.\(^99\) In this study, “patron” will be used merely as a synonym for customer, always implying financial commitment and leaving open the possibility of conceptual input.

The occupants of sarcophagi were the objects rather than the subjects of the act that put them there. A good word to describe this act is deposition. It has the advantage of being derived from *depositio*, a term commonly used in contemporary Christian grave inscriptions (even if its adoption as an infallible indicator of their Christian character is questionable).\(^100\)


\(^{99}\) Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen*, 27–30 and table 4. Publicly-funded funeral processions may have continued into the fourth century (see chapter 1, note 95) but there is no indication that sarcophagi were public monuments, except perhaps the imperial porphyry examples.

\(^{100}\) The historiography of *depositus* as a signal for Christian inscriptions is surveyed, and its reliability put into doubt, by Carlo Carletti, *Dies mortis-depositio: un modulo ‘profano’ nell’epigrafia tardoantica,* *Vetera Christianorum* 41 (2004): 21-48. The tendency to read *depositus* as an unfailing signal of a Christian inscription may become circular and apologetic: if every appearance of the word is interpreted as Christian, then by tautology it becomes an exclusively Christian expression. The problem is illustrated by the not uncommon coupling of *depositus* with the pagan *Dis Manibus*. It is not always obvious which expression “taints” the other. On Christian inscriptions with this and similar traditional formulae, see Henric Nordberg, “Éléments païens dans les tituli chrétiens de Rome,” in *Sylloge inscriptionum Christianarum veterum Musei Vaticani*, ed. Henrik Ziliacu (Helsinki: Institut Romanum Finlandiae, 1963), 2.211–222; Paul-Albert Février, “La tombe chrétienne et l’au-delà,” in *Le Temps chrétien de la fin de l’Antiquité au Moyen Âge: Ille–XIIle siècles*, ed. Jean-Marie Leroux (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1984), 168; Maria Letizia Caldelli, “Nota du D(is) M(anibus) e D(is) M(anibus) S(acrum) nelle iscrizioni cristiane di Roma,” in *Le iscrizioni dei cristiani in Vaticano: materiali e contributi scientifici per una mostra epigrafica*, ed. Ivan Di Stefano Manzella (Vatican City: Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie, 1997), 185–187. *Depositus* is a common Latin word and could be used in non-Christian epitaphs, as where the deposition is specified in *vascello*, presumably referring to putting ashes in an urn. See D. Dante Balboni, “Natale Petri de Cathedra,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 68
The academic literature more often uses “burial” — perhaps deposition is regarded as stilted or pretentious. Words like burial, however, strongly suggest an underground location. Saying that the deceased is “buried in a sarcophagus” cannot refer to putting the corpse in the coffin; it suggests, rather, where the sarcophagus itself was put. This can be misleading. Sarcophagi could be buried below ground but they were also placed in niches on a floor of a mausoleum or sunk into a wall. The term deposition is therefore adopted here for the placement of both the contents and the container. Where “burial” is difficult to avoid it is used in a neutral sense, not meaning interment.

Along with purchasers and occupants, visitors to the tomb, the main focus of this study, are also consumers because they were the people who experienced and reflected upon the sarcophagi and their imagery. The art historical literature refers to the participants in reception as viewers, spectators, beholders, observers, sometimes readers (of images as well as texts), and collectively as an audience or simply “the public.” Such terms and their equivalents in other modern languages reflect etymologies that are usually based on a particular sense, most often vision but occasionally touch ( beholder). The visitor’s encounter with a sarcophagus might evoke several simultaneous sensations (smelling incense, touching relief carving, hearing psalms or prayers, tasting a commemorative meal). However the experience, and in particular the relationship with iconography, was primarily visual, so most of these words could serve.

The problem they share is a suggestion of passivity and detachment. Indeed not only “spectator” but “reception” itself sounds distinctly flaccid and isolated. The original viewers...
of Christian sarcophagi were, as already remarked, actively engaged with the representations they confronted. “Viewer” seems the best of a bad lot, retaining at least some element of activity and denoting a relationship as well as action at a distance.

d) Christian sarcophagi

The adjective “Christian” was applied above to individuals, establishing a class that is meaningful and sufficiently well defined for practical use, albeit fuzzy at the margins. When the same qualification is applied to an object, different considerations arise. What is meant by a “Christian sarcophagus”?

The pioneers of the self-styled field of Christian archaeology had an agenda that is reflected in the generosity with which they dispensed attributions. Many monuments decorated with shepherds, orants, mythological subjects, hunts and musical scenes were regarded as Christian. This taxonomy was largely superseded by the landmark publication of the *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, beginning in 1967 and continuing with supplementary volumes in 1998 and 2003. At the outset the general editor, Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, declared that new and more stringent criteria would be applied, although the overall policy was still one of inclusiveness. That decision was not

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102 These comments should not be taken as a criticism of the erudition, analytical skill and motivation of these scholars, without whom sarcophagus studies would be much the poorer. See, in particular, Josef Wilpert, *I sarcocfagi cristiani antichi* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1929–36). The movement’s agenda may, however, be inferred from the stern face of Msg. Wilpert on the frontispiece.


104 *Rep.* I, xiv. The plan was to catalogue all monuments displaying Christian images or bearing Christian inscriptions or signs, as well as those with a Christian original use even if the iconography was not Christian. This included sarcophagi with a *kriophoros* or an orant whether or not the Christian character was secure, but

[40]
unreasonable: the *Repertorium* was intended as a comprehensive reference work, and nothing is gained by hiding difficult cases. Other scholars, both before and after the publication of the *Repertorium*, have advocated still more restrictive criteria, and the trend over at least the last half-century has been towards a progressive constriction of the corpus.¹⁰⁵

Classification decisions mask an ambiguity in the expression “Christian sarcophagus.” It could refer to the sarcophagus of a Christian, that is, a monument commissioned by a Christian patron or used to hold the body of a deceased Christian. Alternatively, it could refer to iconography, a sarcophagus that depicts a Christian narrative or expresses a Christian concept. Such a monument is Christian in a deeper sense. The first type, the sarcophagus of a Christian, is a “Christian object” whether or not it “looks” Christian. The sarcophagus that visually expresses Christianity may be regarded as a “Christian agent,” recalling the reference to material agency above, without regard to the identity of its purchaser or occupant. Many sarcophagi catalogued as Christian are Christian in both senses. A considerable number of monuments meet the first definition but not the second. It is theoretically possible, but unknown, whether any meet the second but not the first.

Both categories — object and agent — imply a missing term. For the Christian object it is use or commemoration. The sarcophagus is so regarded because of the religious identity of the purchaser or occupant. Christian iconography is normally a sufficient but not a necessary condition for this purpose. There may be other convincing evidence of provenance, most often epigraphic. In the second usage, the sarcophagus as a Christian agent, the missing term is not use but expression; the inanimate object is attributed a religious persuasion precisely because of the representations on its face.

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¹⁰⁵ Particularly influential was a series of nine articles in the *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* published between 1958 and 1967 by Theodor Klauser, advocating a more restrictive classification. This approach is adopted by Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, and explicitly discussed in his brief introductory chapter (15–28) titled “Pagan or Christian.” Christern-Briesenick, in the most recent volume of the *Repertorium* (Rep. III, xvi), also expressed a slightly more restrictive standard. An exception to this trend is Arnold Provoost, who has disputed, in particular, the generally negative view of *kriophoroi* and orants. See Provoost, “Apostolic World of Thought,” 164. More generous criteria also govern his three-volume *Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal*. 

[41]
Whether a sarcophagus without Christian iconography that was Christianized by the addition of an epitaph signalling the religious affiliation of the patron or deceased is classified as Christian generally depends on when the Christianization is thought to have occurred. If it is “original,” the monument makes the cut; if it is later, it does not. This approach has several untoward effects. First, it puts undue pressure on the dating of the inscription. Second, it distorts our understanding of the attitudes of Christians towards the Christianization of pagan decoration. Third, there is a tendency to allow the classification of sarcophagi as Christian based on the inscription (and occasionally the find-spot) to bleed into the understanding of its imagery. For example, if a Christian purchased or occupied a sarcophagus with a kriophoros, orant, or figure of Orpheus, this is often taken to mean that the form of representation was not merely accepted but invested with a new, Christian, meaning. Such representations are sometimes called “neutral,” the word perhaps placed between quotation marks to underscore its ambiguity (or the author’s doubt that they

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106 This was the stated policy of Deichmann for the Repertorium: see note 104 above. It explains the exclusion from Christian catalogues of the well-known third-century sarcophagus front in the Capitoline Museums on which sea creatures hold a clipeus with the later inscription PROMOTE / HABEAS / †: Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Conservatori, inv. 121; ICUR 7.19231; Paul Zanker and Björn Christian Ewald, Mit Mythen leben. Die Bilderwelt der römischen Sarkophage (Munich: Hirmer, 2004), 261, 343–345 (cat. 23, entry by Ewald); Serena Ensoli and Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2000), 620–622 (cat. 325, entry by Sapelli). Another example is the Sarcophagus of Flavius Memorius in Arles, a second-century Attic chest with two centaurs hunting a lion on the face, griffins on the sides and back, and a late fourth-century inscription (CIL 12.00673 = ILCV 95a) regarded as Christian: Musée de l’Arles antique, FAN.92.0.2464; Vassiliki Gaggadis-Robin, Les sarcophages païens du musée de l’Arles antique (Arles: Éditions du musée de l’Arles et de la Provence antiques, 2005), 65–71 (cat. 13). An interesting case is the sarcophagus of Valerinus Vasatulus in the Vatican Necropolis (near the entrance to Cubiculum H, inv. SK7, dated circa 270). It depicts a lion hunt on the front while the centre of the forward-facing vertical field of the lid contains a tabula ansata held by winged erotes on which appears an inscription, which may or may not be a later addition, that is regarded as Christian (from the single word depositus). Curiously, some Roman archaeologists have called it Christian (see Bernard Andreae, Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben: Die römische Jagdsarkophage, ASR I.2 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1980), 77–79, cat. 240) but it has not been classed as such by Christian archaeologists (not in the Repertorium; not in Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage). See also J.M.C. Toynbee, “The Shrine of St. Peter and its Setting,” The Journal of Roman Studies 43 (1953): 4; Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 339 (cat. A110); Liverani and Spinola, The Vatican Necropoleis, 103-105. On the other hand the Sarcophagus of Aurelius Theodorus in the Villa Ada, Rome, evidently a pagan chest with a likely Christian inscription, is included in the Repertorium (Rep. I.918), on the assumption that the epitaph is "original." On this monument, see also Henning Wrede, Senatorische Sarkophage Roms: der Beitrag des Senatorenstandes zur römischen Kunst der hohen und späten Kaiserzeit (Mainz: von Zabern, 2001), 121–122 (cat. 10). Giuseppe Bovini, “Le scene della ‘dextrarum iunctio’ nell’arte cristiana,” Bulletin della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma 72 (1946–48): 105, considers the inscription a later addition.
really are neutral). In these cases, however, the image clearly is not neutral but rather shared, regarded differently depending upon who is using or looking at it.

In this study, the focus is on sarcophagi that are Christian agents. Assuming that biblical and apocryphal themes were chosen mainly by Christians, most were also Christian objects. But might one of Cameron’s “center-pagans” have added a “Christian myth” to his or her funerary monument? Cameron himself thought this highly unlikely: “no pagan is likely to have ordered the scenes from the Bible that decorate so many Christian sarcophagi,” even though many scholars accept the reverse as proven, that Christians accepted mythological, pagan or neutral representations. One is reminded of the oft-cited account of the third-century emperor Severus Alexander worshipping daily at the sanctuary of his household lares not only his deified predecessors, but also such “venerated souls” as Apollonius, Christ, Abraham, Orpheus and others “of the same character.” The story is unreliable as historical record, but it may tell us something about liberal attitudes of some élite pagans in the later Roman Empire when the text was written. There are, however, no sarcophagi that could be considered syncretistic by reason of a display like that supposedly encountered by Severus Alexander. The much less ostentatious and limited intersection of visual elements in this medium is considered in the Conclusion.

In sum, this study is concerned with the engagement of early Christians with early Christian iconography. The theoretical possibility that some iconographically Christian sarcophagi were not actually Christian objects will be mitigated by aiming towards the centre of the

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107 Cameron, Last Pagans of Rome, 183. Cameron posits that Christians might have followed pagan burial customs and accepted pagan (i.e. neutral) visual themes (175–176), but he rejects the reverse possibility. On the claim that Christians used pagan iconography, see, for example, Elsner, “Archaeologies and Agendas,” and “Art and Architecture,” 746–748. Cantino Wataghin, “I primi cristiani,” 29–33, considers both possibilities. She accepts as “obvious” Elsner’s proposition that Christian images, unlike texts, suggest “a culture of inclusion” (29), and proposes a parallel adoption of Christian representations by non-Christians, including perhaps the Cleveland marble figures of Jonah and the “good shepherd.”

108 Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Sev. Alex. 29: “primum si facultas esset, id est si non cum uxorre cubuisset, matutinis horis in larario suo, in quo et divos principes sed optimos electos et animas sanctiores, in quis Apollonium et, quantum scriptor suorum temporum dicit, Christum, Abraham et Orpheum et huiuscemodi ceteros habebat ac maiorum effigies, rem divinam faciebat.” On the SHA, its shaky status as a direct historical source and the circumstances and date of its composition (suggested as 375/380), see Cameron, Last Pagans of Rome, 743–782.
category, away from the fuzzy boundaries for both the people and the monuments. The “Christian sarcophagus” will be assumed to be one that is both Christian agent and Christian object, and although some viewers were probably dissenters the focus here is on the majority, those who did not stray too far into the grey areas.

e) Classical and pseudo-classical nomenclature

Literature on Roman and early Christian art is replete with Latin. The expressions employed may be divided into two broad classes. The first consists of “authentic” terminology, words and expression that were actually used to mean the same thing by the individuals who made, bought or viewed the monuments. In these cases retention of the original Latin is generally acceptable, often preferable and occasionally important, although it can also be superfluous. An example of acceptable or preferable usage might include pollinctor (chapter 1). This occupational designation could be translated as “undertaker,” but the duties, not completely understood, were probably not identical to the modern usage; it is best to use the old word and make note of its likely scope. Similarly, given disputes regarding its botanical identification (chapter 5), it may be prudent to call the plant under which Jonah is so often seen to rest by the then-current Latin biblical translation, cucurbita (pace Jerome who changed it to hedera), although one could also call it a gourd plant, reflecting the weight of scholarly opinion, so long as one recalls the debate. The use of some Latin words in preference to English translations depends on context. Volumen and codex (chapter 7) can both safely be rendered as “book” except where their distinct forms are relevant to the discussion. We then have bookroll or scroll for the former and an anglicized “codex” for the latter, or the Latin terms can be retained.

Some Roman words have no direct modern counterpart, like loculus, arcosolium or cubiculum, so the Latin is necessarily used. In other cases, the original term should be retained because any attempted translation might prejudice its interpretation. Refrigerium (chapter 5) has more than one meaning and picking an English word is inadvisable. An extreme case for retaining the Latin is the expression dominus legem dat, a formulaic
inscription associated with the form of representation considered in chapter 7. It is contemporary with the monuments and its translation raises a host of interpretive issues.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are circumstances in which retaining the classical vocabulary is not the best choice. The Latin may be technically correct but still potentially misleading. For example, although the form of imperial representation commonly called *adlocutio* does bear that name on one early medal, its use in the literature is not entirely univocal and the word can be subliminally polemic. Such terms are occasionally used in this study, but with appropriately explicit precautions. Finally, in many cases an English word communicates just as well as the Latin and with less disruption to the flow of the text. The needless deployment (or display) of Latin in some academic literature — like calling Rome “the Urbs” — can be distracting. This study tries tried to avoid that bad habit but probably unconsciously falls into it on occasion.

A second type of classical expression very different from all the examples above involves rebranding a modern invention as an ancient discovery. Even when the anachronism is understood this practice can be insidious. Bruno Bettelheim argued that Ernest Jones used *ego*, *id* and *superego* to translate Freud’s original *Es*, *Ich*, and *Über-ich* in order to suppress the emotional impact. Roman historians have gone further, not merely translating back into Latin but creating classical neologisms out of thin air.

Theodor Mommsen, for example, invented the expression *collegia funeratica* to designate funerary associations. More seriously, according to Éric Rebillard he also invented the organization to which it refers. The patina of antiquity provided by the Latin nomenclature amounts to a self-fulfilling claim of authenticity. Other, less egregious but still problematic examples are *columbarium* and *coemeterium*. The former was the word for dovecote, although in some inscriptions it was extended by analogy to refer to niches for

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109 See chapter 7, note 42; ill. 108.
111 Éric Rebillard, *Religion et sépulture: l’église, les vivants et les morts dans l’antiquité tardive* (Paris: Editions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2003), 52. The critique of the Latin invention is relevant regardless of whether one sides with Rebillard or Mommsen regarding the substantive question concerning the existence of *collegia* engaged primarily in funding funerals.
ash containers. But *columbarium* was never applied to the sepulchral structures that are now so designated. As for *coemeterium*, in antique usage it referred not to a collective burial ground, the modern cemetery, but individual plots.\(^{112}\) Even once their recent origin is revealed, repetitive intonation of such terminology can create an aura of authority. Some of these *faux classiques* are easy to avoid (like *coemeterium* when one means cemetery) while others have become ingrained (like *columbarium*). In the latter cases, the reader should at least be alerted to their provenance to mitigate the undesirable implications.

Further examples of modern terminology clothed in Latin (and occasionally in Greek) will be discussed as they arise in later chapters. The most important is *traditio legis*. Both the Latinity of its name and the choice of these specific words are considered in chapter 6. Below are a few other examples commonly encountered in examinations of early Christian art.

- *Orans* is a participle of the verb *orare* that can refer to the activity of praying. It is not found in ancient texts as a description of any specific visual depiction. In early nineteenth-century historical studies written in Latin, *orans* was used as an adjective to describe painted or carved figures in a stereotyped posture, generally frontal with palms facing forward and arms raised to shoulder height (as in *mulier orans*). Later in the century, it was appropriated in vernacular literature as the substantive name for such a figure. The anglicized alternative “orant” used by many art historians is the choice here. It signals the connection to the Latin root but is less likely to imply a figural type recognized and labelled in late antiquity.

- Another common figure on late Roman sarcophagi is a shepherd bearing a sheep or ram on his shoulders. It has ancient precedents and is often called *kriophoros* (ram-bearer) by historians of both Greek and Roman art. This word was used by Pausanias to refer to a similarly constituted statue of Hermes.\(^{113}\) Although there is no evidence

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\(^{113}\) Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.22.1.
in Roman literary sources for *kriophoros* being used in this way, it is not a modern coinage and has the considerable advantage of neutrality when compared to “good shepherd,” the overtly Christian expression that is also, and more commonly, used to designate such figures. There being no convenient English rendition (like the German *Schafräger*), the transliterated Greek term is retained here.

- *Dextrarum iunctio* describes a common Roman form of representation in which figures join their right hands. They are often spouses, sometimes political allies. The expression sounds ancient but it is not, or at least not as a description of any particular ceremony.\(^{114}\) Given its wide acceptance, and since nothing turns on its authenticity in this study, the Latin will be used interchangeably with “handshake motif.”

- A cross surmounted by a wreathed Christogram is often called a *tropaion*.\(^{115}\) The rationale is that it is claimed to have represented a Christianized Roman military trophy (although the term is transliterated Greek rather than Latin). There is ancient authority for the broad conceptual analogy between the trophy and the cross, and elements like the wreath and sometimes even an eagle support the analogy.\(^{116}\) Its appearances on Christian sarcophagi are usually contextually associated with the Resurrection, and it is not unreasonable to interpret its reception by Christian viewers as a signal of victory. However, this usage of *tropaion* is unattested in any ancient source and its modern adoption gratuitously alludes to a specific non-Christian form.\(^{117}\)

- Most depictions of Jonah under the *cucurbita* represent him reclining, either asleep or at rest. In an uncommon variant he is seated with a less peaceful mien. It is

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\(^{115}\) See, for example, Lange, *Ikonographisches Register*, 103. A more general use of the Latin *trophæum Christi* is found in Bisconti, *Temi*, 159 (entry by Felle) referring to a gemmed cross held by Christ.

\(^{116}\) Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 148, cites Minucius Felix and Tertullian. Other authors writing closer in time to the production of Christian sarcophagi also refer to the *tropæum crucis*, including Augustine (*De civitate Dei*, 18.32.26 and elsewhere), Jerome (*In Abacuc*, 2.3.1301) and Chromatius, bishop of Aquileia (*Sermo* 43.3).

\(^{117}\) The form can be adequately described without calling it a trophy, in any language. Compare the descriptions of Rep. I.49 in the *Repertorium* entry and in Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 219 (cat. 46).
sometimes labelled as Jonas *irritatus*, a direct and entirely modern allusion to the biblical text, which recites the prophet’s anger after his unpleasant awakening under a broiling sun (Jonah 4:9: *Bene irascor ego usque ad mortem*, I am angry with reason even unto death). The representations themselves are, not surprisingly, subject to interpretation; some commentators describe Jonah not as angry but sad, grieving, brooding or perhaps depicted upon his brutal arousal.\(^{118}\) Adding any one of these adjectives legitimately stakes out an interpretive position on the matter. Using the Latin *irritatus*, however, adds a claim of unwarranted authority to one reading.

5. **Plan of the text**

This dissertation is organized into five parts. The seven chapters between its Introduction and Conclusion are grouped under three headings: Elements of Context (part II), Jonah (part III) and *Traditio legis* (part IV).

Most late Roman sarcophagi are displayed in museums (or if fragmentary, eroded or otherwise less attractive, hidden away in their reserves), others in the naves or chapels of churches. They are shorn from the functional, social, political, economic, emotional, spiritual and physical context in which they were created and first experienced. The three chapters in part II do not purport to reconstruct all of these factors but focus on certain elements of the relational context, the intentional connection between Christian sarcophagi and the people who bought and regarded them. Chapter 1 considers material and commercial aspects of these monuments: their physical properties, production, and the financial implications of purchase. Chapter 2 addresses the other side of the intentional equation, the conscious subject rather than the material object. Building on the cost analysis, it proposes quantitative and qualitative parameters of the potential universe of patrons, occupants and viewers of early Christian sarcophagi. Finally, chapter 3 makes a case for the study of reception. It considers the opportunities for and conditions of viewing, challenging a scholarly theory that they were invisible, or at least that the viewing experience was unimportant.

\(^{118}\) On the other interpretations of this form of representation, see chapter 5, note 46.
These opening chapters are preparatory to parts III and IV, each of which concentrates on a specific group of sarcophagi defined by their iconography. The Jonah theme appeared early and often in Christian art in a variety of media, including almost 200 surviving sarcophagi. These belong primarily to the early period, before 350 CE. The image commonly labelled as *traditio legis* is a late-century invention. Collectively, these two groups span the long fourth century of Roman sarcophagus production. Jonah is the most common example of the biblical, narrative form, while the *traditio legis* exemplifies “conceptual” and apostolic images. This is not to say that they are typical. The relationship between the Jonah theme and its biblical source is unusually ambiguous, and it often appears in a unique multi-scene cycle. The *traditio legis* is far more complex and arcane than most other late-century apostolic motifs. Like any useful case study, these particular monuments are neither the same as all the others, unworthy of special attention, nor so entirely different that they cannot reveal anything about the class as a whole.\(^{119}\)

Each of parts III and IV contains two chapters. The first (chapters 4 and 6, respectively) is devoted to definition of the corpus and dating, the second to the experience of the original viewers. With respect to the Jonah theme, chapter 5 canvasses a variety of facets of reception. These include the traditional emphases that dominate the art historical literature — pagan resonance (Endymion) and Christian typology (Jonah as a figure of Christ) — as well as a number of alternative readings. Some of these have occasionally been discussed: Jonah as a Christianization of Roman bucolic scenes, a symbol of *refrigerium interim* (the mysterious lodging of the soul between death and Parousia), or a statement of political resistance by an oppressed minority. Other facets of the funerary theme, like the Jewish, primal or naked Jonah, have attracted essentially no attention.

The parallel consideration of the *traditio legis* in chapter 7 follows a different path. Rather than considering the image as a whole through a variety of lenses, it deconstructs the composite form of representation into its constituent elements. The actions on either side

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of the central figure of Christ are regarded as if they were independent; the unfurled scroll is examined both as to its form and the actual or suggested inscription; the surrounding symbolic attributes, architectural framing and accompanying images are separately presented as “scenery.” Following this analysis, akin to the close reading of a text, the disparate elements are synthesized, repeating the work of the viewer.

The Conclusion looks back over the case studies and the contextual discussion in order to elucidate the “Christian turn” of Roman sarcophagi as a material analogue to the conversion of the Roman élite and sub-élite. The imagery turned away from profane and pagan forms of representation, not only Greco-Roman mythology but even scenes from everyday life, in favour of narratives and concepts associated with the Christian religion. It provided the visual component to a new Christian imaginaire compatible with a new experience of Christian death.
II. **Elements of Context**

Chapter 1. **The sarcophagus as a material and economic object**

Photographic reproductions of early Christian sarcophagi are invaluable to students of style, form and iconography, but they do not capture the physicality of the monuments. Images carved in relief are shrunk and flattened, their massive, durable and expensive marble support replaced by printed paper. Even when decontextualized from the private funerary space to a public museum, the material presence of a Roman sarcophagus impresses itself on the modern viewer.

These monuments were large, heavy, expensive and visually imposing. These factors are not independent. Size and weight correlate with cost and visual impact is affected by the perception of both material and financial importance. This chapter will briefly consider three material aspects of the medium, size, substance and production, and then explore the difficult issue of monetary value.

1. **Size**

The dimensions of a sarcophagus determined not only the surface available for carving but also the monument’s visual effect, the angle of vision it subtended in the actual viewing conditions. This section provides some basic statistics on size, its variability, and the relationship between dimensions and function.

Most late Roman sarcophagi were rectangular boxes, although some were curved at the ends in the form of a tub or vat. On average, a full-sized chest was about 215 cm long, 70 cm tall and 80 cm deep. Some of the most famous fourth-century examples were considerably larger, while smaller sarcophagi, generally around 120 cm or less in length,
were produced for children.¹ More specifically, a sample of 134 full-sized Roman sarcophagi catalogued in the three volumes of the *Repertorium* provides the following statistics regarding exterior dimensions:²

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<tr>
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<th>Length (cm)</th>
<th>Height (cm)</th>
<th>Depth (cm)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>215.6</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coefficient of variation</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.37</td>
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**Table 1.1: Mean Exterior Dimensions of Roman Christian sarcophagi**

The coefficient of variation (equal to the standard deviation divided by the mean) illustrates comparative variability. It indicates that height and depth were much less consistent than length. This suggests that sarcophagi were not made to fit individual corpses, but the length does not seem to be based on a “standard” measured in Roman feet.³

¹ Monumental examples include the sarcophagus in Sant’Ambrogio, Milan (*Rep. II. 150*), which measures 230 (L) x 114 (H) x 230 (D), plus a large and elaborate lid, and the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus in Saint Peter’s Treasury, Rome (*Rep. I.680*), 243 (L) x 141 (H) x 144 (D) plus another 40 cm from the vertical front of the lid. At the other extreme one could cite children’s sarcophagi attributed to a Roman workshop of the first third of the fourth century and now in Copenhagen and Oxford (*Rep. II. 7 and 32*), measuring 125 (L) x 41 (H) (Copenhagen, depth not given) and 122 (L) x 43 (H) x 47 (D) (Oxford) respectively. Janet Huskinson, *Roman Children’s Sarcophagi: Their Decoration and its Social Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), uses 170 cm as an arbitrary cut-off to identify a child’s sarcophagus where no epigraphic or figural clue is available.

² This sample includes sarcophagi complete but for the lid as well as preserved fronts for which length and height measurements seem secure. In most cases depth was also reported. Children’s sarcophagi are not included. Nor are fragments, because the reconstruction of the dimensions of the original monument is too uncertain. For purposes of defining this sample, the Christian character assigned by the *Repertorium* was generally taken without question except that orant and good shepherd sarcophagi with no indicative inscription and no specifically Christian figuration were excluded. Their measurements do not deviate markedly from the mean so this decision has no important statistical effect. The 134 sarcophagi forming the sample were either found in Rome or Ostia (*Rep. I and II*) or are attributed a Roman workshop provenance (*Rep. II and III*). Modest reassignments of provenance would not have a substantial impact on the result.

³ One Roman foot was between 29.4 and 29.7 cm. The average length in the sample, 215.6 cm, is about 7.3 ft. It is possible that the length was standardized (perhaps 7 ft plus or minus an integer number of *unciae*) but that this is obscured by variations over time or between quarries. No such patterns, however, emerge from a review of the admittedly incomplete raw data.
Turning from the individual dimensions to pairs of dimension, there does not seem to be a strong relationship. The correlations are positive, but not especially high, as indicated in Table 1.2.

<table>
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<th>Correlation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Length and height</td>
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<td>Height and depth</td>
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</table>

**Table 1.2: Correlation of mean dimensions**

Another way to look at sarcophagus dimensions is in a time series. Figure 1.1 below plots the length and height of the monuments in the sample against production dates suggested in the *Repertorium*, rounded to the nearest decade. (Depth has been omitted because it is less regularly reported.) The vertical bars indicate the range of heights and lengths of sarcophagi that are assigned the same date. The dotted trend lines show that there was no notable and consistent change in average size.

![Figure 1.1: Dimensions of sarcophagi – time series](image)
All of the measurements discussed so far are external dimensions. The walls of a marble sarcophagus were between 9 and 15 cm thick, usually 10 to 12 cm. The internal dimensions were still considerably greater than required to hold the contents. The mean height of Roman adults has been estimated at 164.4 cm for men and 152.1 cm for women, with standard deviations of 3.9 and 3.4 cm respectively. The average interior sarcophagus length of 194 cm (215.6 cm minus two walls of 11 cm each) was therefore 7.5 standard deviations longer than the average male (over 12 standard deviations longer than the average female). Under a normal distribution of data, 95% of the sample falls within two standard deviations of the mean. The length of these chests thus far exceeded purely practical demands. This was also true for the other dimensions. In most cases, Roman sarcophagi held a single corpse, although the discovery of two skeletons is not uncommon, and inscriptions sometimes record the common deposition of a married couple. More than two bodies are rarely found. In addition to human remains, some grave goods were accommodated; however, recognizing that such items do have a tendency to disappear over time, the surviving evidence suggests they were not numerous or large in this period.

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4 Monica Giannecchini and Jacopo Moggi-Cecchi, “Stature in Archeological Samples from Central Italy: Methodological Issues and Diachronic Changes,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 135 (2008): 290, table 6. These estimates are for the “Roman period,” defined by the authors as extending from the fifth century BCE to the fifth century CE. There is a transition to slightly greater stature in their subsequent “medieval period.” The data are Italian and while regional differences could be important, published information is insufficient to be more precise about the stature of fourth-century Roman city-dwellers.


6 The prevalence of grave goods generally diminishes during the high empire and becomes largely restricted to coins and personal jewellery, although one still finds the occasional lamp. See Michael Heinzelmann, “Introduzione: La situazione di Roma,” in *Römischer Bestattungsbrauch und Beigabensitten in Rom, Norditalien und den Nordwestprovinzen von der spätten Republik bis in die Kaiserzeit = Culto dei morti e costumi funerari romani Roma, Italia settentrionale e province nord-occidentali dalla tarda Repubblica all’età*
It is not surprising that late Roman sarcophagi were larger than their function required. The use of oversized burial containers to impress viewers and express respect for the deceased continues to the present day. The usual dimensions of contemporary American caskets are surprisingly close to the averages derived above for fourth-century Christian sarcophagi, but since their occupants are taller and wider, the extent of over-sizing is less marked today.\footnote{The standard American coffin is 213 cm (L) x 58 cm (H) x 71 cm (D).}

2. Substance and supply

Virtually all Roman early Christian sarcophagi are made of marble.\footnote{The first general editor of the Repertorium, Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, indicated that its scope would extend to sarcophagi of various materials (Rep. I, xiii), but in the result the exceptions are few. Among sarcophagi found in Rome are two porphyry monuments made for members of the imperial family now in the Vatican Museo Pio Clementino (Rep. I.173 and 174), which were probably not produced in the city, and one made of lead (Rep. I.805). A Red Sea sarcophagus of African onyx in Brescia is attributed to a northern Italian workshop (Rep. II.249), and a number of provincial sarcophagi are of local limestone (e.g., Rep. III.298, 606).}
The nature of the material is relevant to their appearance, use and cost. The thousands of surviving late-third- and mainly fourth-century monuments attest to its continuing availability.

a) Characteristics

Marble is a metamorphic rock, meaning that it is formed from another rock by geological processes of heat and compression. The main precursor is calcium carbonate (calcite) in the form of limestone, but even “pure” marble contains at least trace amounts of other minerals. These impurities are important to the appearance of marble monuments; they alter the hue of the stone and account for its characteristic grains and veins.\footnote{D. J. Fettes and Jacqueline Desmons (eds.), Metamorphic Rocks: A Classification and Glossary of Terms: Recommendations of the International Union of Geological Sciences Subcommission on the Systematics of Metamorphic Rocks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 170, define marble as “metamorphic rock containing more than 50% vol. of carbonate minerals (calcite and/or aragonite and/or dolomite).” They continue: “Pure marble contains more than 95% vol. of carbonate minerals; a marble containing less than 95% of carbonate minerals is classified as impure marble.”}

Marble's aesthetic qualities — including its susceptibility to polishing — were one factor in making it...
the material of choice for sarcophagi. Another was amenability to relief carving. Marble is neither too hard to work nor so soft that it is subject to scratching.\footnote{Moh’s scale of hardness runs from 1 (talc) to 10 (diamond). Marble scores 3.5. Peter Rockwell, \textit{The Art of Stoneworking: A Reference Guide} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19, observes that the cost of carving today (i.e., in 1993) varies in a ratio of 1:2:3 among limestone, marble and granite precisely because of the difference in hardness. There are also gradations among marble varieties.}

The density of marble is between 2.6 and 2.84 g cm\(^{-3}\) depending on the type and source, similar to granite and porphyry, lower than lead, higher than brick.\footnote{David R. Lide and W. M. “Mickey” Haynes (eds.), \textit{CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics}, 90th ed. (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2009), 15–39.} This translates to a mass of 2,600 to 2,840 kg per cubic metre. A solid block the size of an average adult sarcophagus would weigh almost 4,000 kg, twice as much for the largest monuments. The appearance is greater than the reality, since sarcophagi are not solid. Even so, the mass of an adult sarcophagus was over 2,000 kg, the actual figure depending on its size, the thickness of its walls, the manner and degree of carving, and the style of the lid. A child’s sarcophagus might weigh less than 500 kg.\footnote{A solid block of marble the size of the average sarcophagus has a volume, with the lid, of about 1.4 m\(^3\). Applying an average density of 2,700 kg per m\(^3\) yields a mass of 3,800 kg. Hollowing out the chest reduces the volume of material and carving reduces it further, although this latter effect is difficult to calculate and highly variable. The denser the design and higher the relief the greater the quantity of material removed. The rear face of a Roman sarcophagus was rarely carved and the sides, if carved, were normally in low relief. As a rough estimate, an average degree of carving would reduce the marble content of the front by one-third and the sides by less, so that a figural sarcophagus of average size would represent between 0.6 and 0.65 m\(^3\), a mass of around 1,700 kg. The lid could add a further 500 kg if simple and flat, or perhaps 700 kg if it included a substantial vertical panel.} Producers and transporters experienced the mass of these monuments directly; viewers inferred it from the dimensions and the material.

The appearance of marble as well as the ease of carving\footnote{On workability of different types of marble, see J.B. Ward-Perkins, “Workshops & Clients: The Dionysiak Sarcophagi in Baltimore,” \textit{Rendiconti Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia} 48 (1975–1976): 211–213 and 233–234; Rockwell, \textit{Art of Stoneworking}, 17–24. The type of stone affects the style of carving and indirectly the choice of subjects and forms. These variations apply not only between quarry sites but even between marbles with the same provenance. On varieties of Proconnesian marble, see Gabriele Borghini, \textit{Marmi antichi} (Rome: De Luca Edizione d’Arte, 1989), 252.} depends upon the source, the quarry or regional group of quarries whence it comes. Consumers in the capital during the
early and high empire had a wide range of options. These narrowed during the third century as multi-coloured marble became a rarity and Italian Carrara less common. Most late third- and fourth-century sarcophagi are of white marble imported from a few eastern quarries on the islands of Proconnesus (today's Marmara, in the Sea of Marmara, Turkey), Thasos and perhaps Paros (islands in the northern and central Aegean Sea).

Finally, ancient sources refer to a peculiar chemical characteristic of some marble. Pliny commented that a stone from Troas had the unusual property of dissolving a corpse in 40 days, leaving only the teeth. For this reason, he said, it is called lapis sarcophagus, alluding to the Greek etymology of σαρξ (flesh) and φαγεῖν (eat). To the extent that fourth-century lay Christians thought about the resurrection of the flesh, the putative decompositional


aptitude of marble would not have been a selling point; however, there is no evidence early Christians knew or cared about this apocryphal property.\textsuperscript{17}

b) Sources

The widely-accepted model for the marble trade in imperial Rome developed by J.B. Ward-Perkins has remained remarkably robust.\textsuperscript{18} It begins with an assertion of state ownership — or, to use his provocative anachronism, nationalization — from the first century CE.\textsuperscript{19} This leads to streamlining and professionalization, which enable substantial increases in output and efficiency, stockpiling of material both at the quarry and at depots convenient to the final destination, and the development of corps of craftsmen at both ends of the supply chain.

The production of marble sarcophagi required a continuing supply of material. Some of this came from continuing imports, some from recycling. It is commonly asserted that the

\textsuperscript{17} There seem to be no Christian references to Pliny's theory before Isidore of Seville in the seventh century: \textit{Etymologiarum}, 15.11.2 and 16.4.15. See Caroline Walker Bynum, \textit{The Resurrection of the Body} in \textit{Western Christianity}, 200–1336 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 19–114, regarding later medieval sources connecting the etymology, burial and death (198).


marble trade declined dramatically in the later empire. Amanda Claridge’s grim assessment is representative: after the middle of the third century “the market shrinks, the quarries wind down; highly experienced sculptors become fewer and fewer; the accumulated skills of thirty generations of unbroken tradition are less and less in demand.” Yet while economic activity, including trade and construction, did deteriorate, the extent of decline and its impact on particular commodities, including the importation of marble in Rome, is uncertain. Marble was still required for new buildings, major renovation projects, and sarcophagi. These requirements stimulated Constantine to decree further private exploitation rights in 320; the continuing imbalance between supply and demand was remarked by Jovian in 363, when he offered new licenses to promote additional development. In 416 a general tax remission for the eastern provinces was withheld from

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23 CTh 10.19.1 and 2, respectively (the latter ascribed to Julian, but dated after his death). The licences to private producers were subject to a tax, as indicated by its remission for patres conscripti in 376 by Valens, Gratien and Valentinian, at least in Macedonia and Illyria: CTh 10.19.8. A few years later, the same emperors decreed something like modern regimes under which private owners have rights in respect of minerals on or under their property with a reserved interest to the state: CTh 10.19.10. This system should have facilitated an increase in mining and quarry activity.
quarries at Docimeion, Proconnesus and Troad, presumably because they were flourishing without it.\textsuperscript{24} Roman marble yards also continued to function.\textsuperscript{25}

This imported supply from the East was, however, inadequate to meet demand (or meet it at an acceptable price) and was supplemented by surplus or previously used material, both old sarcophagi and architectural blocks. Such reclamation or recycling was not new, but the practice seems to have accelerated as a market response to the inadequacy or the price of primary supply from the quarries. Guntram Koch identified around fifty early Christian sarcophagi from various regions that, in his view, were made by recarving or embellishing pagan monuments, although the cited indicia of “reuse” are not always secure.\textsuperscript{26} The situation is somewhat clearer with respect to the recycling, redeployment or salvage of architectural marble. It is possible to observe mouldings and joints characteristic of architectural blocks, whether elements recovered from buildings or material prepared for but never incorporated into a structure.\textsuperscript{27}

Reuse or salvage was problematic given prohibitions against violating tombs and reclaiming material from public buildings.\textsuperscript{28} Increasing demand for Christian sarcophagi could have

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\textsuperscript{24} CTh 11.28.11. The inference was drawn by Dario Monna and Patrizio Pensabene, \textit{Marmi dell’Asia Minore} (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1977), 154.
\textsuperscript{25} Stores of marble were concentrated in three areas: northwest of the Campus Martius, near the port, and at an Emporium along the Tiber. Although the construction of the Aurelian walls in 271 must have cut off at least part of this last area from easy commerce with the city, the riparian yards continued to serve as marble depots, perhaps on a reduced scale, in the fourth century. On the Roman area finds, see Martin Maischberger, “Some Remarks on the Topography and History of Imperial Rome’s Marble Imports,” in \textit{Archéomatériaux: marbres et autres roches: ASMOSIA IV, Bordeaux-Talence, 9–13 octobre 1995: actes de la IVème Conférence internationale de l’Association pour l’étude des marbres et autres roches utilisés dans le passé}, ed. Max Schwoerer, Norman Herz, Katherine A. Holbrow and Shelley Sturman (Talence: PUB, 1999), 325–334; Maischberger, \textit{Marmor in Rom}, 51, 61–67, 90; Pensabene, “Il fenomeno del marmo”, 27.
\textsuperscript{27} See Herrmann, \textit{Appendix 2 to Van Keuren, et al, “Multimethod Analyses,”} based on a visual analysis of the Pio Cristiano collection. Herrmann concluded that other sarcophagi in the collection were sculpted from fresh material imported from eastern quarries.
\textsuperscript{28} On the prohibition against theft and reuse of sepulchral material, see the edicts of Constantius and Julian, \textit{CTh}, 9.17.1–5. On inscriptions containing threats and curses against those who would reuse the material, see
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induced some relaxation of the rules, or at least their spotty observance, particularly in connection with the reuse of pagan monuments. In any event, the archaeological evidence indicates that some Christian sarcophagi were made from reclaimed marble — unused or previously used sarcophagi, destroyed buildings, surplus material in marble yards — while production also relied on continuing importation from active quarries in the East. Fourth-century supply and demand evidently cleared at a price that permitted buildings to be built and sarcophagi to be produced.

3. Production and “mass production”

Signs of the ancient Roman marble yards near the Emporium on the banks of the Tiber can still be seen by the tourist walking along the Lungotevere Aventino at the Via Marmorata. However, no archaeological evidence of a workshop facility — there or elsewhere else — has been found. Nor does documentary evidence provide any insights into the production process. This has not prevented the formulation of theories regarding the commercial, organizational and technical characteristics of sarcophagus production.

Early in the twentieth century, not coincidentally just as the mechanized assembly line was being enthusiastically adopted, scholars formulated a sarcophagus “mass production” hypothesis that has been more recently promoted through the enthusiastic efforts of Klaus Eichner.29 Its essential elements are standardization and scale,30 although specialization

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through the division of labour is also often regarded as a typical characteristic or even a precondition. For Roman sarcophagus production, none of these elements can be supported by direct evidence. Both the meaning and the inference of “mass production” rest on what might be called intuitive economics, a general understanding of the capitalist market economy and modern theories and practices of industrial organization.  

So Eichner concluded that fourth-century sarcophagus production was organized like a modern factory, “something like the assembly line of the automobile industry.”

This discussion challenges that conclusion. The social, legal, economic, technical and political circumstances in the twentieth century differed markedly not only in degree but in

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30 Andrew Wilson, “Large-Scale Manufacturing, Standardization and Trade,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology*, ed. John Peter Oleson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 394: “the production of very large quantities of the same artifact, or essentially similar artifacts, by the same production means.” On terminology, including Wilson’s definition, and inconsistency in the sarcophagus literature, see Russell, “Roman Sarcophagus Industry,” 120–121.


[62]
kind from those prevailing in the third or fourth.\textsuperscript{33} The production process was, in all likelihood, different as well.

\textbf{a) Division of labour and specialization}

The many “unfinished” Roman sarcophagi provide an invaluable window into the production process.\textsuperscript{34} From their appearance, Eichner inferred eleven discrete stages of production, many of which could be subdivided, combined or omitted.\textsuperscript{35} The observation that sarcophagus production must have entailed serial steps is neither contentious nor profound. Polishing cannot precede carving, and any design must be applied before carving begins. Some of the ordering is tautological: rough modeling, for example, must precede fine carving. Peter Rockwell, a practicing sculptor and restorer, noted that stone carving has always followed a “law of simple sequence”: “stone is worked by a series of simple steps.”\textsuperscript{36}

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\textsuperscript{35} Eichner, “Die Werkstatt,” 67–71, 116–117, 151; Eichner, “Produktionsmethoden,” 93–104, 111. Koch, \textit{Frühchristliche Sarkophage}, 72, proposed a seven-step process similar to the approach taken by Koch and Sichtermann, \textit{Römische Sarkophage}, 84–85. Wiegartz, “Marmorhandel,” 354, provided a less detailed but conceptually similar model. These production step lists are premised on imported marble “blanks,” not reused sarcophagi or architectural material, for which the initial steps would be somewhat different but the principle the same.

\textsuperscript{36} Rockwell, \textit{Art of Stoneworking}, 12–13. These steps are neither entirely separate nor rigidly defined. Rockwell’s “law” suggested a looser and more chaotic state of partial completion than Eichner’s theory. Jastrezbowska, “Sarcophages d’enfants,” 796, observed that children’s sarcophagi, but also many adult examples not considered by Eichner, do not fit neatly into his separate categories of partial completion.
The mass production model relies on the inference that these steps were accomplished by small, dedicated teams specialized in smoothing, modelling, drilling, carving, polishing or painting, and that these teams were staffed with workers having the lowest skill level possible, thereby minimizing cost and production time while maximizing volume. The lion’s share of the work is supposed to have consisted of drilling holes and removing the material between them, tasks that could be assigned to unskilled and less expensive workers, especially slaves.

The unfinished — and, for that matter, the finished — monuments demonstrate the application of various tools, including the all-important drill, to which we will return below; however, there is no archaeological or physical evidence that those who wielded them were organized into specialties or sub-specialties within the carving fraternity. Some scholars have looked to epigraphic or literary sources. Augustine, for example, ridicules the pagans’ distribution of tasks amongst their gods, “as if they were workmen in the silversmiths’ quarter where a vessel passes through the hands of many craftsmen before it comes out finished, though it could have been perfected by a single perfect craftsman.” This could suggest specialization in the early fifth-century silver workshop, although it might just refer to a team effort. Kathleen Shelton went further, attempting to particularize the occupations of the artisans producing the Esquiline Treasure based on literary sources. Reliance on

37 Eichner, “Die Werkstatt,” 151–152; “Produktionsmethoden,” 111. The teams were generally no larger than two except for the drillers, who required four or perhaps six.
38 Eichner, “Die Werkstatt,” 70–71, 146, 152. The assumption that slaves were less skilled and less expensive than other labourers reflects a modern prejudice. The cost of slaves in the later empire was sufficiently high that while their labour might set a floor price on equivalent services, it was far from free. Diocletian’s Prices Edict (PE 29.8) doubles the prices of slaves instructed in the arts. On the levelling of status between the poor free population and slaves in the fourth century, see Géza Alföldy, The Social History of Rome, trans. David Braund and Frank Pollock (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1985), 203.
39 Augustine, De civitate Dei, 7.4 (William M. Green translation): “...tamquam minuscularios uectigalium conductores uel tamquam opifices in uico argentario, ubi unum uasculum, ut perfectum exeat, per multos artifices transit, cum ab uno perfecto perfici posset.”
epigraphy and texts to identify specialties, however, is hazardous: usage is inconsistent, designations often generic, and frequency in the later empire disappointing.\textsuperscript{41}

Regarding the last problem, three of the ten terms Shelton cited as silver-working sub-specialties disappear after the third century.\textsuperscript{42} The mere fact that a term is not found in the preserved record does not, of course, mean that the related occupation ceased to be practiced, although it could suggest that the restricted field of activity to which the label had been attached was no longer considered autonomous. A more serious difficulty with Shelton’s examples is their imprecision, or potentially false precision. The same term may be employed for what seem to be different occupations. \textit{Caelator}, for example, refers to an engraver but also to the incisor of inscriptions on stone.\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Flaturarius} is used in the only secure fourth-century source as a term for those who cast metal, but solely in connection with coins.\textsuperscript{44}

Turning from silver to marble, epigraphy and literary evidence are even less helpful. \textit{Marmorarius} is a common label for sculptors, of both statuary and reliefs, as well as quarry workers, masons and incisors.\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Lapidarius} is used in relation to marble but it is even more


\textsuperscript{43} CIL 8.21106 refers specifically to an \textit{argentius caelator} and his connection with the guild of silversmiths (\textit{cura conleg[i] fabri argentarii}). CIL 6.04328 commemorates an \textit{argentarius}, probably meaning a money changer or banker in this period, not a silversmith, and the inscription uses the word \textit{caelator} to refer not to the person commemorated but rather to the incisor (“Amiantus Germanici Caesaris caelator fecit”). \textit{Caelator} seems to appear only once in a securely dated text after Diocletian, Jerome’s translation of Exodus 28:36, and there it does helpfully refer to an engraver, although one cannot infer from this single reference that by the end of the fourth century \textit{caelator} had become restricted to engravers.

\textsuperscript{44} CTh 9.21.6 (dated 349).


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general than *marmorarius*, as are *artifex* and *faber marmoris*. *Sculptor* and *fictor* refer to sculptors of statues as well carvers of reliefs. The more specific *sculptor marmoris* was used in the funerary inscription of the Abbot Florentinus in Arles in the sixth century, but it referred to the incisor of the epitaph, not the sculptor of the tomb. *Anaglypharius* is a relatively rare term which sometimes designated a sculptor of reliefs. *Samiarius* and *samiator* refer to polishing, although not specifically for stone and not after the third century. References to a painter, *pictor*, are not uncommon in inscriptions but none hint at an artisan applying colour to stone, let alone sarcophagi. Of particular note, there is no designation that points to the all-important drillers.

Another possible source for hints of specialization would be visual representations of tools or craftsmen. A well-known example of Roman industry is depicted in a frieze on the late Republican or early imperial tomb of the baker Eurysaces at the Piazza di Porta Maggiore, Rome, depicting a production-line operation with men engaged in different tasks in their proper sequence. Images of wood- and stoneworking tools can also be found, although nothing quite as explicit and informative as Eurysaces’s bakery. The grave plaque of the

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Vatican: *materiali e contributi scientifici per una mostra epigrafica* (Vatican City: Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie, 1997), 331–332 (3.11.12, epitaph of the *marmorarius* Silvanus, entry by Lega). A college of *marmorarii* is referred to in CIL 6.9550, a *negotiator marmorarius* in CIL 6.33886.

46 CIL 12.00944. Bracketing our time period, CIL 06.09824 includes a reference to a *sculptor [vasculari[us],* a sculptor in metal.

47 Von Petrikovits, “Die Spezialisierung – Spätantike,” 297. Ambrose, *De Tobia*, 13.43, colourfully describes the doleful consequences of a signature on a contract of usury with a series of metaphors, including the reproductive qualities of rabbits: so too, he remarks, is interest generated and compounded by the “inscribers of usury” (*anaglyphariis usurarum*) (translation by Lois Miles Zucker).

48 Pfanner, “Herstellung von Porträts,” 228, refers to these and other, more ambiguous designations. *Politor* is also more general and in the only late antique reference, is a polisher of gems. See von Harald von Petrikovits, “Die Spezialisierung der römischen Handwerks,” in *Beiträge zur römischen Geschichte und Archäologie II* (Cologne: Rheinland-Verlag, 1991), 124, 126, and “Die Spezialisierung des römischen Handwerks II (Spätantike),” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 43 (1981): 302.

49 Eichner, “Die Werkstatt,” 152n1, and “Produktionsmethoden,” 111n133, refers briefly to epigraphic citations but provides no means to link the general and flexible occupations referred to here with his quite specific division of labour.


marmorarius Eutropos in Urbino, usually dated to the fourth century, depicts a carver managing a strap drill pulled by an assistant to complete the left potrome of a lenos sarcophagus (ill. 1). Beside him are a two-bladed axe and a container holding either additional bits for the drill or perhaps chisels; an adjacent image shows the lid, inscribed with his name, on a table or platform. This could be a naturalistic depiction of the workshop, but the funerary context suggests that these were probably attributes of the deceased sculptor.

Such an example does not contradict a division of specialized labour in the sarcophagus workshop, but nor is it particularly supportive.

This brief epigraphic and iconographic excursion indicates that neither late Roman nomenclature nor visual depictions suggest a division of labour, in the modern sense of the expression, in the production of sarcophagi. No proof is required that carving followed the “law of simple sequence” and that tools like chisels and drills were important both for efficiency and aesthetic effects, but this does not add up to an organization of the work force into specialties along the lines of mass production. That inference is premised on a conclusion that most of the work was drilling, and that most of the drilling could was accomplished by cheap, unskilled labour.

and also his *Roman Woodworking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), which includes examples of stone as well as woodworking tools.


The drill was certainly a labour-saving device but it was neither recent nor originally Roman. Pausanias claimed that it was first used to sculpt stone by Kallimachos in the late fifth-century BCE, but the evidence goes back as far as the seventh. Homer evoked the drill to describe the blinding of Polyphemus:

Hoisting high that olive stake with its stabbing point, straight into the monster's eye they rammed it hard – I drove my weight on it from above and bored it home as a shipwright bores his beam with a shipwright's drill that men below, whipping the strap back and forth, whirl and the drill keeps twisting faster, never stopping –

This simile refers to the strap drill, a more powerful cousin of the bow drill. A single craftsman could operate this simpler tool, composed of an iron bit attached to a wooden stock, around which a thong was wrapped and attached to a bow. Pulling the bow back and forth turned the bit in opposite directions. The operator applied pressure to guide the bit by leaning on a hollowed out element, referred to as a nave, atop the stock. The strap drill worked on the same principle but was more powerful and suitable to stone as well as wood. The strap was not attached to a bow but instead held by one or perhaps two assistants who pulled it back and forth. In some cases, the strap drill had two handles in order to provide the craftsman greater control. Both forms of the drill can be found in late antique depictions, and a few examples have been preserved.


Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.26.7.

55 Homer, The Odyssey, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 1996), 9.427–432. On the adoption of the drill by Roman sculptors from the first century CE onward, see Rockwell, Art of Stoneworking, 201; Fant, "Quarrying and Stoneworking," 125. Ward-Perkins, "Workshops and Clients," 232, describes as a "commonplace of Roman art-historical studies" the view that by the second half of the second century, the drill had developed from being a mere technical tool to a means of achieving high relief, the accentuation of small details and the chiaroscuro effect in late Roman sculpture.

57 The previously noted Eutropos grave plaque in Urbino (note 52 and ill. 1) shows a two-handed model of the strap drill in use. A bow drill is depicted hanging on a late third- or early fourth-century funerary altar of Eutyches, now in the Museo Nazionale, Syracuse, and in operation on a fourth-century gold glass vessel now in the Vatican Biblioteca Apostolica, inv. 60788. Both of these examples relate to the occupation of the woodworker rather than the stone carver and are illustrated in Ulrich, Roman Woodworking, 33 (fig. 3.21) and
Pausanias may have been referring to a technique rather than a tool, the so-called “running drill,” a strap drill held at an angle and guided by its operator in order to cut channels. Eichner has repeatedly and persistently argued that this technique is an art historical fiction, contending that in both Greek and Roman sculpture, channels were made by drilling a row of vertical holes and then removing the material between them with a chisel. Most other scholars have accepted the running drill, some regarding the vertical holes method as an alternative. Rockwell proposed two ways that channels were produced by Roman sculptors. His version of the running drill has the operator guiding the bit along the channel to create a series of angled, not vertical, holes between which the drill would step. These could be connected if a deeper channel was desired. Rockwell also referred to a versatile type of chisel with a particularly strong shaft that could cut deep, narrow channels as an alternative to the running drill and that might be used by the same carver. He specifically noted its widespread use on late Roman sarcophagi.

The debate about drills and drill techniques is important in this context because the running drill and the chisel require greater skill than the standing strap drill. This is inconvenient for

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59 The use of a running drill is commonly affirmed in texts on Greek and Roman sculpture. See Andrew F. Stewart, Greek Sculpture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 39 (including its early use and the interpretation of Pausanias’s statement); Carol Lawton, Marbleworkers in the Athenian Agora (Athens: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2006), 29; Rachel Meredith Kousser, Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture: The Allure of the Classical (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 130 (referring to a sarcophagus); Koch and Sichtermann, Römische Sarkophage, 85. See also Strong and Claridge, ”Marble Sculpture,” 199, 205. None of these authors refer to Eichner. However Stutzinger, Frühchristlichen Sarkophagreliefs aus Rom, 79–80, does follow Eichner in rejecting the running drill (without defining quite what it is), at least with respect to the production of hair and drapery folds on early Christian sarcophagi. Mary B. Hollinshead, “Hair Struts in Late Roman Sculpture,” in Stephanos: Studies in Honor of Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, ed. Kim J. Hartswick and Mary C. Sturgeon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1998), 119–120, suggested that both techniques were used in Rome. In the Urbino relief, interpreted by most scholars as a representation of the running drill technique, Eichner sees rather a stationary drill: “Technische Voraussetzungen,” 74–75. Contra, Rockwell, Art of Stoneworking, 53n12; Hollinshead, “Hair Struts,” 119.
60 Rockwell, Art of Stoneworking, 37, 44, 64.
the modern mass production hypothesis, which relies on substantially all the work being accomplished by unskilled labour, especially drillers.\(^{61}\) This disagreement among the experts is unlikely to be resolved, and one is tempted to assume that different techniques and their requisite competencies coexisted.

Since a specialized division of labour cannot be readily inferred from actual evidence, proponents instead rely, explicitly or implicitly, on a belief that this methodology must have been adopted because that is how *homo economicus* maximizes efficiency, echoing the opening sentence of Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*:\(^{62}\)

> The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity and judgment with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour.

The association of specialization with economic efficiency has become a shibboleth, whether applied to a society (cobbler fixing shoes and farmers producing food) or a firm (Smith’s pin-maker with “peculiar trades” to draw, straighten, cut, grind, make the head, put it on, whiten the pins, and wrap them in paper). But not every productive activity benefits from such a division, and efficiency alone does not necessarily dictate the organization of work. The modern stone sculptor may work alone, without semi-skilled drillers and polishers, just as contemporary writers usually type their own texts. Artisans may master more than one skill relevant to their production, with no loss of efficiency or no concern over any such loss. In addition, such non-economic factors as social or legal strictures on labour (e.g., considerations of status or guild and apprenticeship rules) may preclude construction of the “ideal” workshop. Finally, even where certain skills are distributed among different workers, the organizational structure need not be an assembly line or even a single firm. Efficiencies can be achieved through co-operation or co-ordination of independent workers or workshops. The division of tasks could be intended to

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\(^{61}\) Christ, *Junius Bassus*, 187–191, observed that even if one does allocate so much work to drillers, the necessary coordination and integration of the work suggests that not all drillers were quite so unskilled as Eichner maintained.

permit large-scale, standardized production, but it could also reflect a craft endeavour responding to demand for small numbers of commissioned items.\(^63\)

**b) Standardization**

Henry Ford famously said that his Model T was available in any colour, so long as it was black. Even without significant mechanization, the Romans made some progress in organizing the large-scale manufacture of relatively standardized objects, from tableware to textiles, bricks to roughed-in garland sarcophagi.\(^64\) Another of Eichner’s proposed stages of production is relevant here. He argued that the sculptor did not dive directly into relief carving but rather followed the outlines of a design incised into the marble surface from a flexible, reusable stencil or template (Umrißschablon) that was maintained in the workshop to facilitate reliable reproduction.\(^65\) No such cartoons or patterns, or any contemporary literary references or visual depictions, have been found. As an example of an incised design, Eichner cited a fragmentary image, actually a low relief, now in the Museo Pio Cristiano; many similar plaques are preserved.\(^66\) There is no compelling reason to suppose that such objects functioned as preliminary designs. They could be independent monuments (a grave plaque or loculus closure, as Eichner’s example is currently classified), or the intended final state of the short side of a sarcophagus.\(^67\) This is not to deny that

\(^{63}\) On specialization in a small workshop producing early Byzantine silver, see Cutler, “Right Hand’s Cunning,” 988n90. The passage from Augustine referred to above (note 39), also remarked by Cutler, probably contemplated small-scale production.

\(^{64}\) Wilson, “Large-scale Manufacturing,” 402–403. With respect to sarcophagi, Wilson refers to rough garland, striated and columnar forms in the East from the first century into the third.


\(^{66}\) Eichner, “Produktionsmethoden,” 93n55 and ill. 11.c. The object is Vat. 31559 (Lat. 200). Other examples might include the fragmentary representation of a seated and a standing figure incised with traces of red pigment also in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Vat. 31582, Lat. 226), and the incised “good shepherd” and Jonah images in the Terme di Diocleziano, Museo Nazionale Romano: see Rosanna Friggeri, *La collezione epigrafica del Museo nazionale romano alle Terme di Diocleziano* (Milan: Electa, 2001), 166, fig. 12 and 14.

\(^{67}\) Small plaques with incised or very low relief figures are common, and there is no suggestion that these were meant to be carved further into deeper relief. See, for example, Serena Ensoli and Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2000), 471–472 (cat. 73–76). An incised image together with an incorporated inscription fills the principal field on the sarcophagus of Livia Primitiva in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, apparently representing the intended final state. Musée du Louvre, MA2983 (Rep. III.431); François Baratte and Catherine Metzger, *Catalogue des sarcophages en pierre*
Roman sculptors might have taken precautions to minimize the potentially irreversible damage of a misstep in carving expensive marble blocks, or that they might have used and traded ideas through drawings. But the assumption of incision from a template is unsupported. If anything was applied to the marble surface, some kind of rough or ad hoc drawing on the stone would seem more prudent than incising.  

The most obvious challenge to the template conception of mass produced, standardized representations is that unlike loaves of bread, Roman sarcophagi do not look the same. If a stencil was used for the Dogmatic Sarcophagus, the object of Eichner’s dissertation, either it was destroyed after or as a result of its initial use, or all the other exemplars have perished. Koch observed that of about 200 Christian sarcophagi he dated to the early Constantinian period, only two agree in all aspects of form and content, and stylistic variations were significant across the sample. There are indications — the repetition of unusual forms or small technical homologies — that could suggest, or at least are consistent with, production of multiple monuments in the same workshop or even by the same artisan or group of 

d’époques romaine et paléochrétienne: Musée du Louvre (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1985), 305–306 (cat. 303, entry by Metzger). The sarcophagus is dated by Metzger to the first half of the third century, and to the middle of that century in the Repertorium.  

Rockwell, Art of Stoneworking, 108–110 and 134–135, contended that if Roman sculptors from the second to the fourth century used drawings at all, the sculptural process was less geared to the transmission of a pattern and rather freer than, for example, the Greek practice. He also doubted (134) the existence of model or sample books, noting that workshop conditions were not conducive to their preservation. The claim for transmission of forms through such books is, however, often asserted, particularly for early fourth-century monuments. See Klein, “Christliche Ikonographie,” 151; Wischmeyer, “Die Cleveland-Stauetten,” 261; Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 125; Alfred Stuiber, Reprigerium Interim: Die Vorstellungen vom Zwischenzustand und die frührchristlich Grabeskunst (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1957), 173. For a similar suggestion regarding a pagan sarcophagus, see Bartman, “Carving the Badminton Sarcophagus,” 66 (although in the specific case under consideration she found the model carved on the back of the monument itself); Bianchi Bandinelli, Roma, 275. Other modes of transmission are also possible. Metal work was suggested by Heide Froning, “Die ikonographische Tradition der kaiserzeitlichen mythologischen Sarkophagreliefs,” Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts 95 (1980): 322–342. The geographical and chronological restrictions on sarcophagus carving are less suggestive of such a procedure than, for example, mosaics where similar forms appear in different regions and periods; indeed, remains of incised or painted grids (but not model books) have been found dating back to the Hellenistic period, as well as sketches for more complex figured scenes for wall, although not floor, mosaics. See Dunbabin, Mosaics, 285, 302–303, and her discussion of the literature; Rachel Hachlili, Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues, and Trends: Selected Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 273–275; Claudine Dauphin, “Byzantine Pattern Books: A Re-examination of the Problem in the Light of the ‘Inhabited Scroll’,” Art History 1 (1978), 408. Contra, Philippe Bruneau, “Les mosaïstes antiques avaient-ils des cahiers de modèles?” Revue Archéologique (1984/2): 241–272; doubtful, R.J.A. Wilson, “Mosaics, Mosaicists and Patrons,” The Journal of Roman Studies 71 (1981): 176.  

Koch, Frührchristliche Sarkophage, 80–81.
There is always a tension between the focus on similarities or differences in monuments. Both can be instructive. The parallels between sarcophagi demonstrate cross-fertilization among producers, but the observed diversity is problematic for a theory of mechanical reproduction. Stylistic, formal, technical and iconographical variations, even in stock scenes, are not the exception but the rule. Many sarcophagi have no clear precedents or progeny. This does not mean they were unique, but such examples hardly support a theory dependent on standardization.

Two final remarks should be made in this regard. First, of the several imprecisions in the literature on the sarcophagus workshop, the most pernicious may be a confusion of standardized mass production and production to stock. The latter almost certainly occurred in the Roman sarcophagus market. It is often connected with the prevalence of

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70 The *locus classicus* for such claims is the relationship between the Arch of Constantine and various Christian and non-Christian sarcophagi, often attributed to Hans Peter L’Orange, *Der spästantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1939), 225 (although his argument was more nuanced – see note 75 below). For a review of the literature, see Stutzinger, *Frühchristlichen Sarkophagreliefs aus Rom*, 77–78. A Morellian analysis of eyes, bangs, sideburns, feet, and sandals was employed by Michael Schemann, “Werkstätten und Steinmetzen einer Gruppe späntantiker Sarkophage” (Doctoral diss., Freiberg im Breisgau, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, 1999), to group and attribute a number of Constantian period sarcophagi.

71 The two forms of representation dealt with in chapters 4 to 7 – Jonah and the *traditio legis* – illustrate this diversity. It is equally prevalent in other popular representations. Diversity is also apparent in the combination of scenes. Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort*, provides tables enumerating which scriptural scenes tend to be paired with which others. These are meant to illustrate affinities, but they may equally be read as demonstrating variability. For example, Dresken-Weiland noted (170) that the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves appears on 109 sarcophagi, and that it is accompanied in 48 cases by the healing of the blind man, in 40 by the Raising of Lazarus and in the same number by the wine miracle of Cana, and so on. But these statistics equally show that no particular scene is found together with even half the appearances of the multiplication of loaves. Moreover, since the table only highlights the cases with multiple common appearances, it leaves out the many scenes that appear with it only once or twice. The lack of coherence in the combination of scriptural scenes is something of a topos in the literature. On the historiography and a partially contrarian view, see Jean-Pierre Caillet, “Note sur la cohérence iconographique des sarcophages des décennies 320–340,” in Akten des Symposiums “Frühchristliche Sarkophage”: Marburg, 30.6.–4.7 1999, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 41–45; Jean-Pierre Caillet, “Le message de la sculpture funéraire,” in *D’un monde à l’autre: Naissance d’une Chrétienté en Provence IVe–VIe siècle: Catalogue de l’expositon 15 septembre 2000–6 janvier 2002*, ed. Jean Guyon and Marc Heijmans, 2e ed. (Arles: Musée de l’Arles antique, 2002), 64–66.

72 Russell, “Roman Sarcophagus Industry,” 120, highlights this issue of nomenclature. In addition to the examples he cites (12on7), see note 32 above. Deichmann and Klauser, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, 9, considered that the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (Rep. I.747, ill. 22) might be an example of ”serial production” because of the unfinished portrait heads, although it could, and more likely was, specifically commissioned but never completed. If a daring monument was produced without a commission, the workshop took the risk that a novel iconography would “sell.” This is unrelated to the question of mass production, and may even indicate the opposite.
unfinished or at least undifferentiated carving and especially portraits. Sarcophagi were probably completed to various stages in anticipation of a firm order. This has important implications, both commercial and iconographical. Production to stock can be a characteristic of mass production, but the owner of the smallest workshop may also produce without a commission.

A second observation is that even where a similarity of product is evident, the inference of mass production is not very robust in the pre-industrial world. Cathy Lynne Costin noted that an appearance of standardization in objects or monuments may not reflect a high level of specialization focussed in a few mass production sites but rather a “production group,” several workshops that exhibit both independence and cohesion. “Large-scale production, per se, need not in and of itself require or promote standardization.” And, one might add, vice versa.

c) Scale and workshop concentration

The notion of a single Roman lapidary “factory” is sometimes attributed to L’Orange. Eichner went so far as to propose a state-owned monopoly, but this is doubtful. As already remarked, there is no physical, epigraphic or literary trace of any workshop, let

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75 Eichner, “Produktionmethoden,” 92, reasoned that the profits were too good for the emperor to pass up. He rejected an earlier suggestion by von Schoenebeck that production was controlled by the Bishop of Rome, but imperial ownership is equally unlikely. On market forces in Roman trade and commerce in the later empire, see Lo Cascio, “Mercato libero.” Imperial maintenance of an industry exclusively dedicated to making objects for sale to private citizens has no known counterpart in other sectors at this time. See Carrié, “Les échanges commerciaux,” 177–180.
alone such an important facility as suggested. The economic argument — or assumption — concerning scale and concentration presupposes that one large establishment is more profitable than several smaller ones. This is not always the case; it depends on the balance between economies and diseconomies of scale.

Absent mechanization, the main benefit of increasing scale is the potential organization of a large, specialized work force. Yet the number of workers required for sarcophagus production is modest. Even if all the distinct teams proposed by mass production proponents are accounted for, the entire complement would not exceed twenty, and in practice it would be smaller. For however efficient the division of labour, there is some overlap: semi-skilled workers or assistants could smooth rough surfaces and also pull on the strap drill; highly-skilled craftsmen would be adept with both drill and chisel. To realize a commercial benefit from scale of the labour force, the firm must offset through increased efficiency the attendant organizational and administrative costs. In modern manufacturing, this trade-off has usually favoured size (although not without limits and not in all cases) mainly because of mechanization. Most Roman industry was a concentration of artisanal production, exploiting only modest economies of scale.76 There is no reason to assume that sarcophagus production would mass greater numbers of craftsmen than other manufacturing operations. To the contrary, centralized establishments producing truly standardized goods for a mass market — textiles, ceramics, bricks, or bread — should logically be the largest.

Another potential economy of size is financing, a reduction in the cost of carrying raw materials and inventory by relying on accumulated profits or privileged access to external funding. This would, although to an indeterminate extent, favour larger workshops. Smaller operations had more limited access to credit, and at a higher price, and bank financing

became scarce late in the third century.\textsuperscript{77} Larger enterprises might also benefit from enhanced negotiating power for inputs, perhaps being in a position to demand volume discounts on the purchase of marble from the quarries or local suppliers of reused material. We know too little about trade in fourth-century Rome to draw such any conclusions on these matters, let alone quantify their effects.\textsuperscript{78}

Since arguments for scale and workshop concentration do not find clear economic support on the supply side, it is not surprising that proponents have invoked a spike in demand around the beginning of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{79} However, neither the absolute scale of late Roman sarcophagus production nor any surge in numbers during the Christian period requires a dramatic reorganization of production.

To begin with chronology, it should be noted that the other examples of Roman large-scale, standardized production were of long standing; most predate the third century.\textsuperscript{80} When Wilson referred to a “booming market demand” for sarcophagi, he was not referring to fourth-century Roman figural monuments but rather strigilated, columnar, and garland

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\textsuperscript{78} The conjectured imperial ownership of a monopoly sarcophagus workshop would actually eliminate any potential benefit in this regard; if both the hypothesized industrial-scale workshop and the quarries were state-owned, there could be no saving from volume purchasing.

\textsuperscript{79} Eichner, “Produktionsmethoden,” 92, 109; “Technische Voraussetzungen,” 78. To contrary effect, Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 79–80, invoked the large number of pre- and early-Constantinian monuments as, precisely, a reason to doubt their production in a single factory.

\textsuperscript{80} The question here is when the supposed mass production began but one might equally ask when it ended. Some scholars perceive a change around 350, sarcophagi becoming fewer in number and mostly made to order rather than to stock. See William Tronzo and Anthony Cutler, “Sarcophagus,” in The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991); Dresken-Weiland, Rep. II, XV–XVIII. On the other hand, Eichner’s mass production model has been applied to late-fourth-century sarcophagi by Immerzeel and Jongste, “Technique, style et iconographie,” 82, 84–85; Immerzeel and Jongste, “Les ateliers en Gaule,” 235.
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examples shipped in partly- or fully-manufactured form from eastern quarries, in most cases for regional consumption, in the second and third centuries.  

The sarcophagus demand in Rome is not susceptible of precise quantification but its upper limit can be readily defined: it will not exceed the number of deaths among the well-off. This is the subject of chapter 2, which concludes that the potential customer base actually declined after 250 CE. Nor does the absolute magnitude suggest mass production: maximum demand was only about 800 per year at the beginning of the fourth century and declined to less than 350 by its close. These are theoretical maximums, assuming every person who could buy a sarcophagus did so. Actual production was considerably smaller. The Christian numbers do grow, although not so dramatically as sometimes imagined, and from a very small base. Maximum Christian demand was minimal in 250 CE, and while it approximately doubled during the fourth century, the number remained modest, never exceeding around 250 sarcophagi per year.  

One could allege a positive feedback effect: if mass production significantly reduced the cost and the retail price of sarcophagi (it might, of course, accomplish the former without the latter), demand might be extended down the income scale, exceeding the numbers suggested in chapter 2. Eichner proposed just such a virtuous circle, with producers responding to and promoting demand through efficiencies achieved by rationalized mass production and the sale of less finished, lower quality monuments. The cost conjectures later in this chapter take this factor into account, and they are, therefore, already factored into the estimations of demand in chapter 2. One reason why any such upward demand pressure would be limited is that the relative cost contribution of material, as opposed to labour, is higher in less expensive monuments.

81 Wilson, “Large-Scale Manufacturing,” 393. See the discussion of sarcophagi in that chapter (402–403), and also in Andrew Wilson, “Approaches to Quantifying Roman Trade,” in Quantifying the Roman Economy: Methods and Problems, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Andrew Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 218.
82 The figures for total deaths are based on Table 2.5, applying the adult death rate in Table 2.8 and dividing by two to eliminate the invisible children, for whom few sarcophagi were made (as discussed in chapter 2). The Christian numbers are in Table 2.8.
The modest market for figural marble sarcophagi does not require or support workshop concentration. The labour content of a modest to medium-range monument might be 50 to 150 man-days of labour (as estimated at pages 90 - 93 below). A five-person family workshop could produce from 10 to 30 such sarcophagi in a year, not a trivial part of the total estimated production. Elaborate pieces required more time but might have been the subject of special arrangements; simple strigilated chests could be produced more quickly. If half the workshops had twice as many workers, one or at most two dozen establishments would have been sufficient to meet the combined pagan and Christian demand at the beginning of the fourth century. The market roughly halved by its end, although the average monument was more elaborate. As few as twelve small shops might then have been enough.84

These are rough estimates with several sources of potential error. For example, they assume workshops were operating at capacity, but they probably did not in order to permit prompt response to surges in demand due to fluctuations in mortality. But they do indicate that significant workshop concentration was not required to meet demand.

d) Conclusion

There is no direct evidence — archaeological, material, literary, epigraphic, or iconographic — regarding the method of Christian sarcophagus production. The mass production hypothesis, with its supporting assumptions of specialization, standardization and scale, rests uneasily on an unwarranted extrapolation of the industrial economic and commercial behaviour of modern, mechanized manufacture back to fourth-century lapidary workshops.

At the end of the day, it is unlikely that without new documentary or archaeological discoveries the structure, size or methods of sarcophagus workshops will be significantly

84 These calculations assume 300 workdays in a year, comparable to the 290 supposed by Janet DeLaine, The Baths of Caracalla: A Study in the Design, Construction, and Economics of Large-Scale Building Projects in Imperial Rome (Portsmouth, Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997), 105–106. Both figures are conservative.
clarified. The notion that all late Roman sarcophagi — or all those of the Constantinian period, or all but specific luxury orders — were produced in a single industrial establishment by highly regimented and specialized teams in a routinized linear process is unlikely and inconsistent with the diversity of the tangible products that have survived. A different analogy was offered by Koch, to the Turkish furniture industry instead of the automotive assembly line. He called his model Bazar-Industrie, an expression previously used to the same purpose by Nikolas Himmelmann. It recalls Peter Fibiger Bang’s characterization of the Roman trading economy in general as a “bazaar,” a system that favoured small pools of capital and often privileged social networks over market signals. This may provide an apt model for sarcophagus production in the fourth century.

4. Cost

Augustus allegedly remarked that he found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble. His reasons were both practical (resistance to fire and flood) and political or aesthetic (architectural worthiness). The élite attachment to marble in architecture and sculpture persisted into the fourth century and extended to Christian sepulchral use. Jutta Dresken-Weiland claimed that to the purchaser of a late antique sarcophagus, the material was more meaningful than the carved images. Whether the medium actually trumped the

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85 I reluctantly share the conclusion of Baratte, “Sarcophages romains,” 42, that notwithstanding the work of such scholars as Ward-Perkins and Eichner, “on reste toujours dans une grande incertitude sur l’organisation véritable du travail au sein des ateliers: ni sur l’ampleur de ceux-ci, ni sur leur structure ou leurs méthodes de travail nous n’avons d’informations.”


88 Suetonius, Augustus 28: “Urbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornatam et inundationibus incendisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriant marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepsisset.” Michael Greenhalgh, Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Medieval Mediterranean (Boston: Brill, 2009), 37–38, thought the claim not altogether accurate but nonetheless important for what it says about imperial self-representation. Apocalypse 18.12–14 lists marble vessels among imported Roman luxury goods destroyed in its conflagration (generally considered a reference to the fire of 64 CE).

89 Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 193–196, 202. This inference is based partly on her views regarding visibility, a subject considered in chapter 3 below. Gisela Cantino Wataghin, “Biblia pauperam: A
message is debatable, but the significance of opulent substance is undeniable. Christian dedications expressly note with pride that the donor built or bought a sepulchre made of marble. The desirability of marble sarcophagi is further confirmed by their penchant for being stolen and reused.

An object's perceived luxury is distinct from, although not entirely unrelated to, its pecuniary value. It would be useful to know how much a sarcophagus cost in late third- and fourth-century Rome, to understand the price differentials arising from size and form, to disaggregate the cost of production into inputs of raw material and craftsmanship, and to compare the price with a basket of alternative applications of family resources. Precision is impossible, but it is possible to make some progress on these questions. Koch claimed (referring to the second and third centuries) that "there was a sarcophagus for every, or almost every, purse."

Variations within the consumer group and among the monuments do suggest a range of prices, but his assessment is far too generous. Having regard to the distribution of wealth, only a small fraction of Romans could be said to have had purses at all, in the sense of disposable income for luxury purchases like sarcophagi. The cost of a sarcophagus is therefore of interest not only as a subject in its own right but also as a factor that circumscribed the potential universe of patrons and viewers for Christian sarcophagi, the subject of chapter 2.

a) Evidence and methodology

The only direct evidence of cost is found in a few often ambiguous or undated inscriptions and literary sources reviewed and summarized by Dresken-Weiland. One Flavian-era epigram indicates that a Roman sarcophagus was priced at about 400 days of labour. An
eighteenth-century hand-written record of an undated Roman inscription puts the cost of another at nine aurei. The only dated inscriptions are from the late fifth and sixth centuries; they indicate prices between one and one-half and six gold solidi, with one from Ravenna relating to a sarcophagus for multiple depositions as high as twenty-six solidi. On formal grounds, Dresken-Weiland dates to the late fourth and early fifth centuries a few examples from Salona, Dalmatia or Egypt that indicate prices between ten and fifteen solidi. Drawing inferences for sarcophagus pricing in fourth-century Rome from these meagre, geographically disparate and mostly chronologically remote sources is problematic. They provide no indication of size or quality, or even material. In the circumstances, Dresken-Weiland concluded merely that sarcophagi were expensive, both absolutely and compared to the alternatives. 

In the absence of direct evidence, an alternative if ambitious approach is to estimate the “intrinsic cost,” a bottoms-up calculation based on inputs of labour and materials, the latter in turn taking into account the manpower necessary for extraction and transport. The method is illustrated in Janet DeLaine’s study of the Baths of Caracalla. Her starting point, for lack of any other historical source of equivalent specificity, was Diocletian’s Prices Edict of 301 CE.

Many questions have been raised about the reliability, scope of application and effect of the Prices Edict. It purports to set maximum prices for a broad range of raw materials, manufactured goods and services: from luxury textiles and wild animals to cheap local beer and candles, from day labour of a construction worker to pleading by an advocate. The Edict uses Diocletian’s newly-created denarius, and one might question whether the roughly

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94 Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 80. Similarly, Deichmann and Klauser, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 7, observe: “Die Herstellung eines Sarkophags kann nicht billig gewesen sein.” The same expression is used by Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 90.

95 DeLaine, Baths of Caracalla, 207–224.

contemporaneous currency reform was designed to provide a monetary unit for establishing prices or whether the price fixing was meant to support the value of the new currency. The lengthy preamble is filled with rhetorical flourishes denouncing private greed as the source of rampant inflation and promoting the Prices Edict as a firm and sensible response by the beneficent Tetrarchs. The drafting bears the mark of bureaucratic officials, probably working in Antioch and relying only on local information. They may have been behind the inflationary curve: some of the maximum prices were already being exceeded in the marketplace. On the whole, scholars are cautious in their assessments of the Edict, giving it greater credence as a source of relative than absolute prices.  

A further source of concern in using the Edict for determining the cost of Roman sarcophagi (and the same applies to the Baths of Caracalla) is that only one of the almost forty surviving fragmentary copies of the Edict was found in the West. Although most of the other versions are in Latin, this one is in Greek and was quite possibly brought from the East. There is indirect evidence that the Edict was known in Rome, but it may never have been enforced there.  

Finally, there is a challenge of chronology. In DeLaine’s case, the problem is that her monument was built eighty-five years before the Edict was promulgated. She compensated by applying a price deflator based on a commodity (she chose corn), a technique commonly used by Roman economic historians to filter out the impact of price inflation and periodic currency reforms. In the case of sarcophagi, the problem is reversed: the Prices Edict must

97 James William Ermatinger, The Economic Reforms of Diocletian (St. Katharinen, Germany: Scripta Mercaturae Verlag, 1996), argued that the stipulated prices were realistic. Corcoran, Empire of the Tetrarchs, 225–229, found some areas in which relative prices seem sensible, suggesting that the absolute values were likely already breached at the time of the Edict. At the negative extreme is Dominic Rathbone, “Earnings and Costs: Living Standards and the Roman Economy (First to Third Centuries A.D.),” in Quantifying the Roman Economy: Methods and Problems, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Andrew Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 323: “As a whole, therefore, the Edict’s prices do not reflect any external historical reality (except insofar as they may have been obeyed for a time), nor do they form an internally consistent structure.”  

98 Corcoran, Empire of the Tetrarchs, 231.
be projected forward, since it probably had little direct impact after the Emperor’s abdication in 305.  

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, Diocletian’s Prices Edict does contain valuable information about prices as long as its limitations are understood. DeLaine used it as a guide, testing it against her intrinsic calculation, and a similar approach will be adopted here. A unit of constant Diocletian denarii will be adopted.  

b) Cost of material  

Taking into account the difficulty of extraction, cost of transportation and rarity, different sources of marble had quite different costs associated with them. Chapter 31 of the Prices Edict, headed marmoribus, lists nineteen types of stone with maximum prices from 40 to 250 denarii per pedem. The more expensive varieties, more readily available in earlier centuries, presumably attracted a wealthier clientele. Price variations among white marbles, which were used for almost all the Roman Christian sarcophagi, are small. They marbles fall within a narrow band at the low end of the scale: at 40 denarii (Proconnesus, Skyros and Lesbos) or 50 denarii (Thasos). The Edict may not be a reliable indicator of what types of marble were actually available at that time, let alone during the rest of the fourth century, but it is noteworthy that potentially more expensive white marbles like Pentelic and Parian are not listed. Nor do they appear to have been much used for fourth-century sarcophagi. Carrara, as already noted, had become less common. It is not listed in the Edict either and was probably more expensive than those from the eastern quarries.

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99 Corcoran, Empire of the Tetrarchs, 232.  
100 A constant currency unit is derived by applying a price deflator to convert expenditures incurred over time to a price in a base year, in this case 301 CE. Inflation implies that actual nominal denarius prices would have been substantially different from the constant denarius prices. The impact of currency devaluation will be revisited at the end of this chapter.  
101 The opinion of Pearson and Herz, “Isotopic Analysis,” 283.  
103 Marbles from Proconnesus, Troad and Docimeion but not Carrara are referred to in the previously cited Theodosian tax exemption of 416: CTh 11.28.11. On the decline of Carrara marble, see note 15 above.
The traditional view was that the Edict’s pricing standard, *pedem*, referred to a cubic foot, a solid block one Roman foot on a side, but in a 1994 study Corcoran and DeLaine argued persuasively that the Edict actually referred to a square foot of veneer. The implications are significant. Assuming ten slabs could be cut from a solid block of one cubic foot, the difference is one order of magnitude. Porphyry veneer plaques would cost only 25 *denarii* if the cubic foot were priced at 250 *denarii*, the figure specified in the Prices Edict. Marble would no longer be a luxury commodity.

As a check on their conclusion, Corcoran and DeLaine constructed a cost estimate for marble based on Edict wage rates, an estimate of the time required to extract and dress a block, shipping from the quarry to Antioch at Edict freight rates, and sawing of the cube into veneer slabs. The computation is rough and relies to a considerable extent on nineteenth-century labour estimates. They assumed twelve slabs with a thickness of one *uncia* each could be cut from the block, yielding a value of about 18 *denarii* per ft², perhaps closer to 24 *denarii* taking into account anticipated wastage and breakage of 25%, or 36 *denarii* following a later recalculation. This is somewhat lower than the 40 *denarii* stipulated in the Edict for Proconnesian marble, but the authors considered the two figures close enough for their purpose, demonstrating that the Edict referred to the square rather than cubic foot.

There are so many approximations in this exercise that excessive fine-tuning is not useful. However, the Corcoran-DeLaine computations do seem conservative, probably intentionally so. First, transportation may be understated. It is not feasible to calculate freight costs

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106 Corcoran and DeLaine, “Unit Measurement,” 270–271. In a later study, DeLaine, *Baths of Caracalla*, 120–121, 128, 214. DeLaine adopted the same approach with a few refinements and arrived at a figure of 27 *denarii* per ft² based on twelve slabs per ft³. Wastage of 25% (i.e., nine rather than twelve successful slabs from a cubic foot) was postulated based on nineteenth-century evidence. Applying the same factor to the later calculation yields a value of 36 *denarii* per ft².
taking into account fourth-century naval construction, cargo capacity (accounting for ship’s stores, dunnage and ballast, considerations of stability and commercial constraints), navigation practices, tolls and risks (natural and other), but even based on the Prices Edict some adjustment is possible. The Edict expresses freight rates in *denarii per modius kastrensis* for pairs of locations. Proconnesus is not listed. The best proxies are Nicomedia or Byzantium, for which the rate to Rome is 18 *denarii*. This yields a shipping cost of about 16 *denarii* per ft\(^2\) of marble veneer. Corcoran and DeLaine used a lower rate partly because they were calculating a price at Antioch. That made sense in their attempt to test the accuracy of the Prices Edict, on the assumption that shipping was embedded in the maximum price and that this price was determined for that location. However — and perhaps this is one reason it is difficult to conceive how the Edict could have been applied in Rome without adjustment — prices cannot have been the same everywhere. The differential in transportation cost is, therefore, an appropriate adjustment.

The route from quarry to final resting place was not, of course, entirely by sea. Marble had first to be moved from the place of extraction to the vessel. This favoured such quarries as Proconnesus where the stone face was adjacent to the docks. At the receiving end, marble arriving at Portus had to be off-loaded and brought to the workshop in Rome. This entailed haulage by men or animals for, as Procopius observed in the sixth century, the

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108 *PE* 39.38 (Nicomedia to Rome); *PE* 35A.20 in Reynolds, “Prices Edict,” 307 (Byzantium-Rome). There seemed to be a separate charge for so-called fiscal cargoes, particularly to Rome – “praeter onera fiscalia quae formam suam optinent” – but it is unclear to what it applied. See Reynolds, “Prices Edict,” 307–308.
109 The indicated rate in the Edict was probably meant to apply to wheat. One Italian *modius* of wheat weighed about 21 *librae* (on the weights of different sorts of wheat, see Pliny, *NH*, 18.66), or between 6.5 and 7.0 kg. One *modius kastrensis* (MK) equals 1.5 Italian *modii* so that 1 MK of wheat weighed about 10 kg. A block of 1 ft\(^3\) of marble would weigh 70 kg (with 1 m\(^3\) of marble ≈ 2,700 kg). Assuming eight plaques per ft\(^3\) (10 less wastage), each would weigh about 9 kg. Therefore, to convert freight rates for 1 MK of wheat to a 1 ft\(^2\) slab of veneer marble one multiplies by 0.9, and the 18 *denarii* per MK stipulated price suggests about 16 *denarii* for the veneer, based solely on weight. One might expect actual rates to depend on both weight and volume.
110 The commercial disadvantage of the distance between a quarry and its port was remarked by Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.41, who proposed building a canal to reduce the costs of moving Nicomedian marble to the nearest harbour.
bends in the course of the Tiber prevented the use of sails and the swift downstream current frustrated the power of oars.\textsuperscript{111} The Prices Edict is rather brief regarding inland water transport. It stipulates one \textit{denarius} per \textit{modius} (presumably the same \textit{modius kastrensis} as specified for sea transportation) for twenty miles downstream and double that price upstream.\textsuperscript{112} The cost contribution of moving marble up the Tiber should, therefore, have been about two \textit{denarii} per veneer slab of one square foot.\textsuperscript{113} Ignoring the additional costs of loading at the quarry, transhipment from sea-going vessel to barge and unloading at the workshop (all of which would be just as relevant in Antioch as in Rome), transportation is about 6 \textit{denarii} per ft\textsuperscript{2} higher under this calculation, bringing the total close to or even slightly above the price stipulated in the Edict. The final delivery cost for a sarcophagus will be considered below.

Another required adjustment is profit. For an imperial building project like the Baths of Caracalla, it may be reasonable to assume that no economic rent accrued to the marble supplier, since the building and the quarry were under common ownership. But the owner of the resource, public or not, surely extracted a profit on a sale for private consumption.\textsuperscript{114} Little is known about fourth-century profit margins, although one might expect them to rise in the face of reduced supply. All told, a unit price for veneer marble slabs delivered to the Roman workshop of around 50 \textit{denarii} is reasonable.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{PE} 35A.31–32, in Reynolds, “Prices Edict,” 307. A separate price for the transport of 1,000 MK from Ravenna to Aquileia is reconciled with the downstream figure by DeLaine, \textit{Baths of Caracalla}, 211. She arrives at transport cost ratios of 1 (sea) : 3.9 (downstream river) : 7.7 (upstream river) : 43 (ox-cart). These are not dramatically different from Hopkins, “Models, Ships and Staples,” 104, of 1 (sea) : 6:55 (river, not distinguishing upstream and downstream) : 65 (land).
\textsuperscript{113} The conversion from wheat to marble veneer is discussed in note 109 above. Workshops are assumed for this purpose to be near the marble yards at the Emporium, on the banks of the Tiber south of the Aventine. The distance from the port is about 27 Roman miles.
\textsuperscript{114} Regarding state ownership of the quarries, see note 19 above. Supply-demand imbalances in the fourth century are noted at page 60 above.
\textsuperscript{115} Not all sarcophagi were made of Proconnesian marble, the least expensive in the Edict, further justifying adopting a somewhat higher unit price as an average.
The next step is to advance from veneer to three-dimensional sarcophagi. If *per pedem* in the Prices Edict refers to area rather than volume, its direct application must have been limited to architectural facing, and this is precisely what Corcoran and DeLaine concluded. Objects such as columns, sculptural marble and sarcophagi were not, in their view, meant to be priced under the Edict at all; they were bought and sold as one-off items.\(^{116}\) Nonetheless, the stipulated (adjusted) price per ft\(^2\) is still relevant. Savvy *negotiatores marmoris* would not have sold sarcophagus chests and lids to workshops for less than they could fetch deconstructed into slabs of architectural facing. Without assuming perfectly efficient markets, veneer should set a floor price.\(^{117}\) An intact, monolithic chest was worth considerably more, and certainly not less, than the sum of the flat plaques into which it could be broken down.\(^{118}\)

Adopting the veneer equivalent of a Roman sarcophagus as a lower limit to the price of material, a simple calculation multiplies the cost per ft\(^2\), estimated above at 50 *denarii*, times the surface area, approximately 85 ft\(^2\) on average, resulting in a price of 4,250 *denarii*. There are several reasons why the actual price must have been much higher.

\(^{116}\) Corcoran and DeLaine, "Unit Measurement," 268. Fant, “Quarrying and Stoneworking,” 133, took the argument one step further. Since most of the quarry marble was under state control, he suggested that the prices were meant to apply only to reused or secondary supplies of stone, noting as well that veneer was too delicate to ship and was usually cut at a workshop closer to the building site. Fant’s theory provides an equivalent result as it, too, considers the prices to have been set for marble in stock in Antioch. Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen*, 77, although she referred to the Corcoran and DeLaine paper, assumed that the Edict set the maximum price per ft\(^3\) of marble and computed the potential material cost for a sarcophagus on this basis. She did observe that the result seemed low.

\(^{117}\) There was some cost associated with sawing up the chest into slabs but not enough to change the basic conclusion. This cost was estimated at only about 1.3 *denarii* per cut by Corcoran and DeLaine, “Unit Measurement,” 271, and DeLaine, *Baths of Caracalla*, 214 (with a small error of assuming 12 cuts rather than 11 were required to make 12 slabs). If the stone-worker earned 50–60 *denarii* per day (plus meals), this implies about 5 cuts per hour throughout a 10-hour work day.

\(^{118}\) This conclusion is supported both by the attempts that were made to repair damaged chests (see Mat Immerzeel, "The Joint Problem," in *Akten Des Symposiums "Frühchristliche Sarkophage": Marburg, 30.6.–4.7.1999*, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 121; Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, 77–78) and evidence of antique salvage from shipwrecks (see A.J. Parker, "Cargoes, Containers and Stowage: The Ancient Mediterranean," *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 21 (1992): 95).
First, the average thickness of sarcophagus walls was four times as great as architectural veneer. That suggests an equivalent value of almost 13,000 *denarii*. Second, while some of the marble extracted from the chest could have been used for small sculptures or architectural elements, or even additional veneer, much of it was undoubtedly lost in the process of hollowing out the block. This factor is quantitatively significant. If one makes the adverse assumption that *none* of the internal material was salvaged, the value of the sarcophagus marble becomes the value of a solid block. The veneer equivalent of the average-sized monument would then be some 400 ft$^2$ (after wastage), raising the price equivalent to 20,000 *denarii*. If half the interior marble was monetized, this figure is still over 15,000 *denarii*.

A third factor is quality. Grain and crystal size must have affected the price, and blocks suitable for relief sculpture would be more expensive than average. Finally, although overland transport was ignored in approximating the cost of marble because the distances were short, this factor does become relevant when it comes to final delivery. Apart from small children's sarcophagi, the finished items were too heavy for a simple cart and required several yoke of oxen. The distance varied, since sarcophagi were sent to different locations around Rome, but the cost must have been at least 1,000 *denarii*.

Thus, 15,000 *denarii* is a reasonable minimum for the contribution of material and transportation to the price of an average-sized Proconnesian or similar marble sarcophagus delivered to its final resting place in Rome. It might have been 25,000 *denarii* for a high-quality, monolithic chest. A monumental piece could require twice the volume of material

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119 As noted above (see page 54), the walls were between 9 and 15 cm thick. On the basis that a block of one cubic Roman foot could provide twelve slabs of veneer, these would have had a thickness of about 2.5 cm. The price calculation is premised on the hypothesis that instead of using the solid block to make a sarcophagus, the quarry had cut it for veneer. Adopting the above assumption of 25% wastage, it is reasonable to consider the veneer-equivalent value of the 85 ft$^2$ of a marble sarcophagus to be three-quarters of the simple product of four times 4,250 *denarii*, or 12,7500 *denarii*.

120 DeLaine, *Baths of Caracalla*, 108, noted weight limits for ox-carts of 400 to 500 kg from PE, 17.3 and CTh 8.5.30.

121 The distance from the Emporium on the Tiber to an extra-mural site like San Sebastiano is about 10 Roman miles. The Prices Edict cost for a carriage load is 20 *denarii* per mile. A 2,000 kg sarcophagus would probably require five yoke of oxen and four additional men to tend the extra beasts. A delivery charge of 1,000 *denarii* including loading and unloading (and crossing the river) is conservative.
and the cost ratio would be even higher since larger blocks are harder to extract, cumbersome to transport and tranship, and more susceptible to breakage.

c) Cost of labour

A similar exercise can be undertaken for craftsmanship, but the variations are much greater. A simple, strigilated chest required far less investment than a congested, two-register frieze. High relief took longer than low relief; elaborate vertical panels on the lid were more expensive than flat covers. And although judgments of “quality” are hazardous with millennia of hindsight, no doubt sculptural style had a significant impact on labour content. The best one can hope for is an impression of extremes and averages. The cost of craftsmanship is the product of two factors: the price of a unit of labour and the number of units required.

Chapter 7 of the Prices Edict refers to a variety of occupations, including several that could be relevant to the production of a sarcophagus. Daily wages for generic stone- or marble-workers are capped at 50 to 60 denarii. The workshop might have employed some more expensive trades as well as cheaper, unskilled workers costing as little as 25 denarii per day. All of these figures must be increased for meals, perhaps by a further 10 denarii. Design and supervision costs would be allocated and amortized across all the monuments produced in a workshop. The average unit price of labour depends on the balance between skilled and unskilled workers. Klaus Eichner’s mass production model suggests that most of the work could be accomplished by unskilled labourers. This would produce a figure of

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122 Wage rates are stipulated for the marmorarius (PE 7.5, 60 denarii) and lapidarius structor (7.2, 50 denarii). A 25 denarii “minimum wage” is set for farm hands and a few other unskilled occupations like water-bearers and sewer-cleaners (PE 7.1a, 31, 32). DeLaine, Baths of Caracalla, 210n13, suggests 11 denarii for meals. Robert C. Allen, “How Prosperous were the Romans? Evidence from Diocletian’s Price Edict (301 AD),” in Quantifying the Roman Economy: Methods and Problems, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Andrew Wilson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 330, calculated 11.1 denarii assuming the meal allowance is for the whole month rather than only the days worked, which translates into a daily supplement of only 7.6 denarii. See also Walter Scheidel, “Real Wages in Early Economies: Evidence for Living Standards from 1800 BCE to 1300 CE. Version 4.0,” Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics (2009), http://www.princeton.edu/~pswpic/pdfs/scheidel/090904.pdf, 6n14. Given the many unknowns, adding a round figure of 10 denarii to the daily wage seems appropriate.
around 40 denarii.\textsuperscript{123} To the extent more highly-skilled craftsmen are required, the number increases. A normative assumption of 50 denarii seems good enough, especially since the margin of error in the wage rate pales before the volatility in the quantum of labour.

One approach to estimate carving time is to count figures. In a widely-cited effort, Nikolaus Wiegartz surmised that carving a richly-decorated Attic sarcophagus from the first half of the third century required about 1,000 man-days.\textsuperscript{124} As corroboration, he cited a calculation that had been performed by Carl Blümel in the 1920s in relation to an Acropolis frieze. Blümel recounted the background in an archaeological memoir published in 1968 (not cited by Wiegartz).\textsuperscript{125} In 1924, he had arrived at the German Archaeological Institute in Athens, thirty-one years old and winner of the Reisenstipendium. His welcome was not encouraging. According to the institute director, a claim in Blümel's dissertation that the frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike had been commenced at the same time as construction of the temple, that is to say well before its dedication, was obviously nonsense (natürlich Unsinn), since the frieze had in fact been carved in a mere fourteen days. The following day, Blümel presented the director with epigraphic evidence that the sculptor had actually required fifty-six days rather than fourteen, and not for the entire frieze but for each figure. There being some 140 in all, the two calculations were apart by a factor of over five hundred. Blümel also referred to a notation that the carver of the nearby Erechtheion frieze had been paid 120 drachmas for two figures, which at the then prevailing wage of one drachma per day implied a similar result, sixty days per figure.

Wiegartz cited this latter example, but to account for the fact that a late Attic sarcophagus was less finely and more efficiently carved than an Athenian temple, he applied a discount of one-half, from sixty to thirty days per figure. His independent 1,000 man-day estimate

\textsuperscript{123} Eichner, “Die Werkstatt,” 153–158. Reconstructing his calculation, it suggests the labour content of a single-register Constantinian frieze to be about 45 to 50 man-days, 90\% of which consisting of unskilled labour (drilling, smoothing and removing material between drill holes). Using 35 denarii per day as the lowest rate (including meals), this yields an average labour cost of perhaps 37.5 denarii, rounded here to 40.

\textsuperscript{124} Wiegartz, “Marmorhandel,” 365, 365n47. All of the estimates discussed here include not only carving but also preliminary smoothing and forming of the marble block, to the extent not accomplished before delivery, polishing, and where appropriate, painting.

for an early third-century sarcophagus with forty figures was thus corroborated by the half-
Blümel calculation, which yields 1,200 days.

Turning to Christian sarcophagi produced in the fourth century, further adjustments are
obviously required. The figures are often smaller, more roughly formed, in lower relief and
less abundant than on the Attic monuments. Koch, noting just these factors, estimated the
production time for a Constantinian frieze sarcophagus at between forty and fifty-six man-
days.\textsuperscript{126} Applying the assumed average wage rate noted above, Koch’s educated guess
produces a cost for craftsmanship between 2,000 and 2,800 denarii.\textsuperscript{127}

Koch considered only one type of sarcophagus and probably provided too narrow a range
even for that variety. The enormous differences in the quantity, quality and character of
relief sculpture across the entire corpus of late Roman Christian sarcophagi suggest an
equivalent variability in the cost of labour. At one end of the spectrum might be an early,
strigilated chest of modest dimensions like one now in Lucca (Rep. II.91, ill. 28), with two
full-sized figures at the corners, a diminutive Daniel and two lions in a central clipeus, and a
resting Jonah below. There could have been additional carving on the lid (not preserved),
but focusing on the chest we have (i) two figures rather taller than those on the Acropolis
(about 71 cm versus 42 to 58 cm for the Athenian examples), to the extent current
condition permits such a judgment, not very carefully carved and in only moderate relief,
(ii) two more figures about 34 cm tall, even more schematic, and (iii) two truncated lions of
no more than 25 cm. Based on Wiegartz’s 30-day estimate for producing the figures on
Attic sarcophagi, one might estimate 90 or even 120 man-days for the ones on this Roman
chest. But just as he applied a 50% factor to account for the difference between the
Athenian frieze and the Attic reliefs, one must apply a further discount to the Lucca
monument having regard to the lesser detail and shallower relief, even ignoring any

\textsuperscript{126} That is, 10 to 14 days with four artisans working continuously. Koch, \textit{Frühchristliche Sarkophage}, 78, 90.
\textsuperscript{127} Even under Eichner’s mass production proposal (note 123 above) the number would not be dramatically
lower. His guesstimate of the time spent by the cheapest labour would cost, at Edict rates, at least 1,600
denarii. If the more skilled carvers, designers and supervisors accounted for only four man-days at 60 denarii
per day, a highly optimistic assumption, the total comes to over 1,800 denarii, not much below the low end of
Koch’s range.
technical or organizational advances. Some labour, potentially less skilled, was required to produce about one square metre of strigilation, the clipeus outline and any edges that were not already on the blank. Including some overall supervision, not extensive for such a simple and common design, the result falls within Koch’s range at about fifty man-days, suggesting a total cost of 2,500 *denarii* at the proposed average wage rate. This figure may be regarded as a lower limit for the cost of craftsmanship on an early Roman Christian figural sarcophagus.

How much higher could the price go? The sarcophagus of Sabina in the Museo Pio Cristiano (*Rep.* I.6, ill. 2) provides a more elaborate example. It depicts fourteen large figures (about 58 cm, although a couple are partially obscured), five small ones and seven heads on the front. The same methodology might indicate labour content of up to 300 man-days, putting the cost of craftsmanship up to 15,000 *denarii*. This sarcophagus also includes five more sketchy figures with some scenery in low relief on the short sides plus ten smaller ones on the lid, as well as an incised inscription. All this additional detail pushes up the cost, or at least provides some cushion for the 15,000 *denarii* estimate. The sarcophagus of Sabina is certainly not the most complex. Many two-register frieze sarcophagi contain as many as forty, albeit smaller, figures. Larger monuments required even more labour. The surface area of the front of the Dogmatic Sarcophagus in the Pio Cristiano Museum (*Rep.* I.43, ill. 103) is about two and one-half times as great as the average. The *traditio legis* sarcophagus in Sant’Ambrogio, Milan (*Rep.* II.150, ill. 52) produced late in the fourth century has thirty-six figures 70 cm tall, fourteen lambs, elaborate city-gate architecture, and a lid with another fifteen figures about 45 cm tall. The carving technique is, moreover, highly sophisticated. Applying the same general approach, the cost of craftsmanship would probably exceed 100,000 *denarii*.

The relationship between the cost of labour and material varied enormously. On the calculations above, the former accounts for as little as 15% of the least expensive and 80% or even 90% of the most expensive sarcophagus. For his late Attic examples, Wiegartz considered that carving represented about 60% of the cost (apparently assuming a very
high price for the marble) while Ward-Perkins, the target of Wiegartz’s argument, thought carving represented only a small part of the total.\textsuperscript{128} Considering marble sculptures of the first and second century, not third- or fourth-century sarcophagi, Richard Duncan-Jones proposed that material accounted for only about 10% of the cost.\textsuperscript{129} Statuary is not the same as sarcophagi, but it is logical that at the high end of the market, the ratios of material and carving might be similar.

d) Funerals

Traditional Roman funerals included preparations in the home, a public procession, entombment or cremation, and subsequent commemorative meals and events.\textsuperscript{130} These rituals survived into the later empire and among high status Christians, with some additions, deletions and transposed meanings.\textsuperscript{131} For the happy few whose remains were placed in a carved marble sarcophagus, such funerary and commemorative trappings entailed significant additional costs. A detailed consideration of the economics of the late Roman funeral industry is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to appreciate the financial implications for the total price of death.

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\textsuperscript{131} Alfred Clement Rush, \textit{Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity} (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1941), deals with both Roman rites and their adoption by early Christians. See also Geoffrey Rowell, \textit{The Liturgy of Christian Burial: An Introductory Survey of the Historical Development of Christian Burial Rites} (London: Alcuin Club/S.P.C.K., 1977); Paxton, \textit{Christianizing Death}, 37–44. On deduction of Christian practices from the Roman \textit{Ordo defunctorum}, see Damien Sicard, \textit{La liturgie de la mort dans l’église latine: des origines à la reforme carolingienne} (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1978). Of course most fourth-century Romans were poor and were buried, if at all, in unmarked collective graves with minimal funerary fuss. Others managed to secure some modest memorialisation for their departed, evidenced in the many surviving inscriptions and graffiti, catacomb loculi and objects left as markers or mementos — glass or metal vessels, gold-glasses, clay lamps, ivory statuettes. For examples, see Letizia Pani Ermini (ed.), \textit{Christiana loca: lo spazio cristiano nella Roma del primo millennio} (Rome: Palombi, 2000), 2.63–96.
The subject is not much discussed in the literature, and when it is, the usual focus is the early or high empire. An examination of first-century Italian funerary inscriptions led Duncan-Jones to produce a range of costs too broad to communicate much information. A more interesting observation was that in relative terms the percentage of income spent on burial among the military generally increased with rank, which probably also reflected the greater disposable income of the more highly paid.\textsuperscript{132} Bodel reached a similar conclusion: “a basic principle of scale obtained: Roman funerals were to be financed commensurate with the estate of the deceased.”\textsuperscript{133}

There is every reason to believe that this positive correlation continued to prevail into the fourth century among Christians. Families able and willing to spend significant sums on marble sarcophagi would not be expected to scrimp on the attendant costs of funerary display and commemorative events. These expenses may be summarized under four heads: preparation, procession, meals and deposition.

The process began in the house. Some rites were accomplished by the family, domestic servants and perhaps other members of the community, requiring no supplementary expenditure, but professional \textit{pollinctores} were often hired to wash and anoint the body and perform other preparatory and distasteful functions. Their role was both ritual and practical: to delay decomposition and mask its visual and olfactory effects. For the latter, perfumed oils and large quantities of incense were consumed. Both the trade of the

pollinctor and the practice of anointing continued through the fourth century. The deceased might be wrapped in a sumptuous shroud, or even expire on an ivory bed.

The funeral then took to the streets. In Republican Rome, great crowds had formed into cortèges accompanied by musicians, professional mourners, bearers of ancestral imagines, and actors performing mock apotheoses. The extent to which such displays continued into the later empire is uncertain, although an ivory diptych leaf in the British Museum dated around 400 (ill. 3) presents a suggestive visual expression of allegorical apotheosis.

Publicly-funded funeral processions became less common but they did not disappear altogether, and private versions might be equally lavish. At a minimum, a proper funeral procession for a high status Christian family, the kind that bought figural marble sarcophagi, required appropriate mourning garments (and often paid mourners to wear them), a bier or coffin, and pallbearers. These last might be family members or fellow public officials, but paid professionals were also called upon. Jerome decried processions led by aristocratic mourners, the bier wrapped in a golden sheet.

A particular focus of funerary and commemorative expenditure was food. There has been considerable discussion in the literature regarding the Christian observance of Roman

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135 Augustine's mother rejected fancy dress for her corpse: *Conf.* 9.13.29. He refers to the ivory beds as part of the lavish funerals of the wealthy in his *Enarrationes in Psalmodos*, psalm 33, sermo 2.14.16.


137 Bodel, “Death on Display,” 271. Alan Cameron, "The Funeral of Junius Bassus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 139 (2002): 288–292, interprets a poem inscribed on the lid of the famous sarcophagus as describing a public funeral held for the Roman prefect in 359, which included a procession of senators dressed in mourning, and cites two other brief and cryptic references to possible late examples of public funerals. Lindsay, "Death-Pollution," 158, suggested that while early imperial anti-sumptuary laws did technically affect aristocratic funeral display, they seem to have been ignored in Rome.


Sarcophagi were deposed in mausoleums, catacombs and churches, sometimes immured or buried, sometimes incorporated into an existing or newly-built structure or left free-standing in some dedicated space.\footnote{141}{See Dresken-Weiland, \textit{Sarkophagbestattungen}, 98–184. Regarding the placement of sarcophagi, see the discussion in chapter 3 below (pages 137–142).} Land, space or rights of location (like a modern easement) had to be purchased — perhaps a catacomb arcosolium, a precious site adjacent to the tomb of a martyr, or the right to attach a mausoleum to a basilica. Churches were unlikely to give away the best (or any) spots. Labour and materials were required for building, digging, creating or modifying walls, or for lowering 2,000 kg of marble through a light into a below-ground chamber.\footnote{142}{The number of funerary trades identified in literary and epigraphic sources seems to diminish over time. Some designations found in the third century or earlier, such as \textit{funerarius}, no longer appear but others continue to be used, including \textit{bustuarius} and \textit{libitanarius}. See von Petrikovits, “Spezialisierung,” 140, “Spezialisierung – Spätantike,” 304.} Early Christians generally followed the Jewish and Roman custom of quick burial, so unless the monument had been prepared in advance or


141 See Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 98–184. Regarding the placement of sarcophagi, see the discussion in chapter 3 below (pages 137–142).

142 The number of funerary trades identified in literary and epigraphic sources seems to diminish over time. Some designations found in the third century or earlier, such as funerarius, no longer appear but others continue to be used, including bustuarius and libitanarius. See von Petrikovits, “Spezialisierung,” 140, “Spezialisierung – Spätantike,” 304.
the deceased was joining his or her spouse, temporary arrangements might be required.\footnote{On the custom of rapid burial, see Rush, \textit{Death and Burial}, 157. There is little surviving evidence of temporary arrangements, which is not surprising since any provisional container would not likely be preserved. The discovery of both a plain coffin and a second-century mythological marble sarcophagus in the same burial chamber might be an example. See Frank G.J.M. Müller, \textit{The So-Called Peleus and Thetis Sarcophagus in the Villa Albani} (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1994), 1. A documented delay between initial deposition and placement in a sarcophagus is also suggestive. During the forty days (or perhaps one year and forty days) interval indicated for the senator Flavius Ilus Catervius his body must have been preserved somewhere. This inscription and the delay (\textit{CIL} 9.5566 = \textit{ILCV} 98) is discussed in the Introduction, note 52.}{143}

Deposition was not merely physical but ceremonial. Church officials, presumably often paid for their efforts, participated in or led the recitation of prayers and the singing of psalms, both at the funeral and presumably on later commemorative occasions.

What did all this cost? Like the sarcophagus, there were expenditures on labour and materials. The former included the \textit{pollinctores} who undertook the unpleasant (and, one might therefore suppose, expensive) task of touching the polluted corpse, likely with an assistant or two, professional mourners and pallbearers, grave-diggers to handle the deposition, and clerics to assist in ceremonial prayers and the singing of psalms. Considering the wage rates for various skilled and unskilled professions in the Prices Edict, these expenses must have amounted to at least several hundred Diocletian \textit{denarii}.

The material apparatus of death included a shroud, bier, mourning clothes, candles, and banquets. Gold-threaded coverings would evidently be very expensive but even a pure linen wrap for the corpse could cost hundreds or thousands of \textit{denarii}.\footnote{\textit{PE} 26, the longest chapter in the edict, lists hundreds of linen products. Various types of shirts, tunics and robes, even of lesser quality, are priced in the thousands of \textit{denarii}.}{144} Incense and aromatic oils could have included Arabian saffron at 2,000 \textit{denarii} per pound or oil of myrrh at 600 \textit{denarii}. Others scents were more affordable: frankincense at 100 \textit{denarii}, ginger between 100 and 400 \textit{denarii} and some perfumed oils or ointments a real bargain at 30 to 50 \textit{denarii}.\footnote{\textit{PE} 34.14 (Arabian saffron = \textit{croci arabici}), 41 (myrrh = \textit{stacte} in Reynolds, “Prices Edict,” 216), 10 (frankincense = \textit{turis primi} in Reynolds, “Prices Edict,” 214), 55–56 (ginger = \textit{zingiber}), 45–50 (various oils = \textit{olea}).}{145} In some cases there might be no anointing and perfuming. Otherwise, the cost likely varied from a few hundred \textit{denarii} to several thousand.
Where deposition took place in a pre-existing family tomb, most of the expense was a sunk cost. At the other extreme, a brand new mausoleum might be constructed.\textsuperscript{146} We do not know how much (or to whom) the Bassus family paid for the privilege of a burial location in St Peter’s. It is presumably not coincidental that wealthy aristocrats often found prime placements for their mortal remains.\textsuperscript{147}

As with the sarcophagus, the only limits on what might be spent by a supremely wealthy family desirous of a sumptuous funeral and commemorative rites were taste and propriety. Even for those sarcophagus purchasers of more modest, but still substantial means, funeral and commemoration might cost 10,000 \textit{denarii} and could easily reach a multiple of that figure. Where new construction was involved, or the purchase of privileged space, the cost of the ceremony must have far exceeded that of the sarcophagus itself. There might have been exceptions, families that bought a luxurious coffin yet shunned the display of the funeral, but in most cases the two types of expense probably went hand in hand.

e) Conclusion

Combining estimates for material and labour provides a rough range for the price of a late Roman figural carved sarcophagus: as low as 17,500 Diocletian \textit{denarii} for a simple model of modest average size,\textsuperscript{148} rising to perhaps 40,000 \textit{denarii} for a fully-carved, full-sized, but not extraordinary object, and to 150,000 \textit{denarii} or more for massive and luxurious

\textsuperscript{146} An inscription (\textit{CIL} 9.5566 =ILCV 98) on the sarcophagus of Flavius Illus Catervius in Tolentino (\textit{Rep}. II.148) records the commission by the deceased prefect’s spouse not only a sarcophagus but also a mausoleum to put it in ("sarcofagum et pant(h)eum cum tric(h)oro disposuit / et perfecit").

\textsuperscript{147} Dresken-Weiland, \textit{Sarkophagbestattungen}, 131, observed this phenomenon in the last third of the fourth century.

\textsuperscript{148} It was possible to spend even less by eschewing decoration altogether (although there would still be some necessary shaping and smoothing). However undecorated chests still demanded the same quantity of marble. To cut back on material, one could purchase a \textit{faux} sarcophagus (\textit{Scheinsarkophag}), a carved slab that resembled the front of a full chest that but had not sides, bottom or lid. These were likely used as \textit{loculus} closures. Surviving examples are mainly eastern, rarely from Rome, and scholars do not always agree on whether the object is a \textit{Scheinsarkophag} or just a preserved front. See Koch and Sichtermann, \textit{Römische Sarkophage}, 82–83; Koch, \textit{Sarkophage der römischen Kaiserzeit}, 23–24; Koch, \textit{Frühchristliche Sarkophage}, 29–31, 57–60, 102. The introduction to the \textit{Repertorium} indicates that they are included (\textit{Rep}. I. xiii), presumably because there is no systematic difference in iconography. A few examples are so catalogued (\textit{Rep}. I.646), while others could be debatable. For example, \textit{Rep}. I.46, is described as a sarcophagus but cited as a \textit{Scheinsarkophag} by Koch.
monuments. These figures are not inconsistent with the spotty epigraphic record referred to above.\textsuperscript{149} Many thousands more must have been spent on the funeral and commemorative events.

These figures are not meaningful as absolute numbers. The nominal cost of a sarcophagus increased enormously over the course of the fourth century due to rampant inflation. The relevant issue is how the real cost compared to potentially competing purchases. The following paragraphs address these twin questions of inflation and price comparison.

Nominal prices probably rose on average about 17% per year between the late third and the late fourth century, when relative stability finally returned.\textsuperscript{150} Such brisk price inflation disrupts trade and commerce in a money economy, plays havoc with credit, chaotically reallocates wealth and has adverse social impacts, but it does not necessarily make any particular good “more expensive.” That depends on relative rather than absolute prices. The question, then, is whether sarcophagi became more or less costly when compared to other, potentially competing purchases.

Roger S. Bagnall has argued that fourth-century price increases were punctuated rather than gradual, tied to specific monetary events:

\textsuperscript{149} See pages 80-81. If the Prices Edict truthfully priced gold, and assuming the \textit{solidus} retained its gold content, this epigraphic evidence yields somewhat lower prices of 10,000 to 15,000 Diocletian \textit{denarii} in the few cases of fourth-century, albeit not Roman, sarcophagi, but these may have been made of an inferior or different material. An example from Salona, cited above, was said to cost 15 \textit{solidi} or about 15,000 \textit{denarii} at the official rate, but it was apparently made of “lapide vulgari,” probably local limestone. See Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Römische Abteilung, \textit{Ephemeris Epigraphica: Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum Supplementum}. Vol. 4 (Berlin : G. Reimer, 1881), no. 653. Roger S. Bagnall, “Fourth-Century Prices: New Evidence and Further Thoughts,” \textit{Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik} 76 (1989): 69–70, argues that the Edict underpriced gold by between 75% and 160%. That would put the foregoing examples within the range of the “intrinsic value” calculation.

\textsuperscript{150} Depeyrot, \textit{Crises et inflations}, 126–128, estimates inflation at 16% to 18% for the period 300 to 368. Based on the same sources, the guild declarations from Oxyrhynchus, Corcoran, \textit{Empire of the Tetrarchs}, 225–226, calculated 19%. An alternative to expressing prices in constant Diocletian \textit{denarii} often adopted by economic historians is to use a commodity equivalent, usually wheat. The price estimates here can be converted to a quantity of wheat at the Prices Edict rate of 100 \textit{denarii} per MK or expressed as a percentage of subsistence, and this is the procedure adopted in chapter 2 below. This may be convenient and can avoid the confusion with nominal prices, but it does not resolve the issue of relative price inflation.
The central conclusion of [my] Currency and Inflation was that the rise in price levels through the fourth century did not represent an ‘inflation’ in modern terms; rather, it represented a reaction of price levels to the metal content of a new issue of coins. A key consequence of this theory is that by and large prices rise swiftly and suddenly in response to new coins, followed by a period of relative stability.\textsuperscript{151}

To the extent that inflation was mainly or substantially a mirror of successive currency debasements, it can be ignored in considering the price of a sarcophagus, since relative prices would remain constant.\textsuperscript{152} This would not be the case, however, if there were asymmetric developments in supply or demand peculiar to sarcophagi.

On the supply side, the predictable net effect would be some upward price pressure. Material (marble) must have become more expensive due to reduced imports from the quarries, only partially offset by greater use of recycled domestic material. There is no reason to suppose a market imbalance for labour. There were likely fewer craftsmen but also less for them to do with the decline in construction. On the demand side, a moderating effect on prices might be expected due to the reduction in the number of wealthy customers, the subject of the next chapter; however, this would probably be offset by a shift in the product mix to higher-end goods. On balance, therefore, a moderate increase in the relative cost of sarcophagi would be expected during the fourth century.

Turning to the matter of comparison shopping, and keeping in mind the limitations of the Prices Edict, the financial implications of purchasing a sarcophagus (ignoring for these purposes funeral and commemorative costs) are suggested by looking at what else an equivalent expenditure might have bought at Edict prices. A modest monument costing

\textsuperscript{151} Bagnall, “Fourth-Century Prices,” 72, referring to his 1985 study Currency and Inflation in Fourth Century Egypt (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985). See also Corcoran, Empire of the Tetrarchs, 214. A prime example of this type of inflation would be Diocletian’s reforms themselves, which doubled the face value of the currency. \textsuperscript{152} Gold, because it is a store of value and a base for coinage, is a special case and its purchasing power may have increased significantly over this period, as much as two and one-half fold according to Rathbone, “Earnings and Costs,” 324. Others consider that even gold maintained its relative value. Mireille Corbier, “Coinage, Society and Economy,” in The Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193–337, ed. Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey and Averil Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 427, claimed that the prices of basic food and wages remained stable relative to gold, as would be expected “in a society without technical changes in agriculture, mining, craft production, transport by land or sea.” Similarly, Depeyrot, Crises et inflation, 126–128, proposed average annual price increases for various goods during the fourth century, placing gold roughly in the middle.
20,000 to 30,000 denarii was the equivalent of 1,000 days of unskilled labour, 125 months of instruction for one student in Greek or Latin grammar and geometry, or twenty-five cases pled by an advocate. The same sum could purchase several carriages, and it was almost enough for a top-of-the-line male slave. With the 150,000 denarii spent on a lavish sarcophagus the consumer could have procured instead a first-quality lion or a (probably unobtainable) pound of purple silk. These comparisons must be altered in favour of sarcophagi if, as surmised above, they became relatively more expensive during the fourth century due primarily to the higher cost of marble.

The mathematical imprecision in this chapter should not detract from its implications. We can say more than that sarcophagi “were expensive.” The cost estimates have implications for the both workshops and consumers. These prices determine who could have bought and seen the Christian sarcophagi of Rome.

152 PE 7.1, 7.70, and 7.73.
154 PE 15.35a, 29.1a.
155 PE 32.1a, 24.1a (in the Greek version only).
Chapter 2. The Christian sarcophagus population of Rome

Who bought, occupied and saw the monuments we now identify as Christian sarcophagi? The identification of what will be referred to as the "Christian sarcophagus population" depends on the resident population of Rome, its composition by wealth, status and income, the number of Christians, and the mortality rate — all matters of controversy among economic historians and demographers. The aim here is not to improve upon or even to summarize the extensive literature but instead to construct what Keith Hopkins called numerical metaphors, numbers that suggest the magnitude of what they measure.¹ The quantitative consideration will, in turn, suggest qualitative dimensions.

1. The population of Rome

Ancient Rome was a large city. This could be inferred, as Cassiodorus observed in the sixth century, from the wide region from which food was imported, the substantial surface area within the walls, the great amphitheatres and baths, and the many mills.² He did not advance any numbers but modern scholars have, relying on literary references, housing estimates, food imports, and implied population density. The results have been disconcertingly discrepant, ranging from 155,000 to an unlikely 4,000,000.³

Recent literature, focussed mainly on the early and high empire, has narrowed the gap. Proposals tend to cluster around a high estimate of about 1,000,000 — probably a bit lower in the Augustan period and rising in the second century — and a less popular low estimate

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² Cassiodorus, Variarum, 11.39.3-5.
perhaps half as great. The two camps disagree on both methodologies and factual assumptions. Some regard census figures as enumerations of adult, male, free citizens and others think they refer to a broader class of residents. Population density is cited for both high and low estimates. A factor that is important in this study is the treatment of the suburbium; the relevant statistic is the population of a capital region extending far enough into the surrounding area to include those likely to have commissioned or occupied Roman sarcophagi. That geographical expansion adds support to the high estimate.

The population certainly dropped as a result of the Antonine plague (165 to after 180) and had only begun to recover when another pestilence struck in the middle of the third century. It increased again before entering upon an unsteady but persistent decline throughout the fourth century. Yet Rome remained a substantial metropolis, and the

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5 Storey, “Population of Ancient Rome” relied on extrapolations from Pompeii and Ostia to the habitable area of Rome, while Lo Cascio, “La popolazione,” 47, compared parts of Italian cities in the nineteenth century and modern urban areas like Bombay or Hong Kong. Scheidel, “Roman Population Size,” 11, countered claims that the level of centralization in Rome implied by the high estimates is not commensurate with early modern capital cities by noting that Rome was the economic and political centre of an unusually large area.


7 This is the consensus view of most scholars. Nicholas Purcell, “The Populace of Rome in Late Antiquity,” in *The Transformations of Vrbs Roma in Late Antiquity*, ed. William V. Harris (Portsmouth, R.I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 144, perhaps employing a bit of hyperbole to make a point, claimed that “[d]espite fluctuations, it is likely that every year of the 4th c. saw a further diminution in the number of residents in Rome.” The general decline is reflected in the archaeological record: after around 250 CE, a number of multi-story structures occupied by non-élite Romans (traditionally but probably erroneously referred to as *insulae*) were replaced by more luxurious and less densely inhabited *domus*. See Federico Guidobaldi, “Architettura e urbanistica: dalla città-museo alla città santa,” in *Roma imperiale: una metropoli antica*, ed. Elio Lo Cascio (Rome: Carocci, 2000), 322; Federico Guidobaldi, “Le domus tardoantiche di Roma come ‘sensori’ delle trasformazioni culturali e sociali,” in *The Transformations of Vrbs Roma in Late Antiquity*, ed. William V. Harris (Portsmouth, R.I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 59–60 (with comments on the interpretation of the term *insula* at 58 and 59n36). An earlier generation of scholars attempted to construct population estimates on the misleading information contained in two fourth-century regionaries, the *Curiosum* and the *Notitia*,
immediate extramural area must have absorbed some of the decline at the centre. The population of “greater Rome” probably drifted downwards through the late third and the fourth centuries from about 900,000 to perhaps 600,000, including slaves and foreigners, a significant but not catastrophic reduction.\(^8\)

2. Status and Wealth

Epigraphy provides limited information about the social and economic status of patrons and occupants of sarcophagi. Dresken-Weiland compiled a database of 320 Christian inscriptions that identified sixty-nine from the élite orders, four military men, six prefects or civic office-holders, two clerics, a few “professionals” and one tradesman, a Nicomedian marble dealer.\(^9\) This sample represents only a small proportion of the extant monuments, regarding the number of residential buildings of both types found within the fourteen administrative regions of Rome. The results were no more conclusive and somewhat less scientific than recent studies, but they tend to bracket the current literature (ranging from 700,000 to 4,000,000). See Hermansen, “Population of Imperial Rome.” Hermansen concluded that the regionaries exaggerated the number of insulae.\(^8\)

Lo Casco, “La popolazione,” 60, describes the population of the city in 400 as within “a few hundred thousand” of its peak. See also Elio Lo Cascio, “Il popolamento,” in Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana, ed. Serena Ensoli and Eugenio La Rocca (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2000), 54; Walter Scheidel, “Progress and Problems in Roman Demography,” in Debating Roman Demography, ed. Walter Scheidel (Boston: Brill, 2001), 66–69. Richard Krautheimer, Rome: Portrait of a City, 312–1308 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 4, posits around 800,000 after the decline of the mid-third century. Although slaves were sometimes commemorated in household sepulchral monuments there is no evidence of any figural sarcophagi dedicated to or by slaves. The closest thing to a counter-example might be an undecorated Roman sarcophagus, dated 347, commemorating a casarius, a servant or colone: ICUR 4.10851; Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 39. Iiro Kajanto, Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage (Helsinki: Tilgmann, 1963), 6–9, observed that inscriptions considered Christian almost never designate slaves or even liberti. While it would be difficult to estimate the size of the slave population in order to extract it from the total, this is unnecessary. In the next section of this chapter, the Roman population will be segmented by income and the mass of the impoverished – plebs and slaves alike – will be excluded from the sarcophagus population. The second group mentioned in the text, foreigners and transients, is also potentially significant. See Purcell, “Populace,” 140; Walter Scheidel, “Germs for Rome,” in Rome the Cosmopolis, ed. Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 175. In this case, no numerical adjustment is required for the opposite reason: while slaves were not commemorated by sarcophagi, foreigners and temporary residents who died in Rome were. See, e.g.: Rep. I.299 commemorating an Armenian eunuch (natione armenius); Rep.I.517 referring to one Aemilio Polioni, advocatus, from the regione Tripolitania; and Rep. II.101, a fragment bearing a Greek dedication to Aurelios Andronekos, a Nicomedian marble dealer.\(^9\)

Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen des 4.–6. Jahrhunderts im Westen des römischen Reiches (Rome: Herder, 2003), 14, 30–41. Her sample included the full contents of Rep. I and II (Rep. III had not yet been published), thus extending beyond Rome. Whether all the inscriptions and sarcophagi are properly classified as Christian may be debated but this is not material in the current context. Forty-six of the élite were from the senatorial order, 12 were equestrians and 11 identified only as viri honesti or honestae feminae. The sarcophagus of the Nicomedian (Rep. II.101) is now in San Pietro Campovalano, Campoli, Abruzzo but was
let alone of all those originally produced. A different methodology is, therefore, adopted here. It asks who could have incurred the cost. Not everyone who could did, so this approach aims only to establish an upper limit.

The question is framed as one of wealth or income rather than status. These evidently overlap, but they are not identical. While members of the élite orders — senators, equites and decurions — were certainly wealthy, so too were some of the non-élite. Rank could sometimes have been an independent criterion for participation in the sarcophagus population, as there were undoubtedly restrictions on particular forms of display: it is unthinkable that a wealthy libertus would represent himself in senatorial shoes. How far the sarcophagus population extended into the ranks of the financially able but socially undistinguished is impossible to say. The previously noted Nicomedian marble or stone dealer was cited by Dresken-Weiland as indicative of participation by a lower stratum of society, but it might just signal special access by individuals "in the business." Status barriers may have existed but the meagre evidence regarding the purchasers and occupants of sarcophagi makes income a better proxy than rank.

A study of Roman income distribution by Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen provides a valuable starting point, even though it analyzed empire-wide data from the mid-second century rather than late imperial Rome. They divided households into three income strata. The “élite” includes the legally established orders plus “other wealthy,” those considered by Dresken-Weiland (who is also the author of Rep. II) as a Roman work from the first third of the fourth century. Another designation of occupation appears on Rep. I.299. The deceased is described as the eunuchus Aedesius, perhaps referring to a eunuch chamberlain. See Letizia Pani Ermini (ed.), Christiana loca: lo spazio cristiano nella Roma del primo millennio (Rome: Palombi, 2000), 2.48–49 (entry by Nuzzio). 10 Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 16, 96; Klaus Fittschen, Der Meleager Sarkophag (Frankfurt-am-Main: Liebieghaus, 1975), 17.

earning more than ten times subsistence. They represented only 1.2% to 1.7% of the population (under an optimistic or pessimistic view of the non-élite share of total income). At the bottom are households with average income per person no greater than 1.67 times subsistence; they account for 84% to 90% of the total. The remainder is styled “middle”, although that word must be used with caution. The expression “middle class” is found in the literature dealing with ancient Rome, but it is a potentially dangerous anachronism. In antiquity and late antiquity, the “middle” was far above the median.  

Table 2.1 reflects Scheidel and Friesen’s “optimistic” case with some revisions in the presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income (social) group</th>
<th>Estimated population share (in %)</th>
<th>Average income as a multiple of subsistence</th>
<th>Weighted average in multiples of subsistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senatorial</td>
<td>0.0146</td>
<td>513.1</td>
<td>0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equestrian</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>0.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decurion+</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>0.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle 5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle 4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>0.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle 3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.550</td>
</tr>
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<td>Poor 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Income Levels in the Roman Empire c. 150 CE

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13 For a caution regarding the expression "middle class," see Géza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome*, trans. David Braund and Frank Pollock (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1985), 192n212. Median income is the figure separating the top from the bottom half of the population, and was only at the level of subsistence.  
14 The data are from Scheidel and Friesen, “Size of the Economy,” tables 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, using their “optimistic” case and the average provided by them for each income level. As in Milanovic, “Income Inequality,” table 3, per capita income for each level is restated as a multiple of subsistence (at 390 kg of wheat = subsistence, including taxes and investment). The Milanovic recapitulation reaches a somewhat different result from Scheidel and Friesen, but the divergences are not material for present purposes. Since decurions have the same assumed average income as “other wealthy,” they have been combined in a “Decurion+” group. Instead of aggregating these incomes, the last column provides a weighted average income for each group. This eliminates the differential effect of total population estimates (Scheidel and Friesen assumed 70,000,000) and displays the mean per capita income in multiples of subsistence.
It is difficult to decide where to draw the line in defining the sarcophagus population. For a Middle 1 household to finance the purchase of a sarcophagus through multi-year saving would require a painful reduction in annual consumption, sacrificing everything above bare subsistence.\(^{15}\) External financing was limited; borrowed money, if available at all, would bear exorbitant interest rates,\(^{16}\) and funding from collective societies, the *collegia*, was no more than a form of mutual insurance within the same income stratum.\(^{17}\) Disciplined Middle 2 households were in a better position to finance the costs associated with a death in the family although there were certainly other things to spend money on, and less pricey funerary options than a marble sarcophagus.

A liberal conjecture is that in addition to the top three categories constituting the élite, the sarcophagus population in 150 CE included all of Middle 3 – 5. This would represent 5% of the population (or under Scheidel and Friesen's pessimistic case, 3.6%), generously expanding the group that Hopkins called the “sub-élite.”\(^{18}\) A range of 4% to 5% will be adopted as the starting point, constituting an estimate of the empire-wide sarcophagus population in the middle of the second century. It must now be chronologically extrapolated and geographically focussed.

\(^{15}\) Table 2.1 assigns the average Middle 1 household income of 2.5 times subsistence per capita, 2,925 kg of wheat equivalent (390 kg per person multiplied by three in an assumed household of two adults and two children) or 1,755 kg above subsistence. This is less than the low estimate in chapter 1 for the cost of a simple sarcophagus (20,000 to 30,000 *denarii* with wheat pegged at 100 *denarii* per MK in *PE* 1.1a and 10 kg per MK), without taking in account any funeral costs.

\(^{16}\) Borrowed money must be repaid and is therefore analogous to saving, although it can spread the cost forward. In any event, it is unlikely that either commercial lenders or wealthy aristocrats were in the business of lending to Middle 1 households. On credit in the early empire, see Howgego, “Supply and Use of Money,” 15. On its decline in the later empire, see Jean Andreau, “Declino e morte dei mestieri bancari nel Mediterraneo Occidentale (II – IV D.C.),” in *Società romana e impero tardoantico*, ed. Andrea Giardina (Rome: Laterza, 1986), 1:601–615.

\(^{17}\) On the continued existence of these associations, their funerary activities and the participation by Christians, see Éric Rebillard, *Religion et sépulture: l’église, les vivants et les morts dans l’antiquité tardive* (Paris: Editions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2003), 51–71. Rebillard considers the target group to have been the *plebs media* (70). On similar activities of the *collegia* in the early empire, see Patterson, “Patronage.” Inscriptions regarding funerary expenditures of *collegia*, all before the third century, are reproduced in Flambard, “Eléments,” and illustrate that payouts were commensurate with contributions and assessments.

\(^{18}\) Hopkins, “Christian Number,” 208 described this sub-élite as comprising “middling land-owners, merchants, professionals, like lawyers, doctors, architects, professors of rhetoric and philosophy, middling and lesser administrators, army officers, scribes, school teachers, and eventually Christian ideologues” and estimated they constituted 2% of the population.

[107]
There is a widespread view among historians that income inequality rose dramatically in the later empire. Peter Brown estimated a fivefold increase in senatorial wealth, Keith Hopkins as much as eightfold for an even broader status group. As Willem Jongman put it, “the Roman Empire is one of increasing control by a smaller and smaller élite of an ever larger share of the economic surplus above subsistence.” This redistribution had a dramatic impact on the sarcophagus population. One way for the rich to get richer is if mean per capita income increases; however, it probably instead declined after the second century. The only alternative is for someone else to get poorer. But since large numbers of households cannot fall permanently below subsistence, significantly higher élite income implies a dramatic reduction in their numbers into a small hyper-élite, accompanied by a severe compression of the sub-élite and the middling groups. The squeeze is compounded by any decline in mean per capita income. Simple simulations suggest that if the population share of the sarcophagus population in 150 CE was 4% - 5%, it must have dropped to 2% or even less by the year 400. All other things being equal, that produces an evolution in the sarcophagus population along the following lines.

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19 Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 34–36. He described a “widening gulf between the rich and the poor,” as “the prosperity of the Mediterranean world seems to have drained to the top.” Hopkins, “Rome, Taxes, Rents and Trade,” 207, hypothesized that “aristocratic fortunes had risen two- or threefold from the late Republic to the end of the first century AD, and had risen again five- to eightfold between AD 100 and AD 400.” He appears to have been referring to senators, knights and “high palace officials” but not to the more numerous decurions. Similar views expressed by other historians are cited and summarized by Milanovic, “Income Inequality,” 19.


21 Milanovic, “Income Inequality,” 4–12, suggests from something like 1.8 times subsistence in 150 (reflected in Table 2.1) to only 1.3 in 300. His Figure 1 indicates a modest, almost imperceptible further decline in the fourth century. This is similar to the result implied by an interesting graph presented by Jongman, “Rise and Fall,” 245, tracking meat consumption. It shows a significant decline (about one-third) from the second to the third century and a very slight decline to the fourth. If one were to disaggregate the results for the third century, the first half would probably be closer to the preceding century and the second half closer to the following.

22 Jongman, “Rise and Fall,” 249, observed that “aggregate élite income would have equalled the entire surplus of the economy (assuming real GDP equalled twice subsistence) [my Table 2.1 shows it at 1.8 times subsistence] if their aggregate wealth was just over eight times the census minimum.” Since average élite wealth was certainly far higher than the minimum, this is not a very demanding standard.

23 Computations can only be hypothetical but they illustrate and confirm the intuitive conclusion. For example, one can construct a version of Table 2.1 in which per capita income drops from 1.8 times subsistence to about
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Low base assumption</th>
<th>High base assumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.2: Sarcophagus Population – Impact of income redistribution and reduction in per capita income**

All other things are not, however, equal. The élite were over-represented in Rome, and centralization also enriched and expanded the sub-élite occupations, notably relating to construction and commerce, through a trickle-down effect from euergetic infrastructure and transfer payments (distributions of food).\(^{25}\) Mean per capita income imposes some restraint on the urban advantage: too great an urban over-representation of such groups implausibly leaves the rural population entirely at subsistence.\(^{26}\) One might double the élite and sub-élite representation in Rome early in the period but it is difficult to go higher, and

\(^{1.6}\) (still considerably higher than the 1.3 predicted by Milanovic – see note 21) and income of senators and equestrians (but not decurions or “other wealthy”) rises by a factor of five. In this case, the sarcophagus population is only 1.2% including a greatly reduced élite (senatorial and equestrian ranks being reduced by half). The “respectability” group drops dramatically and almost 95% of the population is now in Poor 1 and 2, at or below subsistence. Even more severe reductions in the number of the élite can depress per capita income further, without increasing the sub-élite or middling groups. If one is more optimistic regarding the reverse income redistribution than Hopkins and Brown, or about average per capita income than Milanovic and other historical economists, the numbers become somewhat less dire. However any significant steepening of the income pyramid in a society living close to subsistence will inevitably lead to a drastic reduction in the number of households in the market for expensive luxury goods.\(^{24}\) This table makes two additional simplifying assumptions. First, the information from 150 has been transposed to 250, although in fact the trend probably started somewhat earlier. The end result for the period from the fourth century should not be much affected. Second, the overall reduction in the sarcophagus population is presented as if it were linear from 250 to 400 CE.


\(^{26}\) Scheidel and Friesen, “Size of the Economy,” 90.
this economic pre-eminence declined over time. Nonetheless, upper élite wealth, at least, probably remained notably higher in Rome than the empire-wide average.\footnote{A different approach to estimating the number of wealthy Romans relies on housing data. Guidobaldi, “Le domus tardoantiche,” 55, proposed that the number of domus in the city could serve as a proxy for the number of wealthy households. There are difficulties with this methodology. Many of the sub-élite did not live in domus; indeed, even some of the élite appear to have resided as landlords in insulae owned by them, a claim attributed to Frier and cited by Alex Scobie, “Slums, Sanitation, and Mortality in the Roman World,” Klio 68 (1986): 401. And as noted by Guidobaldi himself (62n56), some of the wealthy had more than one domus.}

Geography and chronology thus work in opposite directions: centralization of wealth in Rome increases the size of the sarcophagus population, albeit with diminishing strength, while upward redistribution and declining mean per capita income reduce it. These effects are illustrated in Tables 2.3 and 2.4.\footnote{The effect of centralization is assumed to double the relevant groups from the figure otherwise calculated for the year 250 and then to decline in importance over the next 150 years (in a linear fashion for want of anything better) to 150% at the end of the period.}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Year} & \textbf{Base assumption} & \textbf{Reduction (redistribution of wealth and reduced per capita income)} & \textbf{Increase (urban wealth concentration)} & \textbf{Combined Result} \\
\hline
250 & 4.0\% & - & 2.0\% & 6.0\% \\
300 & 4.0\% & -0.7\% & 1.7\% & 5.0\% \\
350 & 4.0\% & -1.3\% & 1.3\% & 4.0\% \\
400 & 4.0\% & -2.0\% & 1.0\% & 3.0\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Sarcophagus population of Rome as a percentage of Roman residents (low base assumption)}
\end{table}
Before the mid-third century plague, the proportion of Romans in the sarcophagus population was greater than the 4% to 5% base range, as high as 7.5%. By 350, that figure had dropped back to roughly what it was a century earlier, as wealth was cornered by the élite, per capita income fell, and resources became less centralized in Rome. It continued to fall as wealth moved eastward, westward and upward. By the end of the century it was not much above 3%. The sarcophagus population of Rome was a small proportion of the city’s residents that became significantly smaller during the fourth century.

Finally, Table 2.5 combines Tables 2.3 and 2.4 with the hypothesized urban population (its decline assumed to be linear), thereby converting the percentages to absolute numbers.
3. Christians

To disaggregate the sarcophagus population on the basis of religious affiliation one must consider not only what proportion of Romans were Christians but also whether that proportion varied across income strata.

a) Christian number

Absent direct evidence, the number of Christians during the fourth century can be approximated by computing an implied rate of growth and assuming it was linear (although it obviously was not). Assume that there were about 1,000 Christians in 40 CE; the precise number is not statistically important. Many historians suppose that the empire (with an assumed population of 60,000,000) was about 10% Christian in 300. Keith Hopkins and Rodney Stark used this and other such estimates in the literature to compute an average annual growth rate of 3.4%. The results are illustrated in Table 2.6.

29 The starting point is Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, trans. James Moffatt, 2nd ed. (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1908). The next important step was not taken until the 1990s by Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), and Hopkins, “Christian Number.” See also Stark’s 1998 review response: Rodney Stark, “E Contrario,” Journal of Early Christian Studies 2 (1998): 259–267. There is a preliminary problem of defining “Christian” (see the discussion in the Introduction), but both Hopkins and Stark dismissed the issue as marginal to the task of estimating Christian number. Their conclusion applies with even greater justice here since the concern is limited to Christian self-expression. It may also be noted that within the city of Rome, the gamut of multiple Christianities was less extensive. Mutual interaction and conformity was greater than across the empire as a whole with its far-flung and often isolated communities.

30 Significant changes to the opening figure have only a modest impact on the derived growth rate. Paul McKechnie, The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church (Leicester, UK.: Apollos, 2001), 57, misunderstood the methodology when he argued that if the figure of 1,000 were doubled the end result would become improbably large. The growth rate is not fixed but mathematically derived from the initial and terminal assumptions; changing the figure of 1,000 does not imply a different Christian population in the fourth century, but rather a different growth rate. If there were 2,000 Christians in 40 CE instead of 1,000, the rate is 3.1% instead of 3.4%. If there were only 500, it is 3.7%. Such differences are immaterial for the purposes of this exercise.

31 For a summary of the estimates expressed in the earlier literature, see Stark, Rise of Christianity, 5–13. With respect to the population of the empire as a whole, the figure of 60,000,000 was accepted by Hopkins, “Christian Number,” 192, for the year 300. The same number was derived in a simulation for the year 164 CE by Frier, “Demography,” 192. Scheidel and Friesen, “Size of the Economy,” 66n21, propose at least 70,000,000 for the mid-second century; Scheidel, “Progress and Problems,” 69, considers that the total population likely did not contract from the second into the fourth century. Lower estimates can also be found. Milanovic, “Income Inequality,” Appendix 1, proposes around 41,000,000 in 300 and 36,000,000 in 400. The observations in the preceding note apply to the total population assumption. A growth rate of 3.0% instead of 3.4% produces about 19,000,000 instead of 32,000,000 Christians in 350 CE.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Christians</th>
<th>Percentage of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>0.0023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>7,400</td>
<td>0.0123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>0.0167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>0.0667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>0.1667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>210,000</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>246</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>6,000,000</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>315</td>
<td>10,000,000</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350</td>
<td>32,000,000</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.6: Christians in the Roman Empire

No significance should be attached to the precise figures in Table 2.6, including the date of the psychologically important (to the historian) 50% threshold. Nonetheless, while the rate of growth has important implications for the nature of the Christian community, the absolute numbers are also important. The figure of 210,000 Christians in the year 200 implies a highly successful proselytizing mission, but a century and a half is a long time and the pool of unconverted was still effectively unlimited. More striking is that conversion was sustained and relentless not only through the first three centuries but also in the fourth, when very large numbers of new recruits were required to maintain the rate of expansion. Growth only finally faltered for lack of non-Christians to convert. Of course the actual rate of expansion varied, but to the extent that growth slowed in some periods it must have

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32 Based on Hopkins, “Christian Number,” 191-194 and his figure 1; Stark, Rise of Christianity, 7, Table 1.1.
33 Rodney Stark, Cities of God: The Real Story of how Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome (New York: Harper, 2006), 68, conceded that his estimate for the year 350 is almost certainly too high. Ramsay MacMullen, Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100 – 400) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 93 and 93n18, proposed one-third as a “defensible guess” at the proportion of the population that was Christian in that year, noting that over half of these were Arians, Donatists or Meletians. That distinction is not considered important in this study on the basis that these doctrinal differences rarely had any impact on the visual representations (see Conclusion, page 436 and references). Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.5.1–2, reported that in 361, the Emperor Julian concealed his pagan predilections, suggesting an important Christian presence by that time. Less credible is another claim by the same historian (21.2.4) that Julian clothed himself in Christianity before the army in Gaul because of the soldiers' dominant religious affiliation. This was dismissed by MacMullen, Christianization the Roman Empire, 46, as indicative merely that Christians were the only people who cared about such things. That comment may seem a bit cavalier but a majority of Christians in the army in 360 does seem unlikely.
been even more rapid in others. There is no other way to get from marginal beginnings to “Christian triumph” over this span of time.

One effect of such a high sustained growth rate is that a large proportion of Christians were recent converts. Unlike pagans and Jews, Hopkins observed, “Christians were made not born.” Their religious attachment was often both recent and intentional. Another consequence is that there were far more living Christians than dead ones. Assuming around 6,000,000 in 300 CE, less than one-sixth that number would have died since the religion began. If 40% of the imperial population was Christian by 350, that would represent more than five times the number who had ever died. Both the prevalence of recent conversion and the dominance of the living over the dead must have had an impact on early Christian attitudes or “mentalities.”

The empire-wide statistics hide regional differences. Eusebius reported that around 250 CE, the city of Rome had 155 clergymen and 1,500 dependents. Adolf Harnack derived from this an oft-repeated estimate of 30,000 to 50,000 Christians in the capital. Christian growth in

34 Hopkins, “Christian Number,” 218–219. His witticism repeats the words of Tertullian, Apologeticum, 18.2 – “fiunt, non nascentur Christiani,” of which he was undoubtedly aware. Tertullian was referring not to demography but to the requirement of initiation, but the result is the same.

35 The methodology for computing these figures is based on Arthur H. Westing, “A Note on how Many Humans that have Ever Lived,” BioScience 31 (1981): 523–524, using an estimated life expectancy at birth of 25 (see the mortality discussion below) and assuming Christian populations in 50, 300, and 350 CE of 1,000, 6,000,000 and 24,000,000 respectively. The exact calculations are: (a) from 50 to 300 CE, 6,895,787 were born, and 896,787 had died; (b) from 50 to 350 CE, 28,553,783 were born and 4,553,783 had died.

36 Eusebius, EH, 6.43, reporting on a letter written by Pope Cornelius (251–253) to Fabius, bishop of Antioch. The letter included a summary of the administrative organization of the Roman community: “there were forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolyths, fifty-two exorcists, readers, and janitors, and over fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress.” Harnack, Mission and Expansion, 2.248, thought a community of at least 30,000 Christians was required to feed these 155 clergymen (the enumerated 154 plus the bishop) along with the 1,500 dependents. He conceded that some late fourth-century evidence from Antioch could suggest a number as high as 50,000, but preferred a lower estimate since “the readiness of Christians to make sacrifices was greater about 250 in Rome than it was about 380 in Antioch.” His rough figuring is accepted, for example, by Frank R. Trombley, “Christianity,” in Brill’s New Pauly, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmut Schneider (Brill Online, 2011), part D: Expansion; Richard Krautheimer and Slobodan Čurčić, Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 24. It is cited, but not quite approved, by Hopkins, “Christian Number,” n35. Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, “The Origin and Development of Roman Catacombs,” in The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions, trans. Cristina Carlo Stella and Lori-Ann Touchette, ed. Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, Fabrizio Bisconti and Danilo Mazzoleni, 3rd ed. (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2009), 25, labelled Harnack’s deduction “audacious,” although he did not disagree with it. Olof Brandt, “The Archaeological Record: Problems of Interpretation,” in A Companion to Late [114]
the city in the succeeding decades is indicated by another citation from Eusebius, his caustic remark that Maxentius sought to appease the Christians in 306 as a means to flatter "the Roman people." Harnack hypothesized that their numbers had probably doubled or even quadrupled by 300. This is actually a conservative claim when compared to the 3.4% average growth rate. Doubling in 50 years implies average annual growth of only 1.4%, quadrupling 2.8%. The latter is more likely, and produces 120,000 to 200,000 Roman Christians at the turn of the century, probably 15% to 25% of the urban population. Rome would be somewhere between 20% and 35% Christian by 312.

Growth must have continued at a healthy but less hectic pace as the pool of potential converts shrank. A Christian majority was probably reached within a few decades after mid-century. In 392, Christianity became the only legally recognized religion, and the Rome that was sacked in 410 was for all intents and purposes a Christian city, although not a city composed only of Christians. A significant number of residents remained attached to traditional religious practices or mystery cults and the relatively small Jewish population persisted. But the dominance of Christianity was established, and other religious affiliations, however prominent and public some of their adherents might be, were progressively

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Antiquity, ed. Philip Rousseau and Jutta Raithel (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 166, accepted Harnack's conclusion as well, but mistakenly applied it to the year 300.

37 Eusebius, EH, 8.14.1. Given his agenda one is hesitant to cite such a remark as demographic evidence, but significant expansion in the capital before Constantine is generally accepted on other grounds.

38 Harnack, Mission and Expansion, 2.329. Confusingly, he proposed elsewhere (2.248n1) that the Christians had reached 7% – 10% of the urban population by 312.

39 John Bodel, "From Columbaria to Catacombs: Collective Burial in Pagan and Christian Rome," in Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context: Studies of Roman, Jewish, and Christian Burials, ed. Laurie Brink and Deborah A. Green (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 184n13, performed a similar calculation and arrived at 200,000 Christians in Rome in 300 out of a population he assumed to be 750,000, or 27%. Krautheimer, Rome, 18, proposed that "by 312 as much as a third of Rome’s population may have belonged to the Church or sympathized with it." Slower growth in Rome after 250 compared to the empire-wide statistic is partly a reflection of the fact that continuing Christian expansion relied on less exploited markets, increasingly smaller towns and the countryside. In addition, the high rate of inward migration (discussed below) may have presented a challenge to maintaining the momentum of Christian expansion in Rome. If the Christian proportion among the migrants was less than the average for the resident population, then a given rate of growth in Christian number demands an even higher rate of conversion.

40 Laws do not establish demographic turning points but the Theodosian decrees of that and the previous year (CTh 16.10.10–12) may be regarded as at once a further blow to the already declining traditional religious practices and a demonstration of their waning authority, popularity and dissuasive force.
marginalized.\textsuperscript{41} Those professing a religion other than Christianity, and likely to display it on their funerary monuments, represented no more than a notable but dwindling minority.

b) Income stratification

One still encounters the claim that until well into the fourth century, Christianity was a community of the poor and dispossessed.\textsuperscript{42} This view may have the unusual distinction of being both trivial and false. It is trivial because in a society the vast majority of whose members live near subsistence, it is the absence rather than the presence of a high number of the poor in any religious movement that would be remarkable. It is false because there is no evidence that the élite or the wealthy were absent from the Christian community.\textsuperscript{43} Sarcophagus inscriptions and iconography confirm the presence of Christians among the wealthy and the élite, even senators, in the latter part of the third century and early in the fourth,\textsuperscript{44} although the monuments provide no basis for a quantitative assessment because

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} On the persistence of a pagan population, see Peter Brown “Christianization and Religious Conflict,” in \textit{The Late Empire}, A.D. 337–425, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 632, 640 and \textit{passim}; Alan Cameron, “The Last Pagans of Rome,” in \textit{The transformations of \textit{Vrbs Roma in Late Antiquity}}, ed. William V. Harris (Portsmouth, R.I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 109–121. Alan Cameron, \textit{The Last Pagans of Rome} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168, notes that while official Roman paganism did not survive the fourth century, there were still pagans. However MacMullen, \textit{Christianization the Roman Empire}, 81, contended that “Rome itself was more pagan than Christian until the 390s, when the balance began to change, perhaps sharply.” A difference of a few decades cannot be resolved on the available evidence.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Remarks such as Jesus’s scepticism about the salvation of the rich (as in Matt. 19.23) and Paul’s comment on the scarcity of the wise, mighty or noble in the faith (I Cor. 1.26) should be classified as polemic. There are many canonical references to well-off Christians, e.g., in Acts: 10 (a god-fearing wealthy centurion; 13.7–12 (a converted proconsul); 17.4 (a noble woman); 17.11–12 (honourable Gentiles). Cyprian, \textit{Ep.} 80.1, refers to Christian senators, knights and other men (and women) of distinction being deprived of their status and wealth, and possibly their heads, under a repressive rescript of the Emperor Valerian (253–260), and also (Ep. 18) to repentant Christians who have forfeited their possessions and homes. Pope Cornelius (251–253) may have been of the \textit{gens Cornelia} (although possibly only a \textit{libertus} of the patrician family); Pope Stephen I (254–257) was of the \textit{gens Julia}. Eusebius often refers to wealthy and noble members of the community before Constantine (\textit{EH}, 7.16, 8.11, 8.12). Ammianus Marcellinus, whom one would not expect to exaggerate in this direction, notes in passing the Christian persuasion of high status individuals without remarking anything unusual about their religious affiliation: e.g., magistrates in Pannonia (27.7.6) and a high-ranking Christian military officer (28.6.27). See the data on reputedly Christian consuls and prefects in Barnes, “Christians and Pagans,” 315–321. Additional references are provided by Harnack, \textit{Mission and Expansion}, 2.33–52.
\item \textsuperscript{44} For example, a sarcophagus in the Palazzo Corsini, Rome (\textit{Rep.} I.945) and the so-called sarcophagus of Pronuba or Ludovisi Sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (inv. 31408, \textit{Rep.} I.86) are both classified as
\end{itemize}
they are few in number and late pagan sarcophagi seem to have either disappeared or been misidentified.\textsuperscript{45}

Equally questionable is a contrarian view that Christians were actually concentrated in the upper strata.\textsuperscript{46} A recent version of this assertion was put forward by Peter Brown. Unmasking “Christian rhetoric of identification with the humble and oppressed,” he proposes a more economically diverse early church, with a concentration among the moderately wealthy.\textsuperscript{47}

Altogether, the social niche of the Christian congregations of the earlier part of the fourth century seems to have consisted largely of moderately well-to-do townsfolk. They did not think of themselves as rich. But they were by no means paupers.... [T]he Christian communities had never been socially monolithic. They were open at both ends, both to those considerably poorer than the well-to-do plebeians who made up the bulk of the Christian congregations and to those who were considerably richer and more distinguished.

The social group highlighted by Brown may well have been the most important source of recruits for the early clergy and even the “motor” of the fourth-century church, but it

\textsuperscript{45} See Hugo Brandenburg, “Osservazioni sulla fine della produzione e dell’uso dei sarcofagi a rilievo nella tarda antichità nonché sulla loro decorazione,” in Sarcofagi tardoantichi, paleocristiani e altomedievali: Atti della giornata tematica dei Seminari di archeologia cristiana (École française de Rome – 8 maggio 2002), ed. Fabrizio Bisconti and Hugo Brandenburg (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2004), 11–14. Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 62–66 provides statistics on the decline in pagan sarcophagi that are accepted, perhaps too hastily, by Cameron, Last Pagans of Rome, 183. She identified only 12 sarcophagi attributed to the period from 330 to 400 as pagan against 325 considered Christian. The proportion can hardly reflect the original production. Wrede, Senatorische Sarkophage Roms, 84, identified only one post-Constantinian senatorial sarcophagus and two lids. Paul Veyne, L’empire gréco-romain (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 784n103, suggested that a number of pagan sarcophagi placed in the third century may be incorrectly dated. Another explanation for the missing sarcophagi is the inclusion in the Christian corpus of many monuments solely on the basis of pastoral motifs, although the number is still insufficient to account for all the wealthy, dead pagans.

\textsuperscript{46} Stark, Rise of Christianity, 29–33. See also Wischmeyer, Die Tafeldeckel der christlichen Sarkophage, 171.

cannot have provided most of the Christians of Rome or the Roman Empire. If every person in every household above the "poverty line" (dismally set at 1.5 times subsistence in Table 2.1) had converted, they would still have represented a minority of fourth-century Roman Christians. The projected growth in the Christian population cannot be achieved without heavy reliance on the poor. On the other hand, because the élite and the higher levels of the sub-élite were relatively few, their conversion could be more sluggish without notably affecting the total numbers, although one must always keep in mind that a lower rate in one period implies a higher rate in another.

Élite attitudes towards Christianity have been the subject of conflicting historical narratives. Militaristic and pugilistic metaphors compete with the post-colonial language of accommodation, integration and interpenetration, a story of pagan revanchistes defending classical culture and values against an aggressively rising tide of Christianity versus a gradual, peaceful and complex process of appropriation and assimilation. The reality was probably a bit of each. With the not inconsiderable assistance of a series of co-religionist emperors, Christians did insinuate themselves over a period of many decades into the centres of power, wealth and status, but there must have been repeated flare-ups of personal and social conflict and resentment.


49 On the impact of an almost uninterrupted series of Christian emperors and the Christianization of the court, see Paul Veyne, Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien (312–394) (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007). Brown, Through the Eye of a Needle, 45, notes the importance of the "gentle violence" this imposed on the upper strata of society. Wolf Liebeschuetz, Continuity and Change in Roman Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 253, observed that the transformation of Christianity from a "massive fact" in 300 CE to its eventual status as the state religion demanded at least the passive connivance of the civil and military élite. Emblematic of the continuing inter-community disputes is the well-known quarrel over the Altar of Victory in
A long-standing disagreement concerning the rapidity with which the religion spread within the upper echelons of society has tilted in favour of those favouring relatively early adoption.\textsuperscript{50} Nonetheless, few doubt there was some lag in the conversion of the Roman élite. The earliest claim that Christians constituted a majority of the sitting members of the Senate appears to have been made by Ambrose in 384 in a letter to Emperor Valentinian II,\textsuperscript{51} although the composition of the institutional Senate, which numbered only a few men, is not very important in estimating the size of the Christian sarcophagus population. Eastern appointments by Constantine and his son Constantius were mainly Christian, but Constans, facing the Realpolitik of the Western aristocracy, continued to prefer pagans.\textsuperscript{52} The
resistance of the Roman élite to conversion declined as Christianity became less inimical to and eventually a precondition for social status and political power.\(^{53}\)

In sum, the tipping point for conversion by the élite (and, \textit{a fortiori}, the sub-élite) was probably only slightly later than for other groups, after 350 but before 400, perhaps closer to the latter than the former. Christians were somewhat under-represented in the upper strata of Rome early in the fourth century, but the disparity largely disappeared by its end. This suggests that the Christian sarcophagus population should be placed at or below the low end of the estimate for the Christian population of Rome at first, rising towards the average over the course of the fourth century.

The implications of all the factors discussed above are reflected in Table 2.7.\(^{54}\)

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Population of Rome & Christian percentage & Christian population & Christian sarcophagus population (percentage) & Christian sarcophagus population (number) \\
\hline
250 & 900,000 & 5\% & 45,000 & 5.0\% & 2,250 \\
300 & 800,000 & 20\% & 160,000 & 4.5\% & 7,200 \\
350 & 700,000 & 40\% & 280,000 & 4.0\% & 11,200 \\
400 & 600,000 & 75\% & 450,000 & 3.1\% & 14,063 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Christian sarcophagus population of Rome}
\end{table}

\textbf{4. The Roman dead}

Sarcophagus viewers are alive but there would be nothing to see without a deceased. Even the wealthiest need no more than one coffin each (or less for deposition as a couple). The number of sarcophagi cannot exceed the number of deaths within the sarcophagus population. To complete this review, attention must, therefore, be paid to mortality.

\(^{53}\) See Cameron, "Last Pagans."

\(^{54}\) The "population of Rome" column repeats Table 2.5; "Christian percentage" follows the discussion above, using Harnack's 5\% for 250, the mid-point of an estimated 15\% to 25\% for 300 CE, 40\% for 350 based on a majority being reached in the decades after that date, and 75\% for 400 CE representing near saturation early in the fifth century. The penultimate column is based on Tables 2.3 and 2.4, following the text in starting low, then adopting the low base assumption, and eventually using the average of the high and low base assumptions.
The annual crude death rate is the reciprocal of the life expectancy at birth, commonly designated as \( e(0) \), where “e” means “expectancy” and the bracketed figure is the age at which that expectancy is measured. For the Roman Empire as a whole, \( e(0) \) is normally estimated between 20 and 30 years, implying mortality between 33 and 50 per 1,000. At the midpoint, \( e(0) = 25 \), mortality is 40 per 1,000. The aim of the following discussion is to consider the applicability of this rule of thumb to the Roman Christian sarcophagus population taking into account (i) urban mortality, (ii) early life mortality, (iii) the impact of wealth, (iv) religious affiliation, and (v) variability.

Due to continuing and substantial excess mortality in pre-modern cities, the so-called urban graveyard effect, population could be maintained only by inward migration. This must have been the case for insalubrious and disease-ridden ancient Rome. Its decent infrastructure and the general availability of food and water presented advantages over some other early cities but these were overwhelmed by population density, inadequate sanitation and the high volume of potentially infected travelers and traders. Yet some of

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Rome’s municipal services may have been counterproductive: its baths, water supply and public latrines were efficient vehicles for the spread of infectious diseases.\textsuperscript{59}

Scheidel has argued persuasively that an estimate of excess Roman urban mortality of 10 per 1,000, borrowed by some scholars from the experience of early modern London, is too low. The prevalence of malaria, in particular, led him to double that figure, positing an urban death rate on the order of 60 per 1,000, an implied \( e(0) \) of only 17.\textsuperscript{60} This level of excess mortality in Rome would require massive net migration to prevent population collapse, precisely the conclusion reached by Nicholas Purcell.\textsuperscript{61}

The second factor is infant and child mortality. The crude death rate is not weighted by age. In pre-industrial societies, low life expectancy at birth was coupled with high early life mortality. This was certainly the case in fourth-century Rome, and yet children’s sarcophagi are rare.\textsuperscript{62} Since the Roman Christian sarcophagus population is intended to represent the source for a corpus of monuments, mortality estimates must be adjusted to extract the invisible children.

This is not a simple task. There is considerable uncertainty and disagreement among historical demographers regarding the age structure of the Roman population, age-specific

\textsuperscript{60} Scheidel, "Germs for Rome," 174–17; Scheidel, "Disease and Death," 10. The figure of 60 per 1,000 is an average. Mortality would be even higher in periods of pestilence.
\textsuperscript{61} Purcell, "Populace of Rome."
mortality and the utility of constructed life tables. The assumption here, following the views of most historical demographers, is that about half the children born in the Roman Empire died before sexual maturity. The urban death rate for those who survived infancy and childhood was therefore considerably lower than 60 per 1,000, probably closer to 40, suggesting a life expectancy of around 40 years (i.e., \( e(15) \approx 25 \)). In effect, the mortality benefit of surviving childhood roughly offset the urban graveyard effect.

The Roman sarcophagus population was not only more urban and older than the average, it was also richer. Robert Woods suggested that wealth could have increased life expectancy at birth in ancient Rome by perhaps five years, observing that “it has always been advantageous to be an aristocrat rather than a peasant or a slave.” In addition to better nutrition, the rich had two important advantages in the face of infectious disease, a major cause of death: resources to command elementary care like food and water (privileged access to medical care being useless) and especially the ability to remove themselves from the site of both periodic and extraordinary plague and pestilence to their villas, a self-help strategy not available to urban poor.

At first blush, Scheidel’s conclusion might appear different: “there is no obvious reason why the wealthy should have outlived the poor.” His point, however, was that any mortality advantage conferred on the rich was offset by their increased risk from living mainly in cities. Thus, instead of the general urban death rate of 60 per 1,000, wealthy Romans would suffer mortality closer to 40 per 1,000 (old and young combined). This implies an eight-year

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63 Scheidel, “Roman Age Structure,” 24–26, cites much of the literature that relies on model life tables, concluding with pessimism regarding their utility. More recently, Woods, “Ancient Mortality,” cautiously reintroduced constructed tables into the debate.
64 Woods, “Ancient Mortality,” tables 2, 3 and 4; Scheidel, “Human Mobility,” 17.
advantage, actually somewhat more generous than Woods's five-year allowance. The Scheidel and Woods estimates, adjusted to reflect only adult mortality, become 30 and 33 per 1,000, respectively (equivalent to \( e(15) = 30 - 33 \), or a life expectancy for those surviving childhood of between 45 and 48 years).\(^6\)

These estimates are probably optimistic for the total Roman sarcophagus population because the benefits of wealth — the command of palliative care and especially the privilege of leaving the infested city — was less marked among the sub-élite than within the élite. To avoid a false sense of precision, the mortality of adult Romans within the previously defined income bands will be represented by the crude numerical average of these calculations, half-way between 40 per 1,000 (the general adult, urban morality) and 30-33 per 1,000 (the “wealthy” adult urban group), or 36 per 1,000, a life expectancy of about 43 years.

The fourth potential adjustment concerns an alleged mortality benefit to being a Christian. The reasoning is material, not spiritual. Stark argued for a significant, indeed a game-changing advantage arising from Christian charity and care of the sick, proposing that it led to a two-thirds reduction in mortality during outbreaks of pestilence.\(^7\) The texts are not entirely reliable, and the quantification is both unlikely and unsupported. Stark cites only the views of unreferenced “modern medical experts” regarding the possible benefit of “conscientious nursing.” To the extent this refers to the provision of food and water, it has already been accounted for, although not as enthusiastically as Stark would suggest. The

\(^6\) Scheidel ascribes the urban rich a level of mortality equal to the empire-wide figure for all. Using the figures adopted here, this means that their death rate is 40 instead of 60 per 1,000, which translates into \( e(0) \) of 25 instead of 16.66, a difference of over 8 years. The adult urban mortality adopted above is 40 per 1,000, implying \( e(15) = 25 \). Adding 8 years (or 5 years) increases that to 33 (or 30). The death rate is the reciprocal, 30 or 33 per 1,000.

\(^7\) Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 82–93; Rodney Stark, “Epidemics, Networks, and the Rise of Christianity,” in *Social Networks in the Early Christian Environment: Issues and Methods for Social History*, ed. L. Michael White (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1991), 159–175. His textual sources are from Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1.160–162, 1.171–173. Stark also suggested a multiplier effect through enhanced conversion in succeeding years attributable to both the survival of more potential converters and the marketing impact of their having ministered to those outside the community. This would be important to his thesis that plagues assisted Christian expansion, although not to the number of deaths in the Christian sarcophagus population in the short run.
élite and most of the sub-élite would generally have had access to this care whatever their religion. No other medical treatment available would have had any (positive) impact.

The final issue is not a possible upward or downward adjustment to mortality but a recollection of its volatility. Romans faced recurring seasonal contagions and unpredictable bouts of debilitating or catastrophic pestilence.\textsuperscript{71} According to the \textit{Scriptores Historiae Augustae}, an outbreak in the mid-third century caused as many as 5,000 deaths in a single day.\textsuperscript{72} The real figure was probably closer to 2,000,\textsuperscript{73} still a substantial increase in peak mortality. Of the epidemics that occurred over the next 150 years, all but two were limited to, or at least only noted with respect to, the eastern and African provinces.\textsuperscript{74} Relying on such sources — and there is no archaeological or other evidence — one would conclude that Rome was relatively lucky during the entire period of Christian sarcophagus production. However, even if no such event caught the attention of the chroniclers, Rome cannot have been entirely spared from perhaps less catastrophic, serial eruptions of infectious disease.

Variability in mortality was important to sarcophagus production and consumption. The annual pattern made production a seasonal business while the unpredictable swings

\textsuperscript{71} On regular contagions, see Brent Shaw, “Seasons of Death: Aspects of Mortality in Imperial Rome,” \textit{The Journal of Roman Studies} 86 (1996): 100–138; Scheidel, “Disease and Death,” 2–5. Scheidel attributes the pattern mainly to malaria, either alone or in combination with other diseases, supported by Sallares, \textit{Malaria and Rome}, 115–122. In addition to disease, there were also famines. Dionysios Ch. Stathakopoulos, \textit{Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire: A Systematic Survey of Subsistence Crises and Epidemics} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 57–61, notes nine events in his catalogue affecting the city of Rome. However while food shortages undoubtedly had an impact on urban mortality, the main result was price inflation, which actually benefited wealthy land-owners. See Peter Fibiger Bang, “Imperial Bazaar: Towards a Comparative Understanding of Markets in the Roman Empire,” in \textit{Ancient Economies, Modern Methodologies: Archaeology, Comparative History, Models and Institutions}, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang, Mamoru Ikeguchi and Hartmut G. Ziche (Bari: Edipuglia, 2006), 71–73.

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Scriptores Historiae Augustae}, Gall. 5.5 “Normal” deaths would be closer to 80 per day at a crude death rate of 40 per 1,000, or 125 at 60 per 1,000.

\textsuperscript{73} This is the figure reported by Dio Cassius for the Antonine Plague of the preceding century. See Scheidel, “Germs for Rome,” 170–171, and particularly his “verification” calculation at 171n57. This second-century plague could have killed 20% or even one-third of the urban population: Frier, “Demography,” 815–816 (10% empire-wide and double that in cities); Scheidel, “Disease and Death,” 7 (“a third (?)”). The \textit{Scriptores Historiae Augustae} is notoriously unreliable.

\textsuperscript{74} Stathakopoulos, \textit{Famine and Pestilence}, refers to thirteen epidemics outside of Rome between 300 and 410. He references a retrospective account by Theophanes in the ninth century of famines and epidemics striking across the Empire in 304 to 305, but with Stathakopoulos I see this as little more than a cliché for “bad times.”
presented additional challenges. Workshops had to increase production on short notice (inevitably coinciding with a loss of capacity since the artisans died along with their customers) and then reduce it without losing skilled labour needed for the next upturn. The extreme conditions brought on by epidemics that led to mass burials of the poor must also have prevented or at least deferred proper funeral rites and deposition in a sarcophagus for some who would normally have been accorded these privileges. Such considerations do not affect the basic mortality calculations but are a reminder of their volatility.

To recapitulate, we began with an estimated crude death rate of 33 to 50 per 1,000 for the Roman Empire as a whole, based on life expectancy at birth of between 20 and 30 years. Choosing the midpoint, e(0) = 25, or mortality of 40 per 1,000, three adjustments were then made. First, to account for the excess mortality attributable to the urban graveyard effect the figure was increased to 60 per 1,000. Second, in order to eliminate children, who are vastly under-represented in surviving sarcophagi, life expectancy was supposed to be 25 years for those surviving to age 15, reducing mortality in this adult group back to 40 per 1,000. Finally, a further decrease was made to account for the wealth effect, conservatively increasing life expectancy by a few years and reducing mortality to 36 per 1,000. No adjustment was made for any “Christian advantage.” Variability is noted but cannot be systematically accounted for.

5. Conclusions

With a declining urban population, progressive wealth concentration and reduced average per capita income, the sarcophagus population in Rome declined from over 60,000 in 250 CE, to around 45,000 in 300, 30,000 in 350, and under 20,000 by 400 (Table 2.5). Christians, representing an ever-increasing proportion of the total population (Table 2.6), were probably somewhat under-represented in this high status group at the beginning of the fourth century, but their presence thereafter moved towards the average relatively quickly. From around 7,000 in 300 CE, the Christian sarcophagus population in Rome might have doubled by the end of the century (Table 2.7).
The adult crude death rate within this population was estimated at about 36 per 1,000 based on a common assumption regarding mortality in the Roman Empire, subject to various adjustments: an increase to account for excess urban mortality, a roughly equal decrease to exclude children, and a further modest, and perhaps conservative, reduction to reflect the impact of wealth. Table 2.8 applies this derived death rate to the Roman Christian sarcophagus population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Christian sarcophagus population</th>
<th>Adult death rate</th>
<th>Adult Christian deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350</td>
<td>11,200</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>14,063</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.8: Christian deaths in the sarcophagus population of Rome

A similar number of Christian infants and children must have died, but they left only a faint trace among the extant sarcophagi.

These numbers are not hard statistics, but they do communicate information. They temper our understanding of the demand for Roman Christian sarcophagi. On a cumulative basis, deaths in this segment of the sarcophagus population over the course of more than a century are significant, but the annual number was modest. The figures in Table 2.8 represent the limiting case. Several liberal assumptions have been embedded in the calculations, including a generous inclusion of “low-sub-élite” and rather modest increase in life expectancy to reflect wealth. Probably more important, a non-trivial proportion of households that could acquire a sarcophagus must have chosen not to do so.

The discussion in this chapter also provides a qualitative basis for caution in modern descriptions of the sarcophagus population. References to its being composed of high-ranking military families, senior bureaucrats and professionals are not incorrect, but they can be misleading. In a society where 85% or even 95% of the people lived at, below or not
much above subsistence, these other households enjoyed an economic and social position quite different from those in the twenty-first century with similar designations.

Another observation concerns not the absolute number of sarcophagi but the development of the market. It did not increase exponentially during the period of Christian sarcophagus production. The success of Christianity and its penetration into the upper reaches of Roman society are not reflected in an equally dramatic growth in sarcophagus production because the impact of conversion was offset by a decline in the population of Rome and an ever-increasing concentration of wealth. With generous assumptions, the maximum market never exceeds 250 per year.

A further inference concerns habits of commemoration. The number of deaths in the Christian sarcophagus population increased yet the number of sarcophagi produced seemed to decrease, at least based on what has survived and conventional views of dating. This suggests a secular decline in demand. Prices may have risen, but this is an unlikely cause given the greater concentration of wealth. It more likely reflects changing mentalities or practices in connection with burial.\footnote{75 Hugo Brandenburg, “Das Ende der antiken Sarkophagkunst in Rom: Pagane und christliche Sarkophage in Rom,” in \textit{Akten des Symposiums “Frühchristliche Sarkophage”: Marburg, 30.6.–4.7.1999}, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 22–23, suggested a social or intellectual rationale for the sharp reduction in the use of figural sarcophagi in Rome. Others have connected it to the sack in 410. See Guntram Koch, \textit{Frühchristliche Sarkophage} (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 223, 339.}

Finally, these quantitative reflections suggest a postscript concerning the archaeological record. The preserved monuments must represent a more significant proportion of the original production than often supposed. Koch, for example, calculated that more than 10,000 Christian Roman sarcophagi were made in the period from 312/313 to 325. This was on the basis that the surviving corpus, which he estimated to be greater than 200, represents about 2% of the original number.\footnote{76 Koch, \textit{Frühchristliche Sarkophage}, 79. Elsewhere, referring to the whole of Roman imperial sarcophagus production from around 120 to 310, Koch put forward two possible survival rates, 2% and 5%; Guntram Koch, \textit{Sarkophage der römischen Kaiserzeit} (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993), 1. It is not clear why he preferred the lower rate for Christian, fourth-century monuments.} Yet even making the counter-factual assumption that every death in the adult Christian sarcophagus population of Rome was
commemorated by a sarcophagus, the upper limit on demand is only about 1,600 (applying Table 2.8). More generally, the 600 to 1,300 extant Christian, metropolitan sarcophagi probably represent not 2% but 10%, or even 20%, of all those originally produced.\textsuperscript{77} The survival rate affects a number of our judgments and inferences about sarcophagi. For example, it has been remarked that calling an unusual monument a unicum is misleading because of the likelihood of there having been other, similar products that are now lost; however, the rarity of the outlier depends on the proportion of original production that is still available for study.\textsuperscript{78}

6. Addendum: Ex-Jews among the Christians

Having regard, among other things, to the prevalence of Old Testament imagery on Christian sarcophagi, it would also be interesting to know whether the Christian sarcophagus population of Rome consisted to any significant extent of converted Jews.\textsuperscript{79} Arithmetic indicates that the answer is negative.

The first Christians were Jews and later growth was fuelled by conversion of both Jews and the Gentiles. Scholars have long disagreed how successful the former mission was. The answer depends on how one measures success. If the question is whether most Jews converted to Christianity, the answer is negative. Hopkins calculated that if as few as one-

\textsuperscript{77} The range of estimates for the corpus depends mainly on classification, the low figure reflecting the catalogue in Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage and the high figure the Repertorium (on the assumption that most sarcophagi found outside Rome were not originally used for deposition there). The survival rate depends on how conservative one regards the figures in Table 2.8 and the proportion of Roman Christians with the means to purchase a sarcophagus who failed to do so, which probably increased later in the century. Ben Russell, "The Roman Sarcophagus ‘Industry’: A Reconsideration," in Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi, ed. Jaš Elsner and Janet Huskinson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 127, using an entirely different approach, proposed a survival rate of 20% for all sarcophagi produced between 120 and 310 CE.

\textsuperscript{78} Michael Koortbojian, "Jaš Elsner and Janet Huskinson (edd.), Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi," Journal of Roman Archaeology 25 (2012), 632, reminds us that “unique” sarcophagi might well not be alone: “Yet given the consensus view of the meager percentage of ancient monuments that survive, how does one know which extant sarcophagus designs are unique?” The less meager this percentage, the more robust the judgment that a particular form was, if not unique, at least exceedingly rare.

\textsuperscript{79} This is not to suggest that individual conversion was the main basis for the interaction between Jews and Christians and the interpenetration of Jewish with Christian customs, literature and practices. See, generally, Leonard Victor Rutgers, The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995).
thirtieth of the Jews converted, all the Christians of 175 CE would be ex-Jews, which clearly was not the case.\textsuperscript{80} A different and more relevant measure of success for purposes of this study is the portion of Christians who are converted Jews. On this question scholarly responses range from Hopkins, who concluded that ex-Jews probably still constituted the majority of Christians as late as 150 CE, to David Sim, who estimated that the original Jewish adherents were outnumbered by ex-Gentiles as early as 40 CE and by the end of the first century represented only 5% of the total Christian population.\textsuperscript{81}

Whatever the situation in the first few centuries, there comes a point at which the math no longer works. Jewish conversion undoubtedly continued,\textsuperscript{82} but it could not indefinitely fuel Christian growth. In 250, assuming some 1.1 million Christians in the Roman Empire (Table 2.6), 3.4% annual growth requires 41,000 converts. Half of these could theoretically have been Jews without destabilizing the Jewish population, although it would quickly be depleted to a far greater extent than is credible.\textsuperscript{83} By 300, when annual conversions to Christianity averaged perhaps 200,000, Jews could not have dominated this process without

\textsuperscript{80} Hopkins, “Christian Number,” 214–215.
\textsuperscript{82} This is evidenced by later legal texts where such conversion is either protected and promoted (CTh 16.8.1 and 16.8.5) or discouraged (at least if insincere, CTh 9.45.2). However references to Jewish conversion are not common after the early centuries, and Ammon Linder, The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987), 79, concluded that this silence suggests “its dimensions were quite modest during the fourth to sixth centuries.”
\textsuperscript{83} Estimation of the Jewish population of the empire suffers all the same difficulties as overall estimates plus others of its own. Brian McGing, “Population and Proselytism: How Many Jews were there in the Ancient World?” in Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities, ed. John R. Bartlett (London: Routledge, 2002), 106, concluded: “I do not believe we have the first notion of how many Jews there were in the ancient world, even roughly speaking, nor do we have any means to discover it.” Even so, 20,000 converts in one year would probably be manageable, depending on where they were.
essentially disappearing. If Jews accounted for half the new Christians in the first half of the fourth century there would have been none left.

Turning to the city of Rome, the number of Jews in the first century has been estimated between 10,000 and 60,000. Recent scholarship generally prefers the lower end of that range. It was probably stable thereafter, subject to the occasional expulsion. If the Christian population of Rome was 30,000 to 50,000 in 250 CE, and increased to between 120,000 and 200,000 by 300, only a very small portion of that increment could have been supplied by Jews. Since the sarcophagus population constituted a small fraction of the total Christian population, it could theoretically have been composed in greater proportion of converted Jews, but this would be the case only under the improbable assumption that Jews were vastly over-represented among the wealthy.

84 Stark, Cities of God, 136–138, argued that the Jewish population was depleted, citing its much diminished presence by the end of the first millennium. The situation 600 years later is not of great value in assessing fourth-century conversion rates, but even accepting depletion, Stark’s claim (49) that “Jews continued as a significant source of Christian converts until at least as late as the fourth century” is surprising. In theory, that depletion could be mitigated by the conversion of Christians or pagans to Judaism, but this phenomenon was marginal. Bouffartigue, “Le passage d’une religion à une autre,” 26, noted that Christian sources address conversion from paganism to Christianity, very occasionally the reverse, and almost never from Christianity to Judaism, while pagan and Jewish sources rarely refer to conversion at all. A few legal texts do refer to conversion from Christianity to Judaism (discouraged in CTh 16.7.3, 16.8.1 and 16.8.7), and indeed a prohibition against (presumably non-Jewish) citizens being circumcised appears already in the late third century: Linder, Roman Imperial Legislation, 117–120. Such decrees indicate that conversion to Judaism did occur, but the numbers seem to have been modest and were presumably restrained by legal dissuasion. Leonard Victor Rutgers, “The Jews of Italy: C. 235–638,” in The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period, ed. Stephen J. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 494, expresses doubt regarding the hypothesis that Jewish numbers increased significantly in the later empire.


86 Jews were undoubtedly present in this group but more likely under- than over-represented. Salzman, Christian Aristocracy, 239, found no Jewish aristocrats at all in the western empire, probably because of her narrow definition of “aristocrat.” Fourth-century legal references confirm that Jews were decurions (CTh 16.8.2) and slave-owners (Const.Sirm. 4, CTh 16.8.5, 16.9.2, 3.1.5). They were excluded from service in the imperial administration in 418 (CTh 16.8.24), and the text clearly indicates that they were still engaged in such activity at that time. Jews and Samaritans were stripped of honours and dignities in 404 (CTh 16.8.16). Indeed, prohibitions in the sixth century suggest a persistence of Jewish office-holders. These scattered references do not, however, suggest that Jews were over-represented in these groups.
Chapter 3. The death of the viewer?

At stake in this final element of context is not merely the character but the very existence of reception. Some scholars have argued that there were no viewers of Christian sarcophagi, or if there were, their experience was fleeting, limited, superficial and unimportant. The images either went unseen or it was indifferent whether they were seen or not. The first section below presents the hypothesis of invisibility and the second considers the evidence upon which it is based. The chapter ends with a positive argument in favour of visibility and the engagement of the viewer.

1. The challenge

Jutta Dresken-Weiland concluded her study of sarcophagal burials with a chapter entitled “On the above- and below-ground placement of decorated and undecorated sarcophagi and the role of the viewer,”1 throwing down the gauntlet before Romanists who had recently and belatedly embraced reception theory, notably Paul Zanker.2 Dresken-Weiland mustereds various categories of evidence for her position: principally the reported find-spots

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of many sarcophagi under floors or behind walls, but also such factors as the small size of some family mausolea that limited the number of potential viewers, the apparent insouciance regarding decoration of a few high-ranking patrons, and examples of decoration or inscriptions found on the interior of the chest. She concluded that “antique pagans and Christians neither developed an intense relationship with funerary images nor attributed great importance to them” and, as a result, that “the supposed orientation of the pagan and Early Christian funeral art towards a viewer or some kind of representative function is in need of review.”

Beat Brenk not only agreed with Dresken-Weiland regarding the significance of partial or complete invisibility, he implied she had not taken her own thesis far enough. Her concession of other “concurrent explanations” for sarcophagus placement — lack of space or protection against theft — underemphasized the problems posed by invisible images. Brenk concluded: “That an image must be painted or chiselled solely to be viewed is a thoroughly modern idea. Early Christian images are comprehensible only when studied in their original context, where it was indifferent if they were visible or not.”

If we take the viewer out of the equation, who is left? For Dresken-Weiland, the representations on Christian sarcophagi were addressed primary to the deceased.

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3 The first quotation is from Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “Recherches sur les sépultures paléochrétiennes en sarcophages (Occident, IVe–Vie siècles),” Antiquité Tardive 11 (2004): 319 (a French-language report of her dissertation): “...les hommes de l'Antiquité païenne et chrétienne n'ont ni développé une relation intense aux images sépulcrales, ni ne leur ont attribué une grande importance.” The second is from the English-language summary in her Sarkophagbestattungen, 214. At another point in that book (195), the author observes that the images on sarcophagi were of "secondary importance."


5 Brenk, "Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility,” 157.

Brenk, the principal function of partially or poorly visible Christian images (his main focus was mosaics and wall paintings) was to express social standing by using a borrowed imperial rhetoric. Or perhaps early Christian figural carving was meant for the eyes of God. These provocations will be met in the final part of this chapter, but a few preliminary observations should be made at this stage in order to prepare the review of evidence.

One concerns the relationship between self-representation and reception. Dresken-Weiland cited a number of examples of funerary representation that are, in her view, inconsistent with the condition of the deceased. The underlying premise seems to be that the function of addressing a sarcophagus viewer is to communicate something by or about the patron or occupant; an absence of self-representation is, therefore, tantamount to indifference regarding the viewer. This reasoning unduly narrows the richness of reception.

A second clarification concerns the use of the term “visible.” Roman historians have long debated the implications of imagery placed high up and far away from the viewer, in particular the historiated columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Paul Veyne, invoking Thorstein Veblen’s “conspicuous consumption,” argued that these monuments had no content; they were pure expressions of imperial power, authority and grandeur. While

and Burial in the Roman World (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 275, concluded that Christian as well as non-Christian sarcophagi were meant to be “admired and meditated on” if they were placed so as to be visible but if hidden away, they “must... have mainly been designed to please the dead.” Brenk, “Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility,” 157–159.


Veyne uses expressions like "works of art without viewers" and describes certain imperial images as "invisible," what he is really talking about is illegible representations on visually prominent monuments. "Conspicuous" consumption is, by definition, visible. The spiral columns punctuated the Roman skyline and were meant to be seen. Their upper scenes, the ones whose distance and acute viewing angle render them most difficult to make out, were also closest to the imperial statue on top that attracted the eye and admiration of the beholder. Brenk, too, considers the puzzle of the columns and concludes: “To recognize imperial Magnificencia, there was no need for the viewer to ‘read’ the whole cycle of reliefs; he only needed to open his eyes!” Far from invoking invisibility, then, both Veyne and Brenk actually stress the ostentatious visibility of these representations, while simultaneously denying any requirement for legibility. Far from rejecting the viewer, these explanations of distant relief carving on Roman columns or dimly-lit apse mosaics explicitly rely on visual apprehension. What they reject is any need for beholders to apprehend or articulate the details of what they see.

The issues in connection with sarcophagi are not quite the same. The claim in this case is that they, or at least many of them, were truly invisible, not just illegible. Thus, when he turned his attention to sarcophagi, Brenk reversed Veyne’s argument on conspicuous consumption (albeit without referring to it): "Quite unlike the limousine in today’s consumer society, which wants to be seen, a sarcophagus requires no beholder, much less an iconographically interested art-lover.” This turns the “expression” theory on its head. The upper scenes of Trajan’s column are just as important for the effect of magnificence

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11 Brenk, "Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility," 143. Various theories to explain (or explain away) the illegibility of the historiated columns are espoused in the essays collected in John Scheid and Valérie Huet (eds.), La colonne Aurélienne: autour de la colonne Aurélienne, geste et image sur la colonne de Marc Aurèle à Rome (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000).
12 A third dimension concerns the capacity of the viewer to comprehend that which is both visible and legible. Brenk, "Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility," 149–150, argues that many mosaic programs were beyond the intellectual capacity of the public and rejects any notion of an “interpreter.” He does not mention sarcophagi in this context and most of these funerary representations were much simpler than the mosaic programs. Comprehension will be part of the discussion of the images themselves in chapters 5 and 7.
and grandeur as the lower ones, perhaps in a way even more so precisely because they are elaborately carved yet difficult to read. The column would hardly have the same effect if the top spirals were blank.

A third preliminary comment regards the temptation to generalize from other times and contexts. There may be similarities in the experience of poorly lit apse mosaics among late antique, medieval and Renaissance Christians, and perhaps in certain respects those can inform our understanding of sarcophagus viewing in fourth-century Rome. Such trans-historical and inter-contextual generalizations should, however, yield before the particularities of these monuments. Sarcophagi appeared as Christians were becoming more numerous among the Roman élite and sub-élite. Symbols, themes and figures that now seem quaint, trite, naive or commonplace were still fresh, creative, meaningful and novel. To Christian viewers under the Tetrarchs or Constantine, a glimpse of Jonah at rest under a gourd plant was significant, evoking central tenets of a religion to which the deceased, viewer or patron might have only recently converted (the gamut of reception of the Jonah theme being the subject of chapter 5).

Finally, the space of the tomb had a special visual character for Romans; its emotional and spiritual intensity might have been even greater among Christians, whose religion was especially levered on the moment and significance of death (as discussed in the Conclusion). Similar forms of representation can have different meanings in different places. Analogous conditions of access may engender different experiences of reception. A darkened church apse during the Eucharist is not a darkened tomb chamber during a private funeral. Even within the funerary space, sarcophagus relief carving should not be equated with wall painting. The difference in medium concerns not only the usual issues of variation in technique and appearance, but also social standing. The significant disparity in the choice and presentation of subjects on sarcophagi and catacomb walls indicate that

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14 On the Bildräume of Roman viewers, the work of Zanker is fundamental, including “Bild-Räume und Betrachter”; “Il mondo delle immagini e la comunicazione,” in Roma antica, trans. Francesco de Angelis, ed. Andrea Giardina (Rome: Laterza, 2000). See also Elsner, Art and the Roman Viewer and the discussion in my Introduction.

even though the Bildraum might seem to be the same, sarcophagi must be regarded in their own right.  

2. The evidence

The challenge to reception relies upon one of its own core concepts, conditions of access. In a formulation particularly apt for this discussion, Wolfgang Kemp referred to “external handicaps of reception.” The first three parts of this section address aspects of those possible handicaps. The first concerns placement. More than any other factor, find-spots have been invoked as the reason to doubt their visibility and to infer the unimportance of their imagery and an indifference to viewers. Concluding that sarcophagi were in fact viewed, the second part examines the extent of these viewing opportunities (i.e., frequency and longevity) and the scope of participation. The third turns to the visual or perceptual conditions that govern the reception experience. The penultimate part addresses the claim that images on the interior surfaces of sarcophagi are a further indication of the insignificance of the carvings on the outside. The section ends with a consideration of the implications for reception of the almost universal practice of Roman sarcophagus workshops to leave the backs uncarved.

a) Placement of Christian sarcophagi

On their death, wealthy third-century Romans were deposited in a family tomb, whether a free-standing mausoleum, a funerary garden on a suburban estate, or a “development” containing several contiguous or attached grave buildings. Shifting religious identification did not immediately alter this practice. Archaeological evidence, such as it is, suggests that

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16 The distinctions permeate Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort; she attributes them to different patronage (332).
Roman Christian sarcophagi were usually placed in such sepulchral structures, which slowly migrated in the direction of the church, taking the form of annexes. While the mausoleum, broadly understood, remained the principal space for the deposition of sarcophagi, they might also be placed in below-ground hypogea and catacombs, within church buildings themselves, or in adjacent “cemeteries.” It should be emphasized that in the large majority of cases, the information regarding placement of sarcophagi is sketchy and often unreliable. Jaś Elsner has referred to the almost complete loss of archaeological context as “little short of catastrophic.”

The most complete study of sarcophagus placement was undertaken by Jutta Dresken-Weiland. While her catalogue is impressive, its relative brevity when compared to the total number of known monuments confirms Elsner’s lament. Where it exists, the information consists almost exclusively of modern find-spots (or more nebulous “find-areas”). In a few cases there may be some archaeological evidence of restructuring or renovation of the tomb area.

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20 Jaś Elsner, “Introduction,” in Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi, ed. Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 5–6. “Context” here extends far beyond the modern archaeologist’s fieldwork notation of strata or other component parts of a site to such basic matters as location and the relation of the sarcophagus to, or even the existence of, other furnishings or structures. On the lamentable state of the archaeological evidence of Roman burial due to a combination of factors including poor past recording, disturbance and reuse, see Neil Christie, From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy, AD 300–800 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 153–156; Zanker and Ewald, Mit Mythen leben, 31.

21 Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 98–198, supported by a catalogue of find-spots, 295–425. Although Rome has pre-eminence in the discussion, she does include examples from across the Empire and for these, regional differences in funerary practice should not be ignored.

22 For Rome and Latium, Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, lists 31 sarcophagi in catacombs (Appendix 5D), 80 in churches (5E) and 121 in other contexts (5A). A large proportion of these are not Christian.
Many of the find reports refer to a preserved or inferred funerary structure. Sarcophagi associated with such buildings have been discovered in a variety of contexts: free-standing, immured, sunk into the pavement, and completely covered by earth. Others were found in catacombs, either upon or buried under the floor or placed in niches near the entrance to a cubiculum. Some sarcophagi seem to have been interred in the tufa or in a brick chamber unconnected to any funerary structure, although one can never be certain in these cases that the monument has not been displaced or evidence of a structure destroyed.

Notwithstanding the disappointing state of the archaeological record, reports of sarcophagi having been found hidden behind or under brickwork, pavement or dirt, are the prime evidence for the “invisibility” thesis. The first difficulty is the sample size. While the absolute number of sarcophagi that were discovered buried or immured is not insignificant, it represents a tiny proportion of the surviving corpus. Dresken-Weiland, for example, cites sixteen sarcophagi that were found under the pavement in Roman funerary buildings and thirteen found underground unconnected (or at least no longer susceptible of being connected) with any such structure. For the vast majority of sarcophagi, therefore, no record permits any determination of placement. It is legitimate, and in sarcophagus studies often necessary, to generalize from a small sample to a larger population, but only if that sample is likely to be representative of the whole. There is no way to know if this is the case for the reportedly hidden sarcophagi.

Second, although one might expect that especially well-carved or valuable specimens would be buried or immured as a means of protection, most of the sarcophagi so found actually

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23 Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen*, 186–189, particularly 186n574–576, also cited four inscriptions. (The last-mentioned footnote refers to three inscriptions and cross-references 101n18, which also presents three examples; however, two of these are duplications.) Her note 101n18 also provides examples of inscriptions that refer to above-ground placement, so the epigraphic evidence, aside from being very modest, is a double-edged sword.

24 Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen*, 187, expressed this very speculation even though it is not confirmed by her catalogue. Christ, *Junius Bassus*, 145–147, also suggested a correlation between burial and the degree of finish, but recognized that there were many counter-examples. She explained these (away) as a “side effect of over-abundant sarcophagus production.” There is no doubt that sarcophagus consumers were concerned about tomb violation, the subject of Title 17 of Book 9 of the Theodosian Code. On laws and inscribed curses meant to protect the tomb and its contents, see Éric Rebillard, *Religion et sépulture: l’église,*
display little or no figural decoration (and most of them are pre-Christian). The archaeological evidence may simply be insufficient to prove the predicted tendency to hide highly finished sarcophagi, but as it stands the number of buried or immured sarcophagi drops precipitously if we limit ourselves to those with overtly Christian imagery.

The third and most important evidential problem with reliance on the modern find-spot to infer anything about visibility is that the original deployment was probably different. Even Dresken-Weiland assumes that most sarcophagi were buried or immured only after the funeral, but the issue goes far beyond the funeral. The archaeological reports rarely provide any reason to think that the sarcophagus was originally placed where it was eventually found. On the contrary, they often point in the opposite direction, implying an original and probably continuing display. Many grave chambers — mausolea, hypogea and catacomb cubicula — still reveal traces of a niche or podium that seems designed to hold a sarcophagus. The natural conclusion is that a monument found buried or immured was likely removed from its original position and hidden below the pavement or behind a wall at some later date. Even a delay of a few months or years, an infinitesimal period in archaeological time, is significant, as it would permit considerable exposure to the gaze of visitors. It may well have been much longer.

In a few cases, archaeology in fact provides positive evidence that a sarcophagus was immured or buried only later, generally to make room for additional sarcophagi in the same grave structure, or upon reuse. Janet Huskinson cites a second-century sarcophagus reused by other family members and then placed in a newly-built subterranean and enclosed space. The Sarcophagus of Adelphia in Syracuse was found beneath a niche in a catacomb

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25 Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 187, but citing two cases in which the evidence suggests, in her view, that the sarcophagus was immured before. Both of these examples involve undecorated coffins.

26 Janet Huskinson, “Habent Sua Fata: Writing Life Histories of Roman Sarcophagi,” in Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi, ed. Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 58–61, referring to the Pianabella Sarcophagus in the Ostia Museum. It was produced around 160, displayed in unknown manner and then re-used in the second or third century by other family members. At some point in this process, it was placed below floor-level in a space made to accommodate it. Huskinson also questions (68n47) how we can be certain that the Borghese Sarcophagus (front in the Musée du Louvre,
chamber but its undecorated sides are consistent with an original placement in just this niche. The sarcophagus was probably produced in the first half of the fourth century and reused in the fifth. A reasonable hypothesis is that it was buried upon the reuse. More generally, the phenomenon of reuse and rededication of sarcophagi supports viewer access; while it is possible that a sarcophagus was discovered behind a wall or under the pavement, removed, perhaps inscribed or subjected to further carving, and then used again for a new deposition, it is more likely that a redeployed sarcophagus had remained exposed to view.

The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Rep. I.680, ill. 68), found under the apse of St Peter’s in the late sixteenth century, is emblematic of the insecurity and ambiguity of claims about “immediate” burial of sarcophagi. Dresken-Weiland’s only stated reason for considering it to have been hidden away shortly after the funeral is the previously remarked supposition that such a luxurious monument would not otherwise have survived intact for long. Alice T. Christ put forward another argument in favour of immediate burial, based on some archaeological detective work concerning changes that were made to the area around the confessio where the chest was found. However, the earliest of these renovations was in the sixth century, leaving 150 years unaccounted for. Another well-known example is the Lot Sarcophagus, found 2.48 m under the pavement at San Sebastiano, Rome in 1950. It is noted for its well-preserved polychromy and a libation tube inserted through the lid, both of which factors might suggest (polychromy is discussed below) that it remained on the

inv. MA2980, back in the Musei Capitolini, Rome, inv. 2071; Rep. III.428 [ill. 56], Rep. I.829), although discovered buried below the floor in the fifteenth century, was originally so deposited.

Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale P. Orsi, inv. 864; Rep. II.20; Mariarita Sgarlata, “Il sarcofago di Adelfia,” in Et lux fuit: le catacombe e il sarcofago di Adelfia (Palermo: Arnalso Lombardi, 1998), 15–52. Sgarlata dated the chest on stylistic grounds and portrait hair styles to the second quarter of the fourth century. As evidence for reuse she highlighted (31) the smaller dimensions and differential state of conservation of the cover and the presence of a double portrait, even though the sarcophagus seems to have been used for a single burial (or at least only one body was found in it). The inscription states that a certain “Baleri” commemorated the deceased, the clarissima Adelfia (CIL 10.7123). Sgarlata suggested that this was not, as previously argued, a consul from the late Constantinian period but rather another individual of the same name active early in the fifth century.


surface as a participant in commemorative meals for some time. This is consistent with
evidence that the sarcophagus was damaged when two new occupants were placed inside,
presumably at a time when it was still accessible. In fact, upon perusing Dresken-Weiland’s
catalogue entries for sarcophagi found buried or immured, one is struck that so many
appear to have been moved or reused, suggesting a secondary rather than original
“invisibility.”

In the end, as so often occurs with Christian sarcophagus research, the evidence is messy
and incomplete. A few elaborately figured and expensive sarcophagi, even highlighted with
paint or gold, were hidden from sight behind walls or under pavements, but there is no
sound basis for the assumption that this occurred at the outset, and in some cases there is
positive evidence that it did not. The archaeological record, relied upon to “prove”
subterranean and intramural placement, actually confirms above ground (or, in catacombs,
above floor) use in funerary structures.31 The explosion of Christian mausoleum building
and the development of the “covered cemeteries” of Rome are inconsistent with a general
conclusion that sarcophagi were “invisible.”

b) The opportunity to view

Even before any funerary rites, consumers had an initial encounter with their sarcophagi
during the purchase transaction. It is unlikely that such expensive and complex goods were
bought sight unseen.32 Whoever paid for the monument — unless pre-arranged by the
deceased, most likely a spouse or family member — probably visited the workshop and saw

31 There are certainly records of sarcophagi that were found in a location still accessible to viewers, often in
catacombs because that provided some protection against centuries of grave robbers. Given the propensity of
valuable monuments to be stolen for reuse or recycling of material, this evidence should be given some
weight. Jean Guyon, “L’inhumation privilégiée dans un cimetiére romain au IVe siècle: l’exemple de la
nécropole ‘Aux deux lauriers’,” in L’Inhumation privilégiée du IVe au VIIIe siècle en Occident: actes du colloque
example, reports a sarcophagus (Rep. II.103) placed prominently in the apse of a cubiculum of the catacomb of
Marcellinus and Peter. Some grave chambers have yielded multiple unburied examples (e.g., the Porta Salaria

32 The same inference was drawn regarding pre-Christian sarcophagi by Paul Zanker, “Die mythologischen
Sarkophagreliefs und ihre Betrachter,” Sitzungsberichte, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften,
Philosophisch-Historische Klasse no. 2 (2000): 8. He emphasized this viewing, along with sight upon initial
installation, as the minimum limiting case for occasions of detailed visibility (44n13).
the sarcophagus during its production. Although one tends to focus on the relief carving, recall that the stone might be more expensive than the craftsmanship (chapter 1). One can imagine that consumers wished to determine whether their purchase was monolithic or cobbled together and verify its size, shape, colouration, and veins. In this process, they might have seen drawings or scratched incisions indicating the planned imagery (none of which survive, as remarked in the Introduction) as well as the actual carving, perhaps at several stages of completion. Even if a buyer only saw drawings she or he would still be a “viewer” of the representations that eventually appeared on the funerary monument.

This initial opportunity to view was limited in time and restricted in audience. More viewers had more extensive visual access when the sarcophagus was put into use. There is no direct evidence regarding the participation of sarcophagi in Christian funerary or commemorative ritual. Some inferences, however, may be drawn. The first two are negative. Marble sarcophagi were far too heavy to be carried in processions, so they would not have been seen in the funeral cortège. And since literary sources and inscriptions indicate that burial within one or at most three days was the norm, it is unlikely that sarcophagi were encountered during the preliminary rites carried out in the home. They must normally have been delivered directly from the workshop to their final destination.

Some sarcophagi were seen at the funeral. That was possible if the sarcophagus had been commissioned in advance, or where a spouse was being deposited in a sarcophagus already occupied by the predeceased partner, but otherwise time would have been tight for the monument to be ready so quickly, even if it had been produced to stock rather than on commission and required only some finishing or inscription. Sarcophagi not ready in time would have had to be abandoned. These final stages were not always so laconic. If it was a family member who was being buried, the sarcophagus was normally produced especially for the deceased, a custom that can be observed at Campania in several sarcophagi.


34 Christ, “Junius Bassus,” 151, thought delivery was generally before the funeral, but even the most optimistic views regarding production do not permit them to be carved in less than a week. Klaus Eichner, “Die Produktionsmethoden der stadtrömischen Sarkophagfabrik in der Blützeit unter Konstantin,” Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 24 (1981): 112, argued that a mass production facility could produce a Constantinian frieze sarcophagus in seven to eight days. On manpower requirements for carving, see the discussion under “Cost of Labour” in chapter 1, above. The issue of preproduction was discussed briefly in connection with sarcophagus dating in the Introduction.
for the funeral might have been deposited to coincide with one of the several later milestones in the funerary calendar. Once put in place, so long as the sarcophagus remained on the floor or in a niche, viewers had regular and repeated opportunities at these events to see it and remember the deceased, probably celebrating with a commemorative meal. Traditional Roman observances on the ninth and fortieth days following death, on anniversaries of the deceased’s birthday, the February Parentalia and other feast days were adopted, with some modifications (notably replacing birthdays with the date of death), among Christians.\textsuperscript{35}

Many viewers also had occasion to see monuments other than the one that was the purpose of their visit, since grave chambers and covered cemeteries often held several of them. Sarcophagus viewing could, therefore, be more frequent than the commemorative calendar for any one deceased might suggest. This phenomenon provided viewers the opportunity to see (and compare) other monuments that related to funerals they had missed or to which they had not been invited. Outsiders might have a glimpse of sarcophagi belonging to other families when passing by catacomb cubicula in which they had been placed, although the lighting conditions would have limited the effect.\textsuperscript{36}

Commemorations of the dead were family events, although “family” may designate anything from the two-generation nuclear family group to an extended, multi-generational web of relationships determined by blood or marriage, or even the Roman household including slaves and economic dependents. In the case of particularly high status


\textsuperscript{36} Gisela Cantino Wataghin, “I primi cristiani, tra \textit{imagines, historiae e pictura: spunti di riflessione},” \textit{Antiquité Tardive} 19 (2011): 27–28, refers to the opportunity of strangers to peek into the partially opened spaces of cubicula belonging to other families. However, unless by coincidence a commemorative event was in process or the particular chamber was illuminated by an opening above, visibility and legibility of painting and sarcophagus imagery would have been severely limited.
individuals, a broader range of friends, clients and political figures might attend commemorative events, subject to space restrictions. At the very least, the group assembled at the tomb must have included those who commissioned these monuments and other close relatives, probably with more distant relations and others in proportion to status. It is not an etymological coincidence that the annual feast for the dead was called the Parentalia.\textsuperscript{37}

In sum, Elsner’s view, intended to be restrictive, leaves considerable scope for viewing:

The question of when such tombs were available to visitors or to display is also an open one – and it may be no more often than on the anniversary of decease or when a new burial was added; likewise the issue of to whom such display was made possible (just family? chosen visitors? slaves and freedmen? long-standing clients?) is unresolved and likely never to be soluble.\textsuperscript{38}

c) Visual stimuli

Sarcophagi are not inconspicuous. Adult monuments averaged over two metres in length (see Table 1.1) and the largest could be one and one-half metres high and deep. Some spacious grave rooms accumulated several of them as deceased family members were added. Other chambers were cramped, able to accommodate no more than two or three visitors. The rooms of the Vatican Necropolis, for example, vary from 60 down to 3.2 square metres.\textsuperscript{39} Although these date to an earlier period, some were Christianized, whether by family conversion or subsequent acquisition.\textsuperscript{40} Other Roman grave chambers also became

\textsuperscript{37} Observed by Brent Shaw, “The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine,” \textit{Past and Present} 115 (1987): 28. Shaw also notes that family relationships were paramount in the rituals associated with death (27). He concludes that the nuclear family was a core around which the larger units were constructed, but makes no specific suggestions regarding attendance at funerary rites.

\textsuperscript{38} Elsner, “Introduction,” 7.

\textsuperscript{39} Toynbee, \textit{Death and Burial}, 87–88.

\textsuperscript{40} For example Tomb Z, the “Tomb of the Egyptians,” went through several phases. It was probably built in the second century for an Egyptian family residing in Rome, received two figural sarcophagi with Dionysiac themes attributed to the end of the second century and the first part of the third, and then another terracotta chest from the middle of the century (two more were moved into this chamber from another). Finally, a modest terracotta sarcophagus with an inscription and symbols suggesting a Christian deceased was placed into a recess in the wall. The square room, almost five metres on a side, held all these monuments without overcrowding. See J.M.C. Toynbee and J. B. Ward-Perkins, \textit{The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations} (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 51–57; Zanker and Ewald, \textit{Mit Mythen leben}, 254–255. Other
Christian and many new ones were built following the Roman model. Subterranean hypogea or catacomb cubicula later tended to be smaller, although Jean Guyon suggested that they grew over time, from around 4 metres by 2.5 metres in the early years of the fourth century and becoming larger after around 325, when they migrated progressively to the surface in the form of still larger and more comfortable mausolea, either free-standing or annexed to a church. Sarcophagi deposited in any of these chambers might be placed on the floor, against the walls or in niches. The viewing conditions depended on the size and shape of the space, the disposition of the sarcophagus and other furnishings, and lighting.

In the case of relatively open areas — church aisles or large grave chambers — many visitors could be present at once, able to circulate and view the sarcophagus from several vantage points. The sides might also be visible, although one or both would be hidden from view if it was stuffed into a niche, placed in a corner, or set up against other sarcophagi. In spaces that were small or crowded with an accumulation of funerary furnishings, the number of visitors and their freedom of movement were restricted. They would be pressed more tightly towards the object than what might be regarded as “ideal” for viewing. Yet while the viewer in cramped quarters would have difficulty taking in a panoramic depiction, these in fact rarely appear on Christian sarcophagi (the Red Sea chests being a notable exception). It could be challenging in small spaces to discern compositional relations between widely separated scenes — although many of these monuments lacked a coherent “program” requiring such comprehensive viewing — but the experience of these viewers

chambers that were Christianized are noted by Paolo Liverani and Giandomenico Spinola, The Vatican Necropoles: Rome’s City of the Dead, trans. Saskia Stevens and Victoria Noel-Johnson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), including Tomb R (136-139) and Tomb M or the Tomb of the Julii (114-119). In the latter case, Christianization is indicated by the mosaic decorations, including the prophet Jonah. This small room did not hold a sarcophagus.

41 Guyon, “L’inhumation privilégiée.”
42 On the Red Sea group, see chapter 5, note 98.
was also both more intimate and conducive to detailed examination than the wide-angle perspective.

Lighting is an important factor. Catacomb cubicula often had large skylights but both above and below-ground rooms relied to a great extent on the flickering light of oil lamps. It is difficult to recreate by mere imagination the visual stimuli in a fourth-century funerary space. The spectrum, intensity and irregularity of the source of illumination, the material and decoration of both the chamber walls and the sarcophagus, and the general character of the space all fall outside our everyday experience. An exciting initiative is the use of digital technologies to permit a virtual reconstitution of archaeological artifacts in assumed conditions of space and lighting. Unfortunately, no such studies have been published involving Roman sarcophagi.

Poor lighting impedes legibility. It has often been suggested that paint and gilding were applied at least in part to enhance it. A relatively recent revival of antique polychromy studies began with a focus on Greek sculpture. The Greek chromatic habits are generally

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45 The experience is evoked by Zanker and Ewald, Mit Mythen leben, 32.
considered to have been replicated in Roman art, although the evidence is less extensive, consistent and direct. The movement has only barely touched the corpus of Christian sarcophagi. There are a few well-known monuments with preserved pigment but most show no indications of polychromy and little technical work has been done to expand the scope of knowledge in this regard.


50 The four Christian sarcophagi most often cited are: (1) the “Polychrome Fragments” in the Museo Nazionale Romano (inv. 67606 and 6760; Rep. I.773; see Marina Sapelli, “La lastra polycroma con scene cristologiche del Museo Nazionale Romano: Osservazioni su struttura e tecnica,” in Akten des Symposions “Frühchristliche Sarkophage”: Marburg, 30.6.–4.7.1999, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 192, and the appended transcriptions of notes made by Pietrogrande, with good colour illustrations); (2) the Adelphia Sarcophagus in Syracuse (Museo Archeologico Regionale P. Orsi, inv. 864; Rep. II.20; see Sgarlata, “Il sarcofago
The two most important visual effects of sculptural polychromy on white marbles are usually said to be enhanced legibility and greater realism. Both are apparent in colourful recreations of such monuments as the archer on the pediment of the Temple of Aphaia in Aegina (a replica is now displayed in the Munich Glyptothek) and the Prima Porta Augustus (a photo is presented alongside an "original" preserved in the Vatican Museo Chiaramonti). The claim that polychromy was applied to render marble sculpture more naturalistic or pictorial has extended to Christian sarcophagi, with some equally garish reconstructions. As for legibility, the often restricted illumination of the tomb seems intuitively to favour the use of colour on these monuments.

Assumptions and intuitions based on the experience of outdoor Greek and Roman monuments may, however, be misleading. The lighting conditions of the tomb do not suggest a generalized use of lavish polychromy to mimic pictorial effects. In very low light, the perceived saturation of colours declines until they eventually disappear altogether; the ability to preserve the appearance of colours, referred to as "colour constancy," is also reduced. Moreover, the impact is not experienced consistently across the visible spectrum. Long wavelengths (towards the red) suffer more immediately than shorter wavelengths (blue). Thus, in very low light there is no colour perception at all and when the intensity of

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51 Martin Bradley, "The Importance of Colour on Ancient Marble Sculpture," *Art History* 32 (2009): 435–436, suggested four functions of sculptural polychromy: visibility, realism, finish and trompe l'oeil. The last has no application to Christian sarcophagi and "finish" is not so much a function as an explanation, an allusion to the supposed continuity of visual expectation among Romans that sculpture should be painted. See also Brinkmann, *Die Polychromie*, 21–22.

52 An extreme example is the hypothetical and somewhat dubious reconstruction proposed for an Adoration of the Magi on a Roman fourth-century sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Rep. I.41) by Georg Zluwa, "Hypotetische Farbgebung der Szene 'Anbetung durch die Weisen' auf der Sarkophagplatte Inv. 31 569 (ex 212), Rom/Museo Pio Cristiano," *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie* 14 (2008): 9–26 (see his ill. 2 and 15). Henning Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophage Roms: der Beitrag des Senatorenstandes zur römischen Kunst der hohen und späten Kaiserzeit* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2001), 189–190, suggested that the depictions of Probus on the Louvre Borghese Sarcophagus (Rep. III.428) would have adopted the colour scheme for the dress of a praetorian prefect as described in the sixth century by Ioannes Lydus. Pietrogrande, in the notes cited by Sapelli, "La lastra policroma," 193, considered what he regarded as an increased pictorial character of Christian sarcophagi effected by polychromy to be a result of the progressive assimilation of relief carving to painting instead of three-dimensional sculpture.
illumination is just above that threshold, the viewer suffers a chromatic illusion: blue appears lighter than red and returns to its “normal” position only as the light increases.\textsuperscript{53}

These facts of visual life suggest a different chromatic strategy for Christian sarcophagi placed in dim mausolea or catacombs than for those deposited in brighter spaces, let alone for outdoor monuments like the Column of Trajan. If producers knew or suspected the likely disposition of a given sarcophagus, the most extensive colour schemes would be reserved for the better lit monuments. A simplified palette could indicate, precisely, the artisan’s recognition that the viewer in a space illuminated by flickering oil lamps or weak indirect sunlight would not be able to distinguish subtle differences in hue, or might even misconstrue the chromatic relationships.\textsuperscript{54}

Lest one imagine that these are modern scientific sophistications unknown to antique sculptors, consider Virgil’s description of a nocturnal wood.

\begin{quote}
As one goes through a wood by a faint moon’s
Treacherous light, when Jupiter veils the sky
And black night blots the colors of the world.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

And whatever the sculptors understood, the physiology of perception governed the viewers’ experiences then as it does now.

With respect to legibility, the potential improvement from the addition of pigment depends upon both how it is applied and the hue. The prime culprit in poor legibility of representations carved in white marble is the juxtaposition of fields too close in relative luminance. Chiaroscuro helps, but painting can increase the contrast. This would suggest reinforcing certain ridges or edges, although not every drapery fold, and also a judicious choice of colour since the impact on legibility varies depending on the hue and whether the

\textsuperscript{53} These phenomena are remarked in standard textbooks on perception. See Arne Valberg, \textit{Light, Vision, Color} (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2005), 146, 151–152, 178.

\textsuperscript{54} Liverani, “New Evidence on Polychromy,” 296, recognized the phenomenon: “The reason for this simplified use of colour is probably the fact that the sarcophagi were located in dark tombs.”

\textsuperscript{55} Virgil, \textit{The Aeneid}, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1990), 6.270–272. The dependence of colour on light had previously been described by Aristotle, \textit{De Anima} II.7, 418b and 419a, and was noted in the Renaissance by such observers as Alberti and Leonardo.
adjacent field is light (as a flat marble surface) or dark (like a drill hole or incutting).Legibility, or intelligibility, might also be affected by the fact that a coloured area may appear brighter than a white patch of equal objective luminance (a phenomenon called “colour glow”). In theory, this apparent brightness could permit a highly saturated colour to draw attention to certain elements of a relief carving.

Perhaps some late Roman sarcophagi took account of the anticipated viewing conditions and adopted a sophisticated chromatic strategy intended to promote legibility. This might explain practices like applying red on certain edges. The available evidence is, however, insufficient to determine whether enhancing legibility through polychromy was a significant element in either production or reception.

More generally, in the current, very preliminary stage of the study of polychromy on Christian sarcophagi, whether, to what extent and in what manner Christian sarcophagus representations may have been painted remains largely a matter of educated hypothesis. It seems likely that polychromy varied from none to the creation of elaborate painterly effects. One notable observation from the work to date is the widespread and increasing use of gilding or gold colouration. It is present on essentially all the third- and fourth-century sarcophagi, Christian and non-Christian, on which any polychromy is preserved, often as the dominant vestige of colour. Gold would not be the first choice to foster

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56 Thomy Nilsson, “Ensuring Color Legibility,” in Proceedings of the 10th Congress of the International Colour Association, Granada, Spain, May 8–13, 2005, ed. Juan L. Nieves and Javier Hernández-Andrés (Granada: Gráficas Alhambra, 2005), 749–752. Nilsson’s table 2 compares the legibility of various colour combinations. The results are not entirely intuitive. If the background is dark, then colours like orange, pink and lime would be best, even better than white (his experiment did not include gold). If the pigment is next to a white surface, a darker outline like black or blue is preferable.
58 Swoboda, “Zur altchristlichen Marmor-Polychromie,” 156–157, suggested three categories: (1) objects employing a limited palette of only three colours (yellow, brown and purple) used to accentuate the chisel work, (2) those closely connected to pagan sculpture that were fully painted, and (3) those that predominantly used gilding to achieve a painterly effect and to clarify the sculptural lines, perhaps with a sparse use of additional colours. The second category need not, of course, be linked to “pagan sculpture,” and given the meagre data one might add as a fourth, “none of the above.”
59 Jan Stubbe Østergaard, “Emerging Colors: Roman Sculptural Polychromy Revived,” in The Color of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present, ed. Roberta Panzanelli, Eike D. Schmidt and Kenneth D. S. Lapatin (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2008), 56. In addition to the monuments referred to in notes 48 and 50 above, many other examples of polychromy with gold, or gold alone, are remarked in the
legibility, whether adjacent to either a dark or light area. Nor does its application serve the cause of naturalism. While A.L. Pietrogrande remarked the application of gold to ornaments that “should” be so highlighted, like clasps, this was certainly not its principal use.

Gilding is common on Christ’s hair, where it could have evoked associations with divinity and rulership. Gallienus was said to have sprinkled his hair with gold. However, the distribution of gold on Christian sarcophagi is much broader. Far from being reserved for Christ, or even other “good or sympathetic figures,” gold was applied to a wide variety of representations, from apostolic beards to animal fur (and not only lambs), sandals to loaves of bread. Perhaps everything that attracted gilding could be interpreted as having a miraculous function or assisting in recounting a miracle or holy narrative, but that does not exclude very much. Rather than, or more correctly in addition to, highlighting the sanctity or importance of individual participants or attributes in the composition, gold appears to have functioned as a general indicium of splendid divinity, applicable to the scriptural, miraculous, prophetic or salvific scenes and to the monument as a whole. The depictions were not intended to be “real” in the sense of the mundane or tangible. They were more fundamentally real, and earthly colours alone could not do them justice.

Repertorium. A remarkable example is Rep. I.2 (discussed by Liverani, “Osservazioni sulla policromia,” 13). There are many other examples not noted in the Repertorium on which gold is visible with the naked eye, including Rep. I.23, 26, 52, 54, 64, 135 and 159, all on display in the Vatican Museo Pio Cristiano. Ada Konikoff, Sarcophagi from the Jewish Catacombs of Ancient Rome: A Catalogue Raisonné (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1986), 20, reported that gold and traces of purple were seen on a Jewish sarcophagus, now lost, found in the Vigna Randanini catacomb.


62 Scriptores Historiae Augustae 16.4. The context in this case is negative, a list of luxurious and extravagant traits for which the emperor is criticized, but the passage does underscore the association of gold, light, spirit, and power.

One might have thought that gilded figures on sarcophagi could evoke negative associations among some Christians. Human or animal forms rendered in gold seem (at least to a modern observer) perilously close to idols, but high-status Christians were apparently untroubled by carved figures with golden hair, beards or fur. There may have been some unspoken limits. The face of Mithras may be covered in gold but nothing similar is ever found on Christian sarcophagi. Apparently patrons and viewers of sarcophagi managed to draw a line between the gilded figure as a signal of idolatry and gold as a revelation of Christ’s divinity and Christian spirituality, or as Patrik Reuterswärd put it, as light incarnate. Or perhaps they simply did not perceive any inconsistency that demanded rationalization.

As a final observation on the visual experience one might ask whether, even if we confidently knew the angle of viewing, lighting conditions and colour scheme of a particular sarcophagus, would we have captured its original appearance? Physiology is mostly species specific but psychological effects vary. If digital methodologies enabled us to recreate the visual stimuli of antique viewers, we would still not see the monuments “with Roman eyes.” To complicate matters further, there were probably different sub-types of the

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64 On a mid-third-century polychrome marble relief now in the Terme di Diocleziano, Museo Nazionale Romano, not only the hair, cap and wrist of Mithras are gilded but also his face (Inv. 205837; Rosanna Friggeri, La collezione epigrafica del Museo nazionale romano alle Terme di Diocleziano (Milan: Electa, 2001), 181–182, noting as well a gilded stucco head of Mithras). Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.6.8, reports that fourth-century Romans were fond of gilding their own statues. If fourth-century Christians crossed this line, no evidence of it survives, although an example that might be considered quite close is the group of silver statues of Christ and the apostles donated by Constantine to his eponymous Roman basilica: Sible de Blaauw, “Imperial Connotations in Roman Church Interiors: The Significance and Effect of the Lateran Fastigium,” in Imperial Art as Christian Art – Christian Art as Imperial Art: Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Justinian, ed. J. Rasmus Brandt and Olaf Steen, Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia, Vol. 15 (Rome: Bardi Editore, 2001), 137–148. In succeeding centuries the boundary was progressively erased, as with the golden-headed Sainte Foy in Conques. Undoubtedly the passage of time since the “defeat” of paganism provided security for medieval Christian artisans, but more important in this last case may have been the object’s function as a reliquary.

65 “...als wäre Gold konkretisiertes Licht.” Reuterswärd, Studien zur Polychromie der Plastik, 236.

"Roman eye" that first regarded Christian sarcophagi. Not only the interpretive understanding but even the apperception of these monuments by their early viewers may have differed depending upon sectarian preferences, degree of religious commitment, theological sophistication and status. It might also have evolved over the monument's visual history, from the workshop visit by a prospective customer to a commemorative parentalia years later.

d) Images on the inside

Dresken-Weiland referred to “a whole series of examples of images that are found on the inside of a sarcophagus and thus could have been 'visible' only to the dead.” The class consists of five monuments, three Christian: one from Ksar el Kelb, Algeria with an incised Christogram in a wreath placed under the head of the corpse, and two others with crosses either on all the inside faces (Tegea, in Arcadia, Greece) or just on the short sides (Saraylar on the island of Marmara). Dresken-Weiland also noted a few inward-facing inscriptions and one curious case from Teano, Campania described as a sarcophagus containing three marble plaques, one with a figural mosaic and two other smaller ones bearing inscriptions. The Teano monument is not actually a sarcophagus. The figural mosaic and the inscriptions were found at the bottom of a pit divided into tomb spaces, or formae, in a mausoleum, although its figural representations — the adoration of the Magi and two seated men — might still constitute an interesting example of “interior decoration.”

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67 Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort, 17: “... es eine ganze Reihe von Beispielen gibt, die sich innerhalb eines Sarges befinden und daher nur für den Toten ‘sichtbar’ sein können.” The text cross-references her Sarkophagbestattungen, 195–198, where she is less categorical, suggesting that these representations would have been invisible after the funeral (190): “Da bei diesen Särgen keine über den Moment der Beisetzung hinausgehende Außenwirkung beabsichtigt ist...” See also Dresken-Weiland, “Recherches,” 319: “Ces exemples amènent donc à penser que les inscriptions et les images étaient plutôt destinées aux morts, voire aux personnes présentes au moment des funérailles.”

68 Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 189–190 (the sarcophagus with the incised Christogram is her cat. G8 [398], the Teano monument with the mosaic inside is cat. B15, illustrated as Abb. 12 [349]).

Elsner is dismissive of this phenomenon: “Hardly any [sarcophagi] are decorated on the interior, and these are from the provinces.” It may be unfair to assume that provincials are either less sophisticated or less representative than urbanites (if that is his point), but Elsner is surely correct to underscore the paucity of examples. One cannot impute a general indifference to reception from so few cases.

There are other problems with the inference from images on the inside to viewer indifference apart from the phenomenon’s marginal character. The three Christian sarcophagi mentioned by Dresken-Weiland have only symbols, not figural decoration. Crosses were often carved on marble blocks, architectural elements and other pagan spolia to “Christianize” them, perhaps with an apotropaic or supplicatory function. Koch provides many examples of the practice of adding such Christian symbols to pre-Christian sarcophagi, usually on the outside but very occasionally on the inside, and expressly refers to two of the three examples noted above as reused, Christianized objects. As for the mosaic in Teano, which although not on a sarcophagus is the only example that is truly comparable to Christian sarcophagus imagery, it may undercut rather than corroborate the argument. The mosaic plaque is thought to have been placed initially on top of a grave and

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70 Elsner, “Introduction,” 2. Frank G.J.M. Müller, The So-Called Peleus and Thetis Sarcophagus in the Villa Albani (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1994), 89n368, refers to an earlier, non-Christian sarcophagus with reliefs on the inside (and another with an interior inscription) and is equally categorical in his judgment that concluding from these “exceptional” monuments that decoration was intended only for the deceased “is fundamentally wrong.”

71 Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen, 189, begins the listing of interior inscriptions and images with this phrase: “Ein Desinteresse an einem möglichen Betrachter vermitteln besonders augenfällig Sarkophage aus Kaiserzeit und Spätantike, die innen eine Inschrift besitzen...”


73 Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 12 and 555, considered the Tegea chest to be a reused late second-century piece noting that Urs Peschlow raised the same possibility regarding the one from Saraylar (561n19). He cited several examples where crosses were added to the outside of a pre-existing monument in order to claim it as Christian (10–12).
only moved to the inside somewhat later. In that case, it would have been visible for an extended period in its funerary context.\textsuperscript{74}

e) Fronts, backs and sides

The four faces of sarcophagi were rarely treated with equal attention by Roman workshops. In the great majority of cases backs were left in rough condition and short sides either similarly blank or decorated more simply and in lower relief than the privileged front. The distinction between one- or three- and four-sided carving on sarcophagi has traditionally been related to the presumed disposition of the monuments, and also possibly the rites associated with their use.\textsuperscript{75} The workshop practice of leaving the rear in rough condition would have been commercially viable only if producers and customers were \textit{ad idem} regarding the intended placement of the monument in relation to the contemplated viewers. A sarcophagus fitting tightly within a niche did not require carving anywhere but on the front. If placed against a wall, the short sides might be visible only at a sharp angle and with less direct illumination from a central light source. A summary execution sufficed for these other faces.

The elaborate decoration on all faces on a few Roman sarcophagi (e.g., \textit{Rep.} II.148, 149, 150; \textit{Rep.} III.428, for which the rear is \textit{Rep.} I.829) could be extreme cases of Brenk’s \textit{magnificencia} — expensive carving that would never be seen — but a more straightforward explanation is that these monuments were meant to be placed on unusually full display, perhaps for some particular form of rite or visitation, either permanently or until they were eventually placed in a niche or backed up against a wall. The converse and more common situation is easier to interpret: evidently viewers normally had access to no more than three sides of the typical Roman sarcophagus.

\textsuperscript{74} Sirano (in Bisconti and Gentili, \textit{Rivoluzione}, 192) discusses conflicting theories regarding the identity of the individuals named in the two inscriptions (mother/daughter, or perhaps grandmother/grand-daughter), the sequence of burials, and the consequent displacements of the mosaic.

\textsuperscript{75} On Greek four-sided versus Roman three-sided carving and disposition, see Toynbee, \textit{Death and Burial}, 270.
3. The resurrection of the viewer

The evidence simply does not support indifference to reception. Few if any Christian sarcophagi were invisible. Consideration of the evidence in the preceding section indicates, on the contrary, that most were exposed to view in niches or other architectural settings for periods measured in years, decades or even centuries. Viewing conditions varied from open, well-lit spaces, to cramped quarters with artificial and uneven lighting. And unlike public monuments or domestic decorative programs, Christian sarcophagi were seen only on special occasions, perhaps the funeral and mostly at repeated and regular commemorative events. Social custom and physical constraints limited the number who could have access at a given time.

These quantitative deficits were compensated by intensity. Sarcophagi were expensive and physically imposing marble objects with figural relief carvings, perhaps gilded or highlighted with polychromy. They were encountered during emotionally charged and memorable rites for the dead. The chest contained the material remains of a loved one, close friend or respected personality. Psychological tension was elevated by the close proximity of the corpse, an object that was at once polluting, and in a new Christian sense, holy. All these factors reinforced the psychological stress of the moment and etched the images into the experience and memory of the viewer.

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77 On the impact of emotion on personal event memories, see David B. Pillemer, Momentous Events, Vivid Memories (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
There may, of course, have been some sarcophagus purchasers who were indeed indifferent to the existence of viewers, or even hostile to images. (Indifference among producers is more difficult to conceive since their aim was to present their wares to customers.) Dresken-Weiland listed a dozen sarcophagi that, although discovered in contexts suggestive of high status families, lack any figural carving. These examples are further proof, she suggested, of an antique indifference (Gleichwertigkeit) to images, a valorization of sarcophagal burial for its own sake without regard to sculptural decoration. Rather than proving something about everyone else, these marginal examples may be more simply and probably attributed to individual, and perhaps eccentric, preferences. André Grabar conceived in this period a state of peaceful co-existence between iconodules and iconophobes, prolonging the traditional pagan tolerance of iconic and aniconic religious expression: “The attitude towards images remained an affair of conscience, whether of the individual or the particular Christian community.” Attitudes towards visual expression may be assumed to have varied not only among individuals, but also according to the nature of the space. Domestic, church and funerary forms of decoration were not identical.

A particular category of sarcophagus user who might be indifferent or hostile to its imagery consists of those who recycled or purloined existing monuments. Representations made for someone else, perhaps many years earlier when practices and preferences were different, might be dismissed as unimportant, regarded as passé, or positively disliked. Such attitudes could have contributed to the decision to put sarcophagi previously exposed to view behind a wall or below a floor. On the other hand, reclaiming a monument originally or previously used by another, perhaps an ancestor, could just as well have been motivated precisely by anticipated viewer reaction to the newly appropriated imagery. Patterns of reuse do not

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79 Translated from André Grabar, L'iconoclasme byzantin: dossier archéologique (Paris: Collège de France, 1957), 16. For Grabar, this peace was broken not by the church or its leaders but by imperial “iconic politics,” beginning with Justinian.
suggest a consistent attitude, either favourable or antithetical, towards earlier images, including pagan representations.  

Generalization from a few outlying examples — images on the inside (if any), undecorated high-status monuments, quickly buried or immured chests — imposes an assumption of conformity. A shifting mentality may be invoked to explain, or at least contribute to the understanding of, a general evolution in image preferences. For example, Zanker invoked the concept in connection with the abandonment of mythological representations in the course of only a generation during the third century. It is quite another matter to impose the hypothesized indifference of some purchasers and viewers on the sarcophagus population as a whole.

In this regard, there is some ambiguity or inconsistency in the use of the term “indifference.” It could mean indifference regarding either the content of imagery or the existence of viewers altogether. In the former case, the assertion is that patrons and workshops were uninterested in whether or how sarcophagi were decorated. This is difficult to square with the often lavish (and expensive) conception and execution of so many fourth-century sarcophagi. Alternatively, indifference could mean that buyers and sellers did care about the content of the representations, but not whether they were seen by anyone. This requires some other motivation for commissioning (and paying for) the figural carving. One suggestion discussed above is an expression of status or grandeur.

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80 The word “reuse” has been used in this chapter as equivalent to “recycled,” designedly leaving to one side complex questions regarding the range of possible semantic implications of the charged act of burying a person in someone else’s sarcophagus. The great variety of examples – the old images might remain visible, be changed or hidden, new images could being added, inscriptions erased and replaced, and so on – invites an inquiry of its own. See, for example, Anthony Cutler, “Reuse Or use? Theoretical and Practical Attitudes Toward Objects in the Early Middle Ages,” in Ideologie e pratiche del reimpiego nell’alto Medioevo: 16–21 aprile 1998 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 1999), 1055–1083; Richard Brilliant, “Authenticity and Alienation,” in Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture, from Constantine to Sherrie Levine, ed. Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2011), 167–177; Paolo Liverani, “Reading Spolia in Late Antiquity and Contemporary Perception,” in the same volume, 33–51.

analogous to Roman historiated columns, or if one follows Brenk, to early Christian mosaics and wall paintings. An alternative or additional argument is that the images were indeed meant to be "seen," but not by living humans. The intended viewer was the deceased, or perhaps God.\textsuperscript{82}

These rationalizations of sarcophagus imagery reflect a misunderstanding of the notion of reception. Once it is established that grieving family and friends did see the monuments, it is legitimate to inquire into their experience, quite apart from whether purchasers and producers planned the imagery having regard to that experience. This is what the study of reception is all about. But the supposition that any of the agents connected to these monuments — artisans, patrons or viewers — were indifferent to the figural representations is, in any event, untenable. Even pure magnificencia requires someone to see it. The oft-repeated claim that sarcophagus imagery was “addressed to the deceased” misconstrues the implications of its own syntactical construction. Libation tubes on sarcophagi or commemorative meals at the tomb may be regarded as food being “addressed to the deceased," but not in the same sense as food is normally “addressed to the living.” The semantic character of the sepulchral event is quite different, and its living witnesses are primary participants. In a very important sense, the libation tube or banquet is addressed to them. To choose a modern example, the scent of flowers brought to a cemetery is not meant for the dead.\textsuperscript{83} In the same way, epitaphs that from a grammatical perspective are addressed to the deceased were meant to be read aloud and heard by the survivors. Both the reader and the listeners participated in the expression of some panegyric to or hope for the deceased.

The deceased did not hear with ears or see with eyes. If an epitaph or image reached the spirit of the departed it was not by reason of sound and light. The immortal soul (let alone

\textsuperscript{82} See notes 6 and 8 above.
\textsuperscript{83} The flower example was cited by Paul Veyne, \textit{L'empire gréco-romain} (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 534n368.
God) has no need of or use for aural or visual stimulus. The family crowded around a figural sarcophagus, on the other hand, did see what was depicted on its face. The representations concerned such themes as salvation, resurrection, triumph over death and community in Christ. These could certainly be applied to the post mortem existence of the person whose remains were contained in the sarcophagus, and the living viewers undoubtedly did so. Reception need not be selfish. The images were equally relevant to their immediate human condition of mourning and loss, as well as to their own ultimate deaths. The imagery was regarded simultaneously other- and self-directed, both experiences heightened by the funerary space of the tomb and the proximity of the sarcophagus with its inescapable, brute evidence of death.

Finally, viewers have memories, and memory is essential to a full appreciation of sarcophagus imagery. Reception was not limited to instant processing of visual stimuli. The active reception encounter relied on memory to prepare the viewer, support the experience of mourning, and prolong or preserve the image.

Mary Carruthers referred to the “mnemotechnic” picture that “recalls summatim a text already known and invites further reflection.” So Prudentius, after describing a vivid picture (real or imagined) of the martyrdom of St Cassian of Imola, puts in the mouth of the attending sacristan: “The picture recalls [or reports] the story which, handed down by

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84 Similarly, all sides of a sarcophagus were “visible” to the soul of the deceased and they could not be hidden from an all-seeing God. Theories as to why figural reliefs would be carved on sarcophagi intended to be buried or immured fail to explain the ubiquity of rough backs and carved fronts. Ward-Perkins, “The Hippolytus Sarcophagus,” 14, accepted that sculptural representations could “have significance quite independent of the eye of the observer.” Nonetheless, the fact that Attic sarcophagi were carved on four sides and Roman ones usually left unfinished on the back makes it difficult, in his view, to accept that this decision had nothing to do with viewers. “It seems unduly cynical to suggest that in this respect so many of their clients should have been content to accept quite different standards for the eyes of the living and of the dead.”

85 Even Brenk, “Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility,” 157, suggested that visible images might serve to console the bereaved, one of the main functions of pre-Christian sepulchral imagery according to Zanker and Ewald, Mit Mythen leben, 62–115.

books, shows the authentic truth of ancient times." Similarly, the representations on sarcophagi relied on synecdoche to convey their meaning. This, in turn, demanded a level of viewer competence, the retention of a sufficiently robust and complete version of the story or text. Reception from this perspective entails memory functioning as preparation.

Second, memory is central to grief and mourning. Unlike their pagan predecessors, Christian viewers did not habitually project the image of the deceased onto the depicted figures representing their sacred narratives, but they equally engaged in her or his mnemonic preservation upon repeated viewings of a sarcophagus. This might be supported by inscriptions or such added visual elements as clipeus portraits or diminutive figures adjacent to Christ. Even without such clues, Christian consolation operated through reflection on resurrection, salvation and belief in a special form of Christian eternity, all of which were related to the deceased.

The third mnemonic function of reception is, perhaps, the most obvious. Memory caused the scenes represented on sarcophagi, along with their related texts, stories or dogmas, to persist in the mind of the viewer when the visual representations were not accessible to the senses. This could be between viewings (preservation) or after viewing was no long possible (prolongation).

Sarcophagus viewing was, therefore, intense, repeated and significant. The experience of mourning at the tomb was coloured by the visual stimuli and their intellectual and

87 Prudentius, Liber Peristefanon, 9.19–20: “Historiam pictura refert, quae tradita libris ueram uetusti temporis monstrat fidem,” cited, in part, by Carruthers, Craft of Thought, 198, who renders refert as “recalls” in order to accentuate the memorial function. My translation relies on the notes of Fux, Prudence, 328, who observed that refert connotes bearing witness to something while fidem, in this context, means not faith, but truth.


89 Koortbojian, Myth, Meaning, and Memory, 114–126, observed that viewers could conflate a mythological figure and the departed loved one, “keeping the dead alive, if only in memory.” See also Zanker, “Die mythologischen Sarkophagreliefs,” 35–37. The lack of portraiture on the figures on Christian sarcophagi is remarked in connection with the Jonah theme in chapter 5, page 237.

90 Diminutive figures accompanying the traditio legis are discussed in chapter 7.
emotional effects. These were enhanced and conditioned by memory, which prepared, supported and preserved reception.
III. Jonah

Jonah was probably the most popular figure in the Christian art of the first half of the fourth century, “popular” being understood here in a purely quantitative sense, not meaning *populaire* or plebeian. Some scholars have nonetheless maintained that Jonah was, to quote Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “popular but not important.” She cites, in particular, the placement of the representations.\(^1\) Of eighty-eight examples for which this can be determined (most of the Jonah representations are fragments that do not permit a reconstruction of the original composition), sixty-one appearances are on one side of the lid, seven on both sides of the lid, and two on a short side of the chest. Jonah appears under a clipeus portrait of the deceased in twelve cases (as in ill. 13 and 28). Dresken-Weiland considers the examples where he dominates the central field (she allows six) as exceptions that prove, or at least highlight, her inference that the Jonah theme was not only morphologically but also iconographically peripheral.

It is appropriate at the outset of a lengthy consideration of that theme to challenge such a dismissive judgment. There are several reasons why Jonah warrants our attention and that justify the choice as a valuable case study.

1. A number of famous monuments rely principally on the Jonah theme, notably the so-called Jonah Sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (ill. 4),\(^2\) the London “portrait” Jonah (Rep. II.243, ill. 5)\(^3\) and a children’s sarcophagus in Copenhagen.

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\(^3\) British Museum, inv. MLA 1957.10–11.1. The *Repertorium* attributes it to a provincial workshop.
These elaborate, imposing and complex objects present broadside to the viewer a coherent (if not easily interpreted) program of images.

2. Over 40% of the Jonah sarcophagi include more than one element or episode of the story. Since about half the catalogued Jonah examples are fragments, this figure would undoubtedly be higher if the original form of the incomplete monuments could be recaptured. The appearance of such multi-scene representations, whether large or small and wherever on the chest or lid they may appear, is rare and significant. The closest parallel might be the so-called “Peter trilogy,” consisting of his renunciation of Jesus, arrest, and water miracle. Christian miracle and healing scenes are not a cycle in the same sense; they relate disparate, albeit thematically linked, events. Perhaps later sarcophagi with scenes from Christ’s passion could be another example, but here again there is no rigorous system or cycle. Jonah presents a unique early specimen of Christian narrative. Such other common biblical scenes as Daniel in the lions’ den, the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace, the raising of Lazarus and Moses receiving the law all refer to singular events.

3. The appearance of Jonah under the portrait clipeus in the centre of the front of a sarcophagus can hardly be called peripheral. The location is “subsidiary” only in the literal sense that it is physically below something else. Examples like Rep. I.44 and III.40 (ill. 12 and 13) suggest that this placement may emphasize the imagery rather

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6 This scene depicts Daniel 3:24 (see, for example, ill. 14). An earlier moment in the same story is also occasionally found, when the youths refuse to acknowledge an idol, as recounted in Daniel 3:14–18. See Rep. II.10, Rep. III.38, 41, 492. Although these two images could have been combined to form a narration, they were not.
than relegate it to obscurity. One would expect a viewer to pay some attention to the scene that accompanies and “supports” the image of the deceased. 7

4. As for the prevalence of Jonah representations on sarcophagus lids — including elaborate multi-scene examples like one in the Museo Nazionale Romano (Rep. I.794, ill. 7) 8 — this position could be viewed as liminal or annunciatory rather than unimportant, a perpendicular appendage to the cover hiding the corpse. For sarcophagi placed at ground level, this vertical surface might be more legible than the chest itself. In many cases the lid scenes flanked an inscription, a target for viewer attention. Dresken-Weiland hypothesized that the disproportionate number of Jonah representations on lids compared to fronts might be explained by the reuse of non-Christian chests to which a newly-carved lid was added. 9 If and to the extent this is correct, the appearance of Jonah in this position would be an indication of its importance as a declaration of the Christian character of the monument, rather than a sign of relegation to the periphery.

These factors confirm rather than undermine the demonstrable importance of the Jonah theme already signalled by its statistical dominance.

Chapter 4 reviews the definition, description and dating of the Jonah sarcophagus corpus. The conventional view is that Jonah sarcophagi were among the earliest, and that their...

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7 In some cases the relationship may be reversed. The double portrait on the lid of the sarcophagus in Sant’Ambrogio, Milan (Rep. II.150, ill. 52) derives significance from its appearance directly above the seated Christ. This later reorientation of importance is neatly captured by Johannes Georg Deckers, “Vom Denker zum Diener: Bemerkungen zu den Folgen der konstantinischen Wende im Spiegel der Sarkophagplastik,” in Innovation in der Spätantike: Kolloquium Basel 6. und 7. Mai 1994, ed. Beat Brenk (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1996), 137–184. Jonah is certainly not the only choice for placement beneath a clipeus portrait on the upper register. Others include Daniel in the lions’ den (as on Rep. I.40, 42, 43), the shepherd motif (milking or kriophoros) (Rep. I.85, 87, 239, 778, 962, Rep. II.12), and the adoration of the Magi (Rep. I.41, Rep. II.20). Putti in a vat of grapes below the clipeus on an elaborate two-register monument in San Sebastiano, Rep. I.188, are likely Eucharistic symbols. Even the Resurrection is sometimes depicted in this spot (Rep. II.102). The emphasis on Jonah below the portraits is enhanced on the models that flank the clipeus with striigilated fields, so that the only other imagery appears at the ends (e.g., Rep. I.756, Rep. II.103).

8 Inv. 106900. Note the inclusion of a light-house, an unusual bit of naturalism.

production essentially ended by the middle of the fourth century. The stochastic approach outlined in the Introduction may assist in refining that chronological understanding.

Chapter 5 approaches the viewer’s experience in the presence of the Jonah theme on Roman sarcophagi by parsing and reconsidering various interpretations that have been or might be proposed for its reception — biblical, pagan, idyllic, political, etc. There is no reason to deny the plurality of such interpretations. On the contrary, one impediment to understanding Jonah’s popularity has been the reluctance of scholars fully to accept diversity of meaning or audience. The search for a single source or unitary explanation has engendered sterile and pointless debates. Those who do accept polyvalence often impose organizing principles far more rigorous than justified by the evidence. Customers had more than one reason for appreciating the Jonah theme, and viewers experienced a range of associations when beholding it. Choices regarding whether and how Jonah appeared on Christian sarcophagi may be attributed both to individual preference reflecting different communities or personal religious understandings and commitments, as well as developments over the several generations of the theme’s popularity.

Accepting diversity and multiplicity does not imply that viewers in general or any viewer in particular appreciated all facets of the Jonah theme with equal force. At the core of reception lay a common Christian and biblical experience, albeit understood with more nuance than suggested in some of the literature. Hovering in the periphery were other facets of more or less important to some or all viewers. A proper answer to the question — “Why Jonah?” — demands a supple appreciation of reception.

10 The term “facet” has been chosen as the least unsatisfactory term for designating these different aspects or species of the reception experience. “Modes,” although potentially attractive, has been used in a similar context for a higher-level aspect of reception, as in Elsner’s “modes of viewing,” either secular/naturalistic or symbolic/exegetical. See Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
Chapter 4. The Jonah sarcophagi

1. The corpus

The Jonah theme has been found in a variety of media and contexts in early Christian art: not only catacomb paintings and sarcophagi but also lamps, gems, gold glass, ivory, earthenware and silver plates, mosaics large and small, statuettes, and manuscript illuminations. The first systematic study, by Otto Mitius in 1897, catalogued fifty-five catacomb paintings, seventy sarcophagi, five inscribed slabs, thirty-eight small objects in a variety of media, six miniatures and two church mosaics. These numbers have increased over the succeeding century.12

The inventory of Jonah sarcophagi has just about trebled since Mitius. Arnold Provoost recorded over 200, which he calculated to be 8.82% of all extant Christian sarcophagi.13 The

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11 Otto Mitius, Jonas auf den Denkmälern des christlichen Altertums (Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1897). The miniatures (his cat. 169–175) and the church mosaics are (cat. 176–177) are later than the period under consideration here. The earliest manuscript is folio 6r of the Rabbula Gospels (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Cod. Plut. I, 56), dated 586; the mosaics are in the Orthodox Baptistery and Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, both in Ravenna and dated to the third quarter of the fifth and sixth centuries, respectively.


absolute number is not important because the survival rate is unknown; however, the proportion tells us something about the original prevalence of these representations. Provoost’s numerator, the number of Jonah sarcophagi, is probably slightly high, but his denominator, the total number of Christian sarcophagi, is especially generous because it is based on a very liberal approach to classification, particularly with respect to orants and shepherds. If the denominator is limited to monuments with biblical, apocryphal, doctrinal or unabashedly Christian symbolic iconography, the Jonah percentage more than doubles.

Imposing date restrictions also increases the proportion of sarcophagi with representations of the Jonah theme. As discussed in the next section, Jonah sarcophagi are generally considered to have been produced mainly in the late third and early fourth century. Provoost’s Jonah proportion of 8.82% doubles to 17.94% limiting the calculation to the period 250 to 325 CE, applying his own dating proposals. Combining these two effects — restricting the denominator to sarcophagi with overt Christian expression and narrowing the date range — the percentage jumps to around 40%. The composition of the preserved corpus is the result of historical accident, not statistical sampling, but there is no reason to suppose that sarcophagi were more or less likely to survive depending upon whether they included the story of Jonah. One can, therefore, safely conclude that this theme was

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14 Regarding classification, see the discussion of the shrinking Christian sarcophagus corpus in the Introduction. The numerator includes perhaps twenty fragments that may not be Jonah scenes (to which Provoost appended a question mark). For example, Walter Nikolaus Schumacher, Hirt und “Guter Hirt”: Studien zum Hirtenbild in der römischen Kunst vom zweiten bis zum Anfang des vierten Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mosaiken in der Südhalle von Aquileja (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 77, claimed that one from the catacomb of Praetextatus previously identified by Wilpert as Jonah (and included by Provoost) is actually a naked Putto crawling towards Oceanus.

15 The lists proposed by Guntram Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 238–248, 260–280 and 289–296, include about 150 sarcophagi and might be further preened, as discussed in the Introduction.
present on a very substantial proportion of the total Christian sarcophagus production, especially before 350.\textsuperscript{16}

Unlike most other biblical subjects, the Jonah theme is represented by more than one scene. The usual classification, from Mitius on, divides the examples into three main categories:

(i) \textit{Ship, casting overboard, swallowing by the ketos.} A ship is depicted, usually with two or three sailors; Jonah is often seen being tossed overboard into the jaws of a waiting sea monster. The scene may be isolated (ill. 8, 38), but far more often it is combined with other episodes (ill. 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 22, 31).

(ii) \textit{Disgorgement.} Jonah is vomited out by the monster. This scene is almost always depicted in combination with another (ill. 4, 6). Its isolated appearance may be restricted to a single instance (ill. 9).\textsuperscript{17}

(iii) \textit{Jonah at rest.} Jonah reclines under a gourd plant, indicated by the shape of its hanging fruit (botanical issues are discussed below) (ill. 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 22, 27. 28. 31). His appearance may be variously described as resting, sitting, sleeping, waiting or thanking, and in a few catacomb paintings, as angry and even female.\textsuperscript{18}

As with other common representations of biblical themes and events, there is a degree of standardization in the Jonah images but also significant variations. For example, Jonah is normally naked when thrown into or emerging from the ketos, but on a few sarcophagi he

\textsuperscript{16} If this were an election poll, we would say that the results are accurate to within 4\%, 95\% of the time, assuming that the extant corpus is somewhere between 2\% and 20\% of original production (as discussed briefly in chapter 2, pages 128-129).

\textsuperscript{17} The example is the right side of a lid in Saint-Pierre, Aire-sur-l’Adour, Rep. III.18 (ill. 9). Even in this case, other Jonah scenes appear on the sides of the chest.

\textsuperscript{18} On the last two, see Mitius, \textit{Jonas}, 40–41.
is clothed (e.g., ill. 10, 31). He enters the water head first, but there is at least one contrary example — a marble statuette, not a sarcophagus (ill. 11). Jonah is generally young, but he can be old (ill. 12).

The relative popularity of these episodes will become relevant in the next chapter and is summarized in Table 4.1 below. One unavoidable source of error in any such a statistical presentation is the fragmentary character of most of the sarcophagi. It is likely that if larger pieces had survived there would be more multi-scene cycles; however, isolated scenes are not solely a result of inadequate preservation, as demonstrated by an example like the rest scene on the Berlin sarcophagus (Rep. II.241, ill. 27). With these caveats, the Table indicates that about two-thirds of the Jonah sarcophagi include a representation of the prophet under the cucurbita (categories 1., 2.a, 2.b, 3.c and 3.d), in under half of which he is completely alone (3.d). Almost as many (over 55%) include the ship scene (categories 1., 2., 3.a and 3.b). In many of these, there is also an indication of Jonah being cast overboard. Although the “rest scene with ketos” is categorized as a single scene, this group includes examples that might be regarded either as two-scene conflations, disgorgement and rest (as on Rep. II.185, ill. 16), or as isolated rest scenes with an ambiguous allusion to the remainder of the narrative. The ketos is not a “scene” and therefore not usually compared to the rest or the ship. It is, however, noteworthy that the creature is depicted somewhere

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19 Bonansea, “Giona vestito,” cites thirteen examples where Jonah is clothed, including the Cleveland marble, a loculus plaque, some eastern carved tables, a few fifth-century funerary reliefs, a later pavement mosaic and the sixth-century Rabbula Gospels manuscript. It has been suggested that the Cleveland marbles and the carved tables might not actually be Christian. See Gisela Cantino Wataghin, “I primi cristiani, tra *imaging*, *historiae* e *pictura*: spunti di riflessione,” Antiquité Tardive 19 (2011): 32–33. Bonansea remarks only four fourth-century sarcophagi: Rep. I.591, 750, Rep. II.90, and Rep. III.309 (known only from a seventeenth-century drawing).

20 Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 77.7; Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 186 (cat. 15). Lawrence, “Ships, Monsters and Jonah,” 293n23, refers to one other example.

21 The figures in the Table are based on the inventory in Provoost, *Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal*. Some fragments are omitted because the iconography is too difficult to classify, as are sarcophagi where only vague later sketches or verbal descriptions are available. These numbers also exclude eight sarcophagi that are catalogued in the Repertorium as being of local manufacture, but the percentages would not be materially different without them. An important element of this classification concerns the three- and two-scene categories. The former includes only cases where the disgorgement is separated from the rest scene, with Jonah appearing twice. Examples in which the disgorgement is suggested by conflating the ketos and the resting Jonah are categorized here either as single scene – “rest scene (with a ketos)” – or as a two-scene representation including the ship and rest (with a ketos).
— usually next to the resting Jonah, the ship, or both — in half of the representations (categories 1., 2.a, 2.c., 3.a, 3.c and 3.e).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Three-scene cycle</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Two-scene cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Ship and rest (with a ketos)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Ship and rest (without a ketos)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Ship and disgorgement without rest</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Single scenes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Ship scene (with a ketos)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Ship scene (without a ketos)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Rest scene (with a ketos)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Rest scene (without a ketos)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Ketos alone</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1: Taxonomy of Jonah sarcophagi**

2. **Dating**

Not one of the 200-odd Jonah sarcophagi is dated by inscription. The conventional opinion, based on stylistic comparisons, is that the theme appeared in this medium late in the third century, reached its zenith in the first part of the fourth, declined in popularity around 325, and virtually disappeared after 350. This view is often expressed with frustrating imprecision. Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), is representative, variously claiming: the theme "peaked in popularity
that Christian representations are unlikely to precede the third century, although the reason for this tardy beginning has been the source of some debate. The suggested endpoint of 350 finds a tentative and negative support in the lack of datable inscriptions; as noted in the Introduction, most of these are after mid-century. One later documentary source is also consistent with the relatively early appearance of the Jonah theme. Rufinus of Aquileia, writing in 401, objected to Jerome’s new translation of the name of the plant under which Jonah rests (discussed below), sarcastically asking whether we must add errata to “the tombs of our ancestors.” If this refers to sarcophagus relief carving, as generally supposed, it suggests that the scene of Jonah under the gourd plant was already regarded as ancestral by the turn of the century.

In the third and early fourth centuries appears “with consistent frequency through the middle of the fourth century,” and “is rare after 325–350” (199n55). Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort, 103, indicated that Jonah scenes were common on sarcophagi from the late third century to the end of the first third of the fourth, and appear on a few lids thereafter, into the second third of the fourth century. Although she followed the dates ascribed in the Repertorium (citing Rep. I.53 and I.682 for the lids in question), a number of examples dated later are omitted. A few of these are doubtful and others may not be Roman, but a clear case is Rep. II.138 (the volume that she wrote). The chronology suggested by Mitius, Jonas, 44–45, was different, shifted forward by about 75 years.


Rufinus, Apologia contra Hieronymum, 2.39.29: “Now that the world has grown old and all things are hastening toward their end, let us write on the tombs of our ancestors (scribamus etiam in sepulchris ueterum) so that they themselves, who had read otherwise, will know that Jonah did not have the shade of a cucurbita but of hedera, and again, since that is the wish of the Legislator, not hedera either, but of a different shrub.” The issue of the plant and its translation is discussed in chapter 5, pages 190 to 192. The exchange with Rufinus is summarized and analyzed by John Lewis Heller, “Notes on the Meaning of Κολοκύνθη,” Illinois Classical Studies 10 (1985): 89–94 (from which this translation), who notes with approval (91) the connection
Figure 4.1 is based on Provoost’s inventory, adding a few missing items and deleting entries where the evidence of date is too speculative. Also excluded are sarcophagi attributed to local workshops, since their production may not have been contemporary with the Roman examples.\(^\text{25}\)

![Figure 4.1 Number of Jonah sarcophagi by date](image)


\(^{25}\) The additional sarcophagi are referred to in note 13 above. The data set excludes a number of monuments in the inventory: thirteen lost sarcophagi for which the surviving evidence (usually a drawing) is insufficient to permit a reasonable inference of the date (Rep. I.361, 565, 586, 620, 736, 909, 978, 987, 1013, Rep. II.217, 223, Rep. III.473, 604); one whose identification as a Jonah example is too tenuous (Rep. I.118); three that are too fragmentary (only a few gourds) for dating (Rep. I.297, Rep. II.172, 191); Rep. II.232, which is generally considered quite late and of uncertain provenance. Eleven sarcophagi have been excluded because the Repertorium attributes them to a non-Roman workshop (Rep. II.241, 242, 243, 419, Rep. III.17, 115, 181, 200, 373, 558, 650). Of these, the ones in Rep. II are early (one assigned to the last third of the third century and the others to circa 300), while those in Rep. III, with one exception (Rep. III.558 dated 300–333), are dated after the end of the fourth century. After all these adjustments, the sample consists of 180 monuments. The dates are mainly from the Repertorium. The use of thirds of a century is imperfect since many sarcophagi are assigned dates in a quarter century or some other date range. My methodology was to assign a date at the mid-point of the applicable range and then place the monument within the relevant third of a century.
The same data are recast in Figure 4.2, converted from absolute numbers to the probability that a given sarcophagus with a representation of the Jonah theme was made in each of these periods.

This probability distribution still relies almost entirely on the accepted dating in the literature, mainly in the *Repertorium*. As discussed in the Introduction, these dates are generally the result of stylistic comparison among sarcophagi, between sarcophagi and public monuments, and to some extent with coins. This approach assumes a continuous and orderly evolution in style and iconography and under-estimates the impact of retardataire or conservative workshop practices and revivals. If works that “look Constantinian” were actually produced later, the curve would shift to the right and its tail would be extended.

Accepting that potential systematic prejudice as well as the general imprecision, Figure 4.2 does provide a basis for certain inferences. Note that it is not the familiar “bell curve” of a Gaussian, or normal, distribution. The probability falls more sharply to the right than to the left of the highest point. In this respect, the distribution of Jonah sarcophagi reflects the

[175]
broader decline in Roman Christian sarcophagus production over the course of the fourth century. Using Provoost’s statistics, for example, about 50% of these were produced in his context 3 (250 – 325) and 25% in each of contexts 4 (325 – 375) and 5 (375 – 500).\(^{26}\) Peak production for Jonah sarcophagi thus generally follows the conventional dating for all Roman Christian sarcophagi; however, the Jonah distribution falls off more quickly. This is necessarily the case if some other forms arose only after the overall peak (like the *traditio legis* discussed in chapters 6 and 7). Thus, the Jonah group may reliably be assigned, on average, an earlier date. However, in the very early decades of the period, relatively few Jonah sarcophagi were produced, if for no other reason than that there were not many dead Christians of sufficient wealth to bury in them (chapter 2). At the same time, these monuments cannot be entirely confined to the period before 350 CE.

Finally, it should be noted that if the appearance of the Jonah theme on Roman sarcophagi is evidently linked to the rise of Christianity, its early decline is more difficult to rationalize. Dismissing this as a change in taste or fashion is tautologous.\(^{27}\)

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27 Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort*, 331, referring to both catacomb painting and sarcophagus carving and specifically to Jonah images, concludes: “Das Verschwinden von Bildthemen ist wohl am ehesten durch einen Wandel des Geschmacks oder der Mode bedingt.” The reduced employment of the Jonah theme is not “explained” by saying that consumers were less attracted to it. An alternative proposal is that the need for the Jonah image waned after Christian persecution ended: Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine*, Rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 94–95. This proposition has the virtue of attributing meaning to the change in iconography but does not correspond very well with the actual production chronology, depending upon how liberally one interprets the word “after.” See the discussion under “Political Jonah” in chapter 5.
Chapter 5. Why Jonah?

This chapter explores several facets of the Jonah theme on Roman Christian sarcophagi. They are neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive. Some are secure and must have been pervasive; others might have been part of a minority experience. A few will be rejected, or left as open and insoluble questions.

1. Biblical Jonah

Jonah is, first and foremost, the protagonist of the eponymous book of the Hebrew Bible. His experience in the belly of the ketos and his prophecy to the Ninevites were also evoked by Jesus in the gospels (Matthew 12:38-41, Luke 11:29-32). It is natural to assume that the consumers of Christian sarcophagi bearing images of Jonah made the biblical connection(s). There are, however, significant debates regarding the correspondence between the images and the Old Testament text, as well as the significance of the New Testament “sign of Jonah.” These two aspects of the Biblical Jonah, the old and the new, are evidently not independent, but it is convenient to address them serially. The discussion will extend beyond the four corners of the canonical scriptures to consider literary, liturgical and other traditions directly related to the biblical material.

a) Old Testament Jonah

The rather short book of Jonah narrates the story of an unwilling and disobedient prophet whose only prophecy is thwarted by the very act of pronouncing it. The plot may be briefly summarized.¹

¹ The text consists of 48 verses. In late antiquity there was no further organization; it was divided into four chapters only in the twelfth century. For ease of reference, the chapter and verse organization used by modern editors of the Septuagint and the Vetus Latina will be followed. This differs from such editions as the King James Version only by the inclusion of what the latter labels as Jonah 1:17 in chapter 2. That discrepancy is, however, instructive about the implications of chapter division. The succinct record of Jonah being swallowed and spending three days and three nights in the belly of the ketos terminates his adventure aboard the ship in one case and commences his psalm of prayer in the other.
Jonah is told by God to go to Nineveh (Assyria) and preach against the wickedness of its people. He disobedies and flees in the opposite direction, taking a ship bound from Joppa (Jaffa) to Tharsis (or Tarshish). God sends a storm in which the ship almost founders. The mariners lighten the load by tossing wares into the sea, but to no avail. Jonah, who has gone below and slept through the events, is called up by the master to participate in a casting of lots to identify who has brought this evil upon them. The lot falls on Jonah, who realizes that he is the cause for having fled the Lord and asks to be thrown overboard. He is, the sea is calmed, and the mariners offer sacrifice to the Lord. God sends a sea monster (ketos) to swallow Jonah. He remains in its belly for three days and three nights during which he prays. God hears him and orders the ketos to vomit him out on dry land. God again orders Jonah to go and preach to the Ninevites. This time Jonah obeys. His preaching is successful. The inhabitants, both men and beasts, fast, don sackcloth and pray for forgiveness. God decides to spare the city. Jonah is so troubled and angry at God’s lenience that he asks God to take his life rather than spare the Ninevites. Jonah goes out of town to rest and see what will transpire. He makes a booth for shelter and God sends a plant to grow over it and protect him from the sun. But next morning, God sends a worm to destroy the plant and a burning wind. Jonah is broiled by the heat. He again becomes angry with the Lord and again asks for death. Finally, God announces to Jonah a cryptic moral: you complain of the death of a plant you did nothing to create and that lived only fleetingly; should not I, then, spare the many inhabitants of Nineveh, who cannot distinguish their right hand from their left, and their beasts?

In an early rabbinical commentary Midrash Jonah, to be discussed below, this thanksgiving is embellished with conversion: the sailors go to Jerusalem and are circumcised. August Wünsche, trans., “Midrasch Jona,” in Aus Israels Lehrhallen: kleine Midrashim zur späteren legendarischen Literatur des Alten Testaments zum ersten Male übersetzt (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1908), 2.45. On the sources, see note 119 below.

The same Midrash Jonah provides a more elaborate version of Jonah’s captivity in the monster. See page 269 below. Jonah’s prayer, sometimes called his psalm or canticle, occupies eight verses, Jonah 2:2–10, and has sometimes been argued to be a discrete or even inauthentic addition to the text. See LaCocque and Lacocque, Jonah, 98 and references.

Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos, 120, 8.6, explains the similar language in Matthew 6:3 by associating the left hand with that which is temporal and the right with that which is eternal: “sinistra nostra dicitur, quidquid
Viewers of Roman Jonah sarcophagi associated the images with this biblical story, a facet that may be termed the "Old Testament Jonah." It presupposes both some familiarity with what is related in the text and a capacity to connect it with the visual program. This section therefore begins with a consideration of the propagation of the book of Jonah among lay Roman Christians in the period when the Jonah sarcophagi were produced and initially seen, a matter taken for granted in the sarcophagus literature. The discussion then turns to an assessment of the unresolved debate concerning divergence between the visual and biblical accounts, including alleged sins of omission and commission.

i) **Familiarity**

In the discussion of visibility and legibility in chapter 3, the issue of comprehension was deferred. Beat Brenk, it was noted, doubted the ability of the average Christian viewer to understand many complex and obscure visual programs, epitomized by the mosaics on the triumphal arch of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The figures and scenes were, he argued, unusual in their iconography, unaccompanied by explanatory inscriptions, and sufficiently sophisticated that “their decoding ... required an extremely well-informed guide — i.e. an art historian of the twenty-first century.”\(^5\) At first blush, the Jonah sarcophagi do not seem so problematic. Nonetheless, it is worth reflecting on some potential obstacles to their recognition.

The ability of the viewer to "decode" the Jonah theme presupposes at the very least a general familiarity with the story in the Hebrew Bible. The principal concern here is reception by Christian viewers, but one cannot ignore the likelihood that a not insignificant number of visitors to the tombs of dead Christians did not share their religious affiliation. Mixed families and alliances were common in the fourth century. Non-Christians must have attended commemorative ceremonies for their Christian friends and relatives. A few might

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have been Jews, but most were pagans. Some acquired sufficient biblical knowledge by osmosis, association or study to recognize the Jonah theme unaided. Augustine, a somewhat later witness, refers to a pagan who questioned the visual appearance of the Jonah cycle and thus obviously knew about it. Perhaps others received assistance “on site” from more knowledgeable visitors. The circumstance is analogous to the “dissident” Roman viewers discussed by Paul Zanker. It is a fascinating subject but one about which we have far too little information to speculate.

Even among the Christian viewers, familiarity with the story of Jonah is not easy to prove. One might, not unreasonably, circumvent the question by inferring the answer from the tangible result: the popularity of the Jonah theme on sarcophagi speaks for itself. It cannot have been entirely a supply-side phenomenon. Christian purchasers evidently desired funerary monuments with this biblical imagery and their demand is comprehensible only if they knew it, at least in a general way, when they saw it. Sarcophagi were meant to be seen, admittedly by a restricted group and only on commemorative occasions, but not for these limitations any less intently (chapter 3). The choice of the Jonah theme may, therefore, in and of itself implicate wide-spread recognition among viewers. While less common themes might have reflected the special requirements or interests of erudite or nonconformist patrons, the large number of stereotypical Jonah representations suggests general familiarity with both text (or story) and image. Nonetheless, it is worth considering where this knowledge might have come from in the hope that this may enable us better to understand what viewers did or did not know about the Old Testament Jonah.

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6 Augustine, Ep. 102. Yves-Marie Duval, Le livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne grecque et latine: sources et influence du Commentaire sur Jonas de saint Jérôme (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1973), 1.28, interpreted the passage as indicating that this correspondent had not read the biblical account but only seen the image.

By the late third century, biblical texts were available in significant number; some high status Christians may have read the book of Jonah on their own. However, although early Christianity is called a religion of the book, there was much greater focus on speech than text even among the élites and certainly the sub-élites of the Roman sarcophagus population, partly although not entirely due to limited literacy. For most sarcophagus viewers, familiarity with Jonah’s story must have been based on having heard it read aloud. One might suppose this to have occurred in the churches. Jonah has long been associated with readings during the paschal liturgy, yet evidence before the fifth century is meagre. The book of Jonah does seem to have been included among the vigil readings in Jerusalem, and perhaps Antioch, but it is not mentioned in any of Augustine’s paschal sermons. No text connects Jonah to the early liturgy in Rome, and it does not appear to have been included among a streamlined group of readings in northern Italy. The two most explicit notices concerning the liturgical reading of the book of Jonah concern Milan and the town of Oea (today’s Tripoli). Regarding the former, Ambrose noted in 386 that reading of the book was customary on Holy Thursday. The African example is based on the hostile reaction among members of the congregation to a reading by their bishop of Jerome’s revised Latin

9 See Peter Brown, “Images as a Substitute for Writing,” in East and West: Modes of Communications: Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida, ed. Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 31; Keith Hopkins, “Christian Number and its Implications,” Journal of Early Christian Studies 6 (1998): 206–212. On the character and extent of literacy in the late Roman Empire, see William V. Harris, Ancient Literacy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 285–322, and particularly regarding Christian literacy, 295–306. Harris argues that literacy in general declined after 250 CE; in the fourth century, the lower echelons of the élite (decurions) and the sub-élite were probably less literate than they had been earlier. Women were less literate than men even among aristocrats.
10 Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 66–67. The Jerusalem practice is, nonetheless, potentially significant. The oldest sources suggest twelve Old Testament readings, including the whole of the story of Jonah. The only longer reading was Genesis 1.1–3.24. Thomas J. Talley, The Origins of the Liturgical Year (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1986), 47–54, provides this reconstruction and also remarks that Egeria, visiting Jerusalem between 381 and 384, did not find the vigil there to be noteworthy in this respect, from which one might infer that the practice in the West, with which she was familiar, was similar. Nonetheless, Talley was unprepared to conclude that late fourth-century Roman liturgy was the same as in Jerusalem. See also Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 1.39–51.
11 Ambrose, Ep. 76.25–26: “lectus est de more liber Ionae.” In his Exameron, 5.11.35, pronounced on that day, Ambrose refers at some length to Jonah, and also to the typological “sign of Jonah.” See Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 1.41–42.
translation, in which the plant growing over Jonah in the rest scene was rendered _hedera_ (ivy) instead of _cucurbita_ (gourd plant). In reporting the incident, Augustine referred to the older version as long familiar to the congregation, having been chanted “for many generations.”

Precious as these hints of long-standing liturgical practice may be, it is uncertain how far they can be generalized. For example, there might have been some special connection between the Milanese church and the Hebrew prophet. A distich in the Ambrosian basilica, perhaps by Ambrose but not universally accepted as such, suggests that there was a wall painting of Jonah, presumably an image of his being swallowed up and spit out by the ketos. The chronological continuity and geographical consistency of liturgical practices may be debated. It is tempting to suppose that the book of Jonah was read in the Roman churches before 350, but the evidence is incomplete and inconclusive.

Another forum in which it might have become familiar to lay Christians was catechetical instruction. Aimé-Georges Martimort argued that this, rather than sepulchral ritual, explains the complete range of the subjects of Roman catacomb painting, especially Noah and Jonah. Of course many “Christians” among the sarcophagus viewers were not yet baptized, and the state of their religious instruction may have been far less advanced than the catechumen. Even for the latter, the sources are reticent regarding the presence of Jonah in their training. Martimort relied mainly on seventh-century texts. He also cited certain of Ambrose’s sermons to the newly baptized, but only for their general sentiments.

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12 Augustine, _Ep._ 71.3.1–4: “que inueteratum et tot aetatum successionibus decantatum.”
13 “Excipit innocuo viventem belua morsu / Cetus et ad terram Ionam gravis adtulit alvo.” The text appears in the _Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum_ as Ambrose (dubium), _Titula (Disticha in basilica ambrosiana)._  
They do not mention Jonah or, indeed, most of the other figures or episodes found in early Christian funerary art. Yves-Marie Duval’s review of the evidence enabled him to conclude only that the book of Jonah was probably read at some stage during the training of catechumens in Hippo. There is nothing to connect it directly to the baptismal rites and no documents regarding Roman practice. 15

Thus, the textual record is vaguely suggestive or supportive but not demonstrative regarding familiarity with the story of Jonah. One can speculate by analogy to the extra-Roman liturgical, ritual and catechetical practices in the later fourth century, themselves far from clearly documented, that Jonah’s story was read aloud to many Christians in the capital. The passages or lessons that might have been emphasized are unknown.

If we nonetheless assume that viewers had a general knowledge of the story, connecting it with the forms of representation on sarcophagi required a further effort. We see these depictions as “stock scenes,” but that is not likely how they would have been regarded by viewers. Through photographic reproduction, art historians have easy access to hundreds of carved and painted Jonah images on sarcophagi and in catacombs, but in the fourth century these were private monuments in spaces visited by a limited number of people. One should not confuse the number of Jonah funerary representations with the exposure of individuals to them. 16 How many coffins or mausolea does the average person see in a lifetime? Funerary rituals in the later Roman Empire provided more viewing opportunities than their modern successors, and the possibility of exposure to other families’ monuments in covered cemeteries may have expanded the range of visual experience; nonetheless, the exposure of early Christians to the carved or painted Jonah should not be exaggerated.

What about other media? There is no evidence of Jonah in the surviving decoration of Roman domus or nearby villas. He is depicted in a floor mosaic at Centcelles, near

15 Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 1.38–40 and 38n116, 39n117–118.
16 Robin Margaret Jensen, The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 30, for example, passes easily from “Jonah’s extreme popularity as a subject” in funerary art to “this continually reinforced image.” The former does not imply the latter.
Tarragona, Spain, probably no earlier than the end of the fourth century. This might or might not hint at earlier, Roman domestic programs. The only surviving ecclesiastical example from the first half of the fourth century is a floor mosaic in Aquileia. Gabriele Pelizzari argues that the Jonah cycle at the east end of this basilica had an important role in the instruction of local catechumens. No equivalent program survives in Rome, and there is no evidence it was widespread. As remarked in chapter 4, Jonah’s image did appear in smaller format. The surviving corpus is not large, many of the objects are from outside Rome or post-date the sarcophagi, and they often do not reflect the stereotypical funerary forms. Nonetheless, this circulating Kleinkunst, particularly gold glasses, might have provided a source of information for some sarcophagus viewers.

Even a number of first-time sarcophagus viewers who did know the story must have still required assistance in order to recognize the visual presentation as part of the Jonah theme and to contextualize the depicted episodes. One need not go so far as to propose a learned

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17 See, most recently, Manuel Sotomayor, “La iconografía de Centcelles. Enigmas sin resolver,” Revista de Prehistòria i Antiguitat de la Mediterrània Occidental 37 (2006): 143–173, with bibliography (Jonah images discussed at 148); Noël Duval, “Le problème d’identification et de datation du monument de Centcelles, près de Tarragone,” Antiquité Tardive 10 (2002): 443–459 (reviewing a conference publication on Centcelles). The Jonah theme consists of Jonah thrown to the ketos and at rest under the cucurbita. It is probable that a lost intermediate panel represented the disgorgement. There has been considerable debate in the literature whether the space is imperial, episcopal or domestic. After reviewing the arguments in some detail, Sotomayor opts for the last, and Duval leans in the same direction. Recent archaeological research summarized by him suggests a later date than previously proposed, perhaps the end of the fourth or even the fifth century.

interpreter, a hypothesis for which there is no evidence. Commemorative events at the Roman tomb were not silent gatherings of individuals isolated in their private grief. They were marked by banquets, speeches and chanting. Inscriptions must have been read aloud, both as a matter of habit and to assist the many less literate visitors. The reader might be a family member, or perhaps a cleric. Decoding pictures was likely also a performative and communal activity. Éric Rebillard has argued strenuously and repeatedly against a Christian funerary ritual imposed by the institutional church before the sixth century; he did not, however, deny the facultative and limited role of clergymen. The Apostolic Constitutions prescribe that there should be psalms, readings and prayers on the third day after death, marking the Resurrection, the ninth day, in memory of the living and the dead, the fortieth day, following ancient practices, and on anniversaries thereafter. Presbyters and deacons are to take part in these commemorations. All these events provided viewers an opportunity to acquire or deepen their knowledge of Jonah’s tale.

19 Josef Engemann, Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997), 31, hypothesized such an interpreter not only for complex mosaic programs but also simpler monuments: “Den Inhalt und die Bedeutung von bildlichen Darstellungen können nicht nur Analphabeten, sondern auch lesefähige Bildbetrachter nur dann erkennen, wenn sie ihnen erklärt werden oder wenn sie sie zuvor in Texten gelesen haben…. Dies gilt nicht nur hinsichtlich komplizierter Bildkompositionen, sondern schon für ganz einfache Darstellungen von Geschehnissen.” Brenk, “Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility,” 150, questioned Engemann’s suggestion, while acknowledging the complexity of the images, concluding that they were understood only by a small, literate élite.


22 Franz Xaver von Funk (ed.), Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1905), 8.41, canons 42 and 44, referred to by Alchermes, “Cura pro mortis,” 324–325. Although compiled in Greek in Syria around 380, book 8 is probably based on the third-century Apostolic Tradition of Hyppolytus of Rome, suggesting that these passages are also applicable to earlier Roman rituals. See Johannes Quasten, Patrology (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950), 2.181–184. Canon 42 of the Apostolic Constitutions, in von Funk’s translation (553–555), reads in part: “Quod spectat ad mortuos, celebretur dies tertius in psalms, lectio nubis et precibus ob eum, qui tertia die resurrexit; 2. Item dies nonus in recordationem superstitum et defunctorum; 3. atque etiam dies quadragesimus iuxta veterem typum; Mosem enim ita luxit populus; 4. denique anniversarius dies pro memoria ipsius.”
In sum, although direct documentary evidence is lacking, it is reasonable to suppose that most Christian viewers looking at Jonah sarcophagi knew the whole story, albeit perhaps with gaps and errors. On their own or with a little help from their friends and clerics they were able to recognize the images on Jonah sarcophagi. There were, however, significant discrepancies between those images and the biblical account, to which we now turn.

**ii) Coherence**

The depiction of Jonah on Christian sarcophagi is unlike that of other common Old Testament representations. The figure with hands outstretched in prayer surrounded by lions is recognizably the Daniel of Daniel 6:16-22; a man standing in a box on the water approached by a dove with a bough in its mouth is a relatively direct, if stylized, expression of Noah in Genesis 8.11 (both seen on Rep. I.23, ill. 14); the three young men praying while surrounded by flames are clearly the Hebrew youths in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace from Daniel 3:24 (as on Rep. I.52, ill. 15). A symbolic and emotionally charged scene like the sacrifice of Isaac is readily deciphered (Rep. I.44, ill. 12). Such images as these capture a unique event that can be pinned to a specific biblical passage without much strain on the part of the viewer.

The Jonah theme often extends beyond a single frame to a multi-scene cycle. This might be thought to make the narrative even more recognizable; however, the representations present important and surprising omissions. In particular, the sarcophagi do not depict the calling of the prophet, his preaching in Nineveh, or the successful result. There are, indeed, few if any hints of Nineveh in early Christian art. Nor does one find any images of Jonah’s

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24 Myla Perraymond, “Ninive, la città del profeta Giona: iconografia, simbolismo, narrazione,” in *Il De Civitate Dei: l’opera, le interpretazioni, l’influsso*, ed. Elena Cavalcanti (Rome: Herder, 1996), 611–625, makes a valiant attempt to assert the importance of early Christian representations of Nineveh that merely reinforces their rarity (“Tuttavia anche se quantitativamente nonrilevante, essa si manifesta... non priva di significato...”). She cites only four examples before the fifth century: one catacomb painting, one loculus closure, a Theodosian
crucial three days and nights in the belly of the ketos. A model appears in much later medieval manuscripts, like the ninth-century Chludov Psalter (ill. 17).\(^{25}\) This form, while it cannot have been beyond the skill of the sculptors, either fell outside the fourth-century imagination or was not regarded as central to the visual presentation of the theme. Jonah does not appear on sarcophagi in extremis, like Daniel among the lions or the three Hebrew youths in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace. The artisans and designers offered the viewers only suggestions, at best the “before and after” of the swallowing and disgorgement. Jonah’s prayer, sometimes called his psalm or canticle, is left to imagination, contemplation or discussion.\(^{26}\)

Omissions are not surprising. Sculptors commonly adopted such techniques as conflation, condensation and selection in the passage from text to image. It is possible that the visual

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\(^{26}\) Uwe Steffen, *Das Mysterium von Tod und Auferstehung: Formen und Wandlungen des Jona-Motivs* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 109–110, claimed that Jonah is often depicted in prayer, hands outstretched in orant pose, upon his being vomited up by the ketos, thereby alluding to his psalm in the belly of the ketos and its answer. He cites one catacomb painting as an example. The form is not found on sarcophagi.
representations were regarded as a synecdoche for the entire book of Jonah. Alternatively, the absence of Nineveh and the Ninevites, for example, might imply that the viewer’s experience of even the three-scene Jonah representations was restricted to particular aspects of the story. An isolated episode could but need not have functioned as an abbreviated version of a two- or three-scene cycle. We will return to these various possibilities throughout this chapter. The point here is that there is no need to suggest an extra-biblical source or understanding of the Jonah images merely because they do not expressly depict the whole or even what some might regard as the most significant elements of the story.

Turning from what is not represented to what is, a few concerns have been expressed in the literature regarding the ship and the disgorgement. The creature that swallows Jonah is visually modelled on typical Roman sea-monsters. It does not resemble a “fish,” the word used in the Vulgate, but the pagan precedents are appropriate for a cetus magnus, the expression in the Vetus Latina, a direct transliteration of the Septuagint. It is more difficult to justify the occasional representations of Jonah falling into the water rather than being thrown in by the sailors. Jean Allenbach regarded this as a case of conformity with the text strengthening over time, the so-called “biblicization” of the theme proposed by a number of scholars, although that requires greater confidence in dating of the individual

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27 On the ketos in Greek and Roman art, see Lawrence, “Ships, Monsters and Jonah,” 294–295. Many non-Christian examples might be cited of the ketos in virtually identical form to that commonly seen with Jonah. See, for example, a lenos sarcophagus in Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. 1552; Jan Stubbe Østergaard, Imperial Rome: Catalogue, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1996), 126–127 (cat. 54).

28 Jerome preferred piscis in his translation of the book of Jonah, but he, too, used the Latinized cetus in Matt. 12:40. In Latin usage, cetus was employed to refer to a large fish in general and a sea monster in particular, including the beast of Greek myths such as Andromeda: Thesaurus linguae Latinae (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 3,975–977. Since the Vetus Latina followed the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text, the speculation by Eduard Stommel, “Zum Problem der frühchristlichen Jonasdarstellungen,” Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 1 (1958): 113–114, that a Greek version of the Jonah story disseminated by Diaspora Jews was likely the source of the imagery is unnecessary. See Korol, Die frühchristlichen Wandmalereien, 139; Josef Engemann, “Jonas: V. Kunst,” in Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, ed. Ernst Dassmann (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1998), 18.690.

monuments than is warranted. Some other biblical infidelities, for example Jonah falling directly from the deck of the boat into the mouth of the sea monster — in the text the ketos comes along only later — probably just reflect the artistic compression of sequential events into a single image.\textsuperscript{30} Jonah’s nakedness, in both the ship and rest scenes, has also been remarked as “extra-biblical” and attributed to factors ranging from naturalism to Jewish precedents to borrowing from the pagan Endymion (see “Naked Jonah,” below).

The most serious problem of biblical coherence concerns the depiction of Jonah at rest under the gourd plant, both its prevalence and the manner of its presentation. In the biblical account, Jonah leaves Nineveh after his preaching and builds a “booth” \textit{(umbraculum or tabernaculum} in the Vetus Latina) east of the city in order to watch events unfold (Jonah 4:5). God causes a plant to grow over this structure, providing additional shade (Jonah 4:6). The “rest scene” on sarcophagi usually shows Jonah at rest or asleep — it is often difficult to tell which — under a plant, sometimes with and more often without any indication of a man-made structure.\textsuperscript{31} This form of representation has been argued to be at odds with the biblical text in several respects.

First, in a substantial number of cases, the sea-monster is shown in close proximity to the reclining Jonah (e.g., ill. 7, 12, 13, 16, 18, 22) or even still holding part of its victim (ill. 16, 20). The spitting out is thus juxtaposed with the rest under the plant even though these two moments are geographically, temporally and thematically distant from one another in the biblical account. Following the text, the dry land upon which Jonah is deposited by the ketos cannot be the spot where he erects his booth. The city of Nineveh was not close to the sea. It lay on the east bank of the Tigris, so Jonah’s chosen spot east of the city was not on water at all. The booth and the plant are part of the concluding verses of the book of Jonah, separated from his adventures at sea by the preaching at Nineveh. His “rest” is connected to conflict over his role as a false prophet and the salvation of the non-Jewish Assyrians. It

\textsuperscript{30} Sichtermann, “Der Jonaszyclus,” 243, 245; Duval, \textit{Le livre de Jonas}, 1.22.
\textsuperscript{31} The “booth” is only occasionally found on the sarcophagus representations. See, e.g., \textit{Rep.} I.778 (ill. 18), 794 (ill. 7), \textit{Rep.} II.185 (ill. 16). It is more often depicted on wall paintings (e.g., an arcosolium lunette in the “Anonima di via Anapo” catacomb).
precedes and sets the stage for the exchange between Jonah and God. There is no reference here to Jonah’s own salvation from the ketos.

A second issue concerns the botanical accuracy of the plant, a matter that has attracted a surprising degree of attention. Scholarly interest in the question was tweaked by a controversial episode in biblical translation. In the Hebrew text, this plant was called qiqayon (also transliterated as qyqywn, kikayon and ciceion). The Septuagint translators chose the word κολοκύνθα, which became cucurbita in the Vetus Latina, only to be changed by Jerome to hedera in his Vulgate. The conventional view is that the Hebrew word referred to the castor-oil plant, ricinus communis, while cucurbita is a gourd plant, likely the bottle-gourd. Perhaps the Greek translation resulted from unfamiliarity with the eastern species and an attempt to find a phonetic equivalent, although it is also possible that the Septuagint actually got it right. Hedera is ivy or vine.

Giovanni Bazzana argued that Jerome’s emendation was not only lexical, meant to correct an error in the Greek translation, but also theological, a subtle attempt to reverse a traditional association of cucurbita with divine protection and millennialism. There is no way to know whether viewers of the Jonah sarcophagi actually considered the species to hold such symbolic content, but it seems doubtful. Fourth-century Christian writers before Jerome do not refer specifically to the plant, and if its millenarian connotations were not important to the theologians, one suspects they were not recognized by lay sarcophagus viewers. J.L. Heller proposed a less elevated explanation for the Vulgate translation. He

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33 Heller, “Κολοκύνθη,” 67–71, 92, 101. The cucurbita is identified with Lagenaria siceraria (also called cucurbita lagenaria), the bottle-gourd. It cannot be the cucurbita maxima as suggested by some earlier scholars since that plant – squash or pumpkin in English – is native to North America and did not reach Europe until the sixteenth century. Heller presents convincing visual evidence of the similarity of the fruits of the bottle-gourd to early Christian representations.

34 Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” 402, concludes that the Hebrew term also referred to the gourd. Heller, “Κολοκύνθη,” however, accepts that the ciceion is the Middle Eastern castor-oil plant and notes (85–86) that Jerome considered the lexical problem as involving three different plants.

35 Bazzana, “Cucurbita.”

36 Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 1.26–27.
suggested that Jerome’s rejection of *cucurbita* was prompted by asceticism, concern that “the gourd was one of the garden-products which were sought out by luxury-loving clerics.” Alternatively it might have been a wish to avoid referring to a fruit which, according to Pliny (who may have been referring to a different variety), had purgative properties. Whatever the explanation, there is evidence, albeit rather later than the production of the Jonah sarcophagi, that at least some of the faithful knew not only of the existence of a plant in the biblical account of Jonah’s rest but also what it was called. We have already encountered the correspondence between Augustine and Jerome about the tumult in the town of Oea caused by a liturgical reading of the story in the new translation. Local Jews were consulted and they confirmed that the Hebrew version conformed to the Septuagint and not to Jerome’s Vulgate.

The issue here is not precision of translation but whether the different botanical species are reflected in the sarcophagus images, and if so, whether this could have had any impact on the Biblical Jonah. In the great majority of cases, the rest scene is characterized by the hanging fruit of the *cucurbita*. There may be leaves as well, the form of which is not always consistent. The carvers evidently meant to communicate the protection of the Old Testament prophet by a species of gourd plant then known in the region and thereby to convey a proper visual rendition of the prevailing biblical text as it appeared in both Greek and Latin. There are some examples that do not follow this norm. For example, a sarcophagus lid in the Museo Pio Cristiano depicts a putto-like Jonah escaping from the ketos. He stands on his left leg hugging the trunk of a tree, as if to avoid being pulled back into the mouth of the monster that still holds his foot and calf (Rep. I.145, ill. 19). The tree has mysterious bulbous appendages that could be gourds, but it does not resemble the

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38 Augustine, *Ep.* 71.3. The episode, correspondence and the larger context of contemporary concerns with Jerome’s resort to the Hebrew text are reviewed by Heller, “Ὑλοκύννη,” 83–94.
39 Heller, “Ὑλοκύννη,” 112–116, claims that the *cucurbita lagenaria* is depicted on the walls of a room at Herculaneum, and that it was, and is, native to the area around Naples. His description of the fruit is similar to the typical version found on Jonah sarcophagi. It may be observed that “cucurbitae primae” also appears in Diocletian’s Prices Edict. 6.26.
usual cucurbita. Another example, also in the Museo Pio Cristiano, depicts Jonah in the more usual reclining, cross-legged posture indicative of rest or sleep, although as an older, bearded man (Rep. I.44, ill. 12). The prophet is lying not under a booth or a gourd plant but a tree that provides shade over his head. There are no hanging fruits.

The third possible plant species is Jerome’s vine. Mitius thought he could recognize forms of the Jonah rest scene in which the plant was transformed from cucurbita to hedera. He interpreted this as an indication that these monuments post-dated Jerome’s translation. In other cases, he identified shrubs that seemed to combine ivy leaves with gourd fruits. Later scholars have been slow to accept such fine botanical analyses. There are no early fourth-century depictions of Jonah at rest under a plant that is identifiably the ricinus or the hedera rather than a cucurbita. To the extent that any seem closer to the vine than the gourd plant, their dating contradicts any effect of Jerome’s translation.

However one interprets the depiction of the plant over Jonah’s head, it is not inconsistent with the perception of the Old Testament Jonah. The dominance of the cucurbita with its gourd fruits suggests that the Septuagint or Vetus Latina text was what most Christians had heard (as confirmed by the tumult at Oea later in the century). The occasional different forms could reflect a particular patron’s attachment to some other botanical understanding.

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41 Dated in the Repertorium to the first quarter of the fourth century (for Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 272, also Constantinian)
42 Mitius, Jonas, 46.
43 Antonio Ferrua, “Paralimpomeni di Giona,” Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana 38 (1962): 59, concluded that the plant in the rest scene “ha molto del fantastico, ma niente affatto dell’edera, nè per il tronco, nè per il tip della vegetazione o del fogliame.”
44 The ricinus communis is described by Robinson, “Jonah’s Qiqayon Plant,” 392, as "a bush or small tree with a trunk." Pliny, NH, 15.25, says the ricinum is a tree native to Egypt and also found in Spain. Duval, “Jonas à Aquilée,” 176, referred to a floor mosaic in a Palestinian basilica at Beth Govrin dated to the fifth or sixth century as possibly depicting Jerome’s hedera. The plant has full, round or spade-shaped leaves and no fruit. See Foerster, “Story of Jonah,” fig. 1. Another example may be a wall painting at Sopianae (Pécs). See Krisztina Hudák, “The Iconographical Program of the Wallpaintings in the Saint Peter and Paul Burial Chamber of Sopianae (Pécs),” Mitteilungen zur christlichen Archäologie 15 (2009): 55, 63–64, who dates the work to the end of the fourth century. These representations are not very different from Rep. I.44, referred to above. While the Beth Govrin and Sopianae images could reflect Jerome’s retranslation, as Duval and Hudák suggest, they could also merely continue the tradition of botanical confusion and imprecision observed by Ferrua in the preceding footnote. Heller, “Koλοκύνη,” 94, found no examples of a depiction of ricinus and the only hedera he cited was a fourteenth-century manuscript.
or a different textual source, but this seems unlikely. The variations could be attributable to attempts by the Roman sculptor to depict a plant not native to Italy. In any event, in all cases the images remained associated with the biblical account of Jonah’s booth and the Lord’s plant.

A third issue concerning the rest scene is the sense of peace and repose expressed by the prophet’s posture, sometimes reinforced by pastoral elements. According to the text, Jonah was angry when he left the city and made his booth (Jonah 4:4). But he was pleased with the plant provided by God (Jonah 4:6), so perhaps the sarcophagus representations reflect this emotional moment rather than the immediately preceding one. The question of precisely what Jonah is doing or feeling during the rest scene is complicated by the considerable variety in its presentation. He may be resting, sleeping or sitting; in most cases it is impossible to infer his state of mind from the summary rendering of his physiognomy (compare ill. 4, 5, 7, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 22, 27). In a few examples, found only in catacomb painting, the prophet appears to some commentators to be angry, the so-called Jonah irritatus, although others interpret the same images as sad or brooding.

Taking all these factors into account, some scholars have concluded that the Jonah theme as it appears on sarcophagi is extra-biblical while others have defended a strict connection to the book of Jonah. Both positions are, to borrow Duval’s words, “too radical.”

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45 Stommel, “Zum Problem der frühchristlichen Jonasdarstellungen,” 113–114, made the same argument for a lost Jewish text in connection with cucurbita and ricinus as he did regarding ketos and piscis. See note 28 above.

46 As remarked in the Introduction, this is a coined Latinism. It is deployed by Wolfgang Wischmeyer, “Das Beispiel Jonas: Zur kirchengeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Denkmälern frühchristlicher Grabeskunst zwischen Theologie und Frömmigkeit,” Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte 92 (1981): 170; Wischmeyer, “Die Cleveland-Statuetten,” 260–261, ill. 9 (referring to the ceiling of the Susanna cubiculum in the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter). Both articles include footnote references to Jakob Speigl, “Das Bildprogramm des Jonasmotivs in den Malereien der römischen Katakomben,” Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte 73 (1978): 1–15 (at 170n56 and 273n64), but Speigl does not use this terminology; indeed, he does not adopt this interpretation. In the second note, Wischmeyer refers to a “secondary” interpretation offered by Speigl as Jonah rudely aroused from his sleep (aufgeschreckten) by the burning sun. Mitius, Jonas, 38–40, included the painting mentioned by Wischmeyer and several others under the heading “der trauernde Jonas.”

47 Notable rejectionists include Sichtermann, “Der Jonaszyclus,” 243; Alfred Stuiber, Refrigerium Interim: Die Vorstellungen vom Zwischenzustand und die frühchristlich Grabeskunst (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1957), 136–138, 148–150. The opposite view was championed by Ferrua, “Paralimpomeni,” 52–56; Lucien de Bruyne,
best solution is not a compromise but a more nuanced understanding of what one means by “biblical,” avoiding a false dichotomy. Nothing prevents reception of the images (or, for that matter, their production) from being over-determined, simultaneously expressing biblical and extra-biblical meanings. Nothing requires every image to be experienced in the same way by every viewer, or by the same viewer at every viewing. Depictions of Jonah may properly be associated with the Old Testament text without illustrating it fully or faithfully, and without presenting an intelligible synecdoche for the complete narrative. Indeed, the demand for coherence may be unreasonable having regard to the complexity of the story and the many readings it received, both before and after the sarcophagi were deployed.49 What makes the viewer’s Jonah an Old Testament Jonah is that the visual experience evoked thoughts of the biblical prophet and his story.

The Old Testament Jonah presents several possible faces. His disobedience to the Lord is conveyed in the ship scene where he is cast into the sea after confessing to the sailors. His repentance is stubbornly hidden from direct view but suggested by the disgorgement. The representation of Jonah vomited up by the monster, or lying on the shore with the monster hovering nearby, could recall God’s mercy, as could the appearance of the ketos, which saves Jonah from drowning, and the cucurbita which protects him, at least temporarily, from the heat of the sun. The rest scene could have been related back to the imagined, if not depicted, swallowing and disgorgement but it could also have been retained within its biblical context, a succinct and cryptic reference to his preaching, his role as an instrument of God and the final message of divine wisdom. Or it could be ripped from its context and mean something else, as suggested by the other facets to be discussed in the balance of this chapter. But under any of these alternatives, Jonah remained Jonah.

b) Typological Jonah

Jonah's scriptural role was not restricted to the "old" writings. He also appears in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. After a lengthy confutation of the Pharisees, Jesus is asked by some of them, who wish to be convinced, for a sign. He responds testily (or at least this is the report of the Evangelists) that this evil and adulterous generation will receive no sign but "the sign of Jonah the prophet" (Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:29-32; also, in abbreviated form, Matthew 16:4). By way of explanation, Jesus refers to two aspects of the Old Testament story. The first is Jonah's ordeal in the ketos.

For as Jonah was in the whale's belly three days and three nights: so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40).

The second is the penance and conversion of the Ninevites.

The English texts are from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate Clementina (changing Jonas to Jonah to conform with contemporary English orthography). The Vetus Latina manuscripts are not materially different save that in the Vulgate and modern translations like the King James Version, only Matthew refers to this first element of the typological allegory, while Luke 11:30 mentions only the second, concerning the Ninevites. The manuscripts of the Vetus Latina for that verse of Luke fall into two groups. Most are similar to the Vulgate, limited to the Ninevites, but a substantial minority include both aspects of the "sign," referring in sequence to the ketos and the Ninevites. The typological parallel between Jonah's confinement in the ketos and the Resurrection is also drawn in Paul's apocryphal letter to the Corinthians (3.24): Acts of Paul, in Schneemelcher, Wilhelm (ed.), New Testament Apocrypha, trans. Robert McLachlan (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 2.377.

The mathematical inaccuracy of this comparison has long been noted. The Resurrection occurred on the second day after the Crucifixion. The number of days Jonah spent in the ketos and Jesus spent in the earth might be reconcilable since the usual method of reckoning was to count parts of a day ("After three days I will rise again," Matt. 27:63), but it is more difficult to avoid the discrepancy between two nights and three. This inconvenience in the typological text was remarked by early Christian writers who constructed a number of creative solutions. Eusebius, Questions évangéliques, trans. and ed. Claudio Zamagni (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 228-231 (Question 4, to Marinos, dated after 320) described some of these – like restarting the "day" based on an eclipse or obstruction of the sun – but he preferred a simpler explanation: Christ displayed his power by exceeding expectations. Like a debtor who pays his debt before it is due, the Lord's early Resurrection is hardly a source for complaint. The three-day period could also relate to the principle that the soul was thought to hover about the body for three days. Frederick S. Paxton, Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 22, notes Lazarus was raised after four days in the grave (John 11:17), when his soul would have departed, making the miracle more impressive. In any event, this technical day-counting problem dissipated with time. When Augustine discussed the book of Jonah in 409, he regarded it as passé, no longer worthy of attention (Ep. 102.31): "longum est disserere et in alius sermonibus iam saepissime dictum est."

Again, the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate Clementina, which is very similar to the Vetus Latina save as noted above (note 50) for the additional material in many manuscripts of Luke 11:30.
For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites; so shall the Son of man also be to this
generation (Luke 11:30).

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn
it: because they did penance at the preaching of Jonah. And behold a greater than

Mark also reports this event (8:11-12), but without referring to Jonah at all.

The Typological Jonah in the sarcophagus literature has been exclusively related to the first
of these two elements of the “sign of Jonah,” and it has been regarded as fundamental both
to the meaning of the Jonah images and their popularity.53 Other common Old Testament
sarcophagus themes are not so privileged with a New Testament source. Daniel, for
example, is mentioned in Matthew 24:15, but not his presence in the lions’ den, an episode
not explicitly remarked anywhere in the gospels.54 Nor does one find the three Hebrew
youths in the furnace. Noah and his ark are occasionally mentioned (Matthew 24:37-38;
Luke 3:36, 17:26-27), but not the moment when the dove arrives with a sprig in its mouth
as depicted on sarcophagi. The same can be said of other popular representations drawn
from the Hebrew Bible.

The German language literature often labels Jonah representations, along with Daniel and
some other common themes in early Christian art, as Rettungsbilder or Rettungsszenen,

53 Mitius, Jonas, 98. Similarly Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 64, considered that the reference in Matt. 12:40
“undoubtedly became the most influential reason for depicting Jonah in pre- and post-Constantinian art.” See
also Dulaey, L’initiation chrétienne, 86. Wolfgang Wischmeyer, “Die vorkonstantinische christliche Kunst in
passages as providing a second meaning or source for the Roman Jonah cycles (after the pagan precedent of
Endymion), although the same author elsewhere noted that the typological reading of Jonah and
corresponding Christology do not appear until the 340s: Wolfgang Wischmeyer, “Das Beispiel Jonas: Zur
kirchengeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Denkmälern frühchristlicher Grabeskunst zwischen Theologie und
Frömmigkeit,” Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte 92 (1981): 169. The reconciliation is probably to be found in his
claim that the understanding of the sign of Jonah in early Christian Roman art was premised not on theological
typological reasoning but Volksfrömmigkeit. For a typological interpretation of the swallowing and
disgorgement scenes on the late fourth-century Brescia casket, see Catherine Brown Tkacz, The Key to the
70.
54 Frank W. Hardy, "New Testament References to Daniel," Historicism 1985, no. 1, Modified September 19,
2010, at http://www.historicism.org/Documents/Jrnl/DanNT.pdf, 10, suggested that Heb. 11:33 is intended as
a reference to Dan. 6:1–27, although Daniel is not actually named.
literally rescue or salvation images or scenes.\footnote{Engemann, \textit{Deutung und Bedeutung}, 106; Steffen, \textit{Das Mysterium von Tod}, 107.} There is a range of meanings that may be ascribed to this notion of deliverance (see “Idyllic Jonah” and “Political Jonah,” below), but the traditional and primary sense has been a full-blown Christian resurrection soteriology. What is at stake here is not fairy-tale symbolism, Jonah's marine adventure as a generic and unthreatening figure for death and rebirth. It is the very serious matter of the eschatological views of early Christianity, whether and in what way they were elicited and experienced by viewers of certain images.

\textit{iii) The resurrection thesis}

One view of early Christian art is that it is fundamentally centred on a particular conception of the salvation of the soul anchored in the Incarnation and Resurrection: the images with which Christians surrounded themselves in their funerary spaces graphically displayed the eternal salvation that was the hallmark of their religion and God’s gift to its adherents.\footnote{Lucien de Bruyne, “Les 'lois' de l'art paléochrétien comme instrument hermeneutique,” \textit{Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana} 35 (1959): 186: early Christian art "étale sous les regards des visiteurs l’album, si j’ose m’exprimer ainsi, du salut éternel promis, et donc assurément destiné aux fidèles du Christ." This vision of an idyllic heaven as the heritage of the “the dead who do not die” was already well-established (185): "Et cette sérénité ne date pas des débuts du quatrième siècle, elle est vieille (et également jeune) comme la foi du chrétien dans la valeur absolue de l’oeuvre du Christ."} Scenes chosen from among the panoply of possibilities presented by biblical narratives established, as Fabrizio Bisconti put it, a kind of “visual alphabet” with which the divine plan of salvation might be presented to a viewer.\footnote{Fabrizio Bisconti, “Il mito e la Bibbia: due volti della rivoluzione dell’immaginario iconografico nella tarda antica,” in \textit{La Rivoluzione dell’immagine: arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio}, ed. Fabrizio Bisconti and Giovanni Gentili (Torino: Intesa Sanpaolo, 2007), 49. He notes that this process implies an origin of the imagery in liturgical and catechetical spaces, from which it was later transferred to the sepulchral realm. Brenk, “Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility,” 144, also emphasized the “salvational” character of early Christian “ecclesiastical-episcopal” imagery in contradistinction to imperial art. See also Dulaey, \textit{L’initiation chrétienne}, 54–59, 257–260.} In the words of Erwin Panofsky:\footnote{Erwin Panofsky, \textit{Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini} (New York: Abrams, 1964), 39, 42.}

Early Christian art emphasized not what the deceased had been or done but what would happen to him on account of his faith.... [T]he dominating principle of Early Christian funerary art remained... the preoccupation with deliverance from death and sin.

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\footnote{55}{E.g., Engemann, \textit{Deutung und Bedeutung}, 106; Steffen, \textit{Das Mysterium von Tod}, 107.}
\footnote{56}{Lucien de Bruyne, “Les 'lois' de l'art paléochrétien comme instrument hermeneutique,” \textit{Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana} 35 (1959): 186: early Christian art "étale sous les regards des visiteurs l’album, si j’ose m’exprimer ainsi, du salut éternel promis, et donc assurément destiné aux fidèles du Christ." This vision of an idyllic heaven as the heritage of the “the dead who do not die” was already well-established (185): "Et cette sérénité ne date pas des débuts du quatrième siècle, elle est vieille (et également jeune) comme la foi du chrétien dans la valeur absolue de l’oeuvre du Christ."}
\footnote{57}{Fabrizio Bisconti, “Il mito e la Bibbia: due volti della rivoluzione dell’immaginario iconografico nella tarda antica,” in \textit{La Rivoluzione dell’immagine: arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio}, ed. Fabrizio Bisconti and Giovanni Gentili (Torino: Intesa Sanpaolo, 2007), 49. He notes that this process implies an origin of the imagery in liturgical and catechetical spaces, from which it was later transferred to the sepulchral realm. Brenk, “Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility,” 144, also emphasized the “salvational” character of early Christian “ecclesiastical-episcopal” imagery in contradistinction to imperial art. See also Dulaey, \textit{L’initiation chrétienne}, 54–59, 257–260.}
\footnote{58}{Erwin Panofsky, \textit{Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini} (New York: Abrams, 1964), 39, 42.}
Its themes were invested with “what might be called a charismatic or ‘salvational,’ not to say magical power.” Panofsky cited as thematic examples Daniel, Jonah and the three Hebrew youths.

The Jonah theme has been regarded as paradigmatic of this conception of early Christian funerary art. Mitius elaborated a grand interpretation for the cycle that reflected his faith in its salvific significance. Like Bisconti’s visual alphabet, he conceived of the three basic episodes as spelling out the essence of the Christian soteriological trilogy: death (swallowing), salvation/resurrection (regurgitation), and the paradisiacal peace of the soul (rest under the cucurbita). This tripartite formula has been surprisingly robust. Under this theorization of the Jonah theme, his disgorgement becomes the conceptual and theological pivot. Rescue from the ketos is transmogrified from the happy ending of a maritime misadventure into a symbol or allegory of the Christian triumph over death.

A preliminary question, not always carefully attended to in the literature, is: salvation of whom? Are viewers meant to have associated representations of Jonah on Roman sarcophagi with the resurrection of the deceased whose corpse it contained, or of themselves? Or perhaps the salvation had a communal sense, referring to the Christian faithful in general. Could it have been an allusion to the “special dead” who ascend directly to heaven, the martyrs? Was Jonah to be regarded as a mortal or as emblematic of Christ, the image becoming a visual rendition of the sign of Jonah?

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59 Mitius, *Jonas*, 97–98. Note that he imputed the construction of meaning to the Christian artisans, not the viewers. Jensen, *Substance of Things Seen*, 43–44: “Jonah was dead and was brought back to life.... The vomited Jonah is being released into paradise, not returned to his dodged responsibilities, and the reclining Jonah is already in heaven, not just sulking in a garden.” Korol, *Die frühchristlichen Wandmalereien*, 147, writing about a later cycle: “...[D]as Verschlungenwerden (gleichsam das Sterben), die Rettung aus dem Todesbereich des Ungeheuers und der idyllische Zustand des Gerettetseins ermittelt werden können.” See also Tkacz, *Brescia Casket*, 70, 86; Wolfgang Wischmeyer, *Die Tafeldeckel der christlichen Sarkophage konstaninischer Zeit in Rom: Studien zur Struktur, Ikonographie und Epigraphik* (Rome: Herder, 1982), 101–103; Steffen, *Das Mysterium von Tod*, 107–111; Pelizzari, *Il pastore ad Aquileia*, 122–125. Even Stuiber, *Refrigerium Interim*, 150–151, agreed that when Jonah at rest is depicted in the ship or disgorgement scenes the meaning shifts away from the intermediate state to resurrection, although there is some tension in his discussion as to whether the “salvation” concept applies to all three scenes or only the first two.
References to Jonah as an allegory of the martyrs are uncommon, but all these other possible identifications of Jonah have received some support. This does not imply conflicting theories, since the interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Over-determination is not only permitted but encouraged by the reciprocally reinforcing character of these alternatives. Christ’s resurrection was intimately linked to the Christian’s own condition. And while some scholars argue strenuously that the images refer to the deceased, there is no reason why the carved Jonah could not have been regarded simultaneously as a figure for both the occupant of the sarcophagus and its viewer. Jensen’s reading of the funerary images (catacombs and sarcophagi without distinction) conflates many of these potentialities: Jonah as Christ, deceased, believer and, by implication, viewer.

By the association of these different ideas in a sort of mathematical equation (Jonah = Christ’s death and resurrection = baptism of the believer), we arrive at an almost obvious conclusion. The image of Jonah symbolically refers to Christ’s death and resurrection, in which the Christian participates through baptism. Baptism is the believer’s guarantee of resurrection from death and rebirth into paradise, which is iconographically symbolized by Jonah’s deliverance from the sea monster. In this sense the deceased person in the tomb is also a “Jonah.” The image thus speaks at many levels.

It is unlikely that a viewer actually regarded the naked prophet as Christ (and there are no physiognomic suggestions of this), but Jensen’s analysis does not demand this. So long as the New Testament metaphor entered their minds when viewing the Jonah theme in the presence of the deceased, thoughts of Christ’s life, death and resurrection could easily be related to the cycle of mortal existence. A viewer coming upon Jonah at the tomb might

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60 Josef Engemann, “Zur Interpretation der Darstellungen der Drei Jünglinge in Babylon in der frühchristlichen Kunst,” in Akten des Symposiums “Frühchristliche Sarkophage”: Marburg, 30.6. – 4.7.1999, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 85–89, reviews the literature proposing that the image of the three Hebrew youths in the furnace was meant to represent the Christian martyrs and concludes that this reading is untenable. It is not a common claim in respect of Jonah and even more difficult to defend.

61 Engemann, Deutung und Bedeutung, 107.

62 Jensen, Substance of Things Seen, 45. See also von Schoenebeck, “Paradeisosarkophage,” 311; Dulaey, L’initiation chrétienne, 93; Bisconti, “Il mito e la Bibbia,” 51.
thereby have been spontaneously reminded of the importance (if not all the theological implications) of the Christological typology.

This facet of the Jonah theme has been hotly contested in the literature. For some scholars it is self-evident and inescapable, like the “obvious conclusion” of Jensen’s soteriological algebra cited immediately above: the images, supported by texts, speak for themselves, and the message of the Christian eschatology of resurrection and redemption must have been irresistible to the knowledgeable viewer. Others question whether the Jonah representations had any such resonance at all.  

The approach in this chapter is more analogue than digital, polyvalent rather than univocal. The issue is not whether the Typological Jonah is “correct,” but its relative strength, its likely reach within the Roman Christian sarcophagus population, and its concordance with the archaeological evidence.

iv) Texts, prayers, catechism

It is logical to consider first extrinsic evidence that could have formed or coloured the attitudes of Christian viewers initially presented with sarcophagus images of Jonah. Bracketing the images, that is to say regarding the documentary sources on their own terms, do they suggest that viewers approached the visual material with preconceptions that would have fostered a Typological Jonah?

Patristic literature has been mined to yield nuggets supporting the typological understanding. Perhaps the most elaborate and extensive textual reading of the visual theme is due to Martine Dulaey: Jonah as an allegory of the Passion, the sea representing Christ’s suffering, the boat as a figure for the Cross, the ketos as a floating tomb and emblematic of the darkness and temptation into which humankind has been cast, Nineveh as pagan sin, the rest scene a precursor to the Incarnation, the worm effecting the destruction of Israel, and so on.  

This ambitious interpretation of the funerary programs

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64 Dulaey, L’initiation chrétienne, 95–103.
relies on a broad range of sources, from East and West, from the third century to the sixth, on the explicit but problematic premise that there was far greater chronological and geographical cohesion in Christian thought than often supposed.65

Yet even applying liberal criteria to the utilization of sources, patristic writings regarding the book of Jonah are not very helpful for the salvific interpretation of the sarcophagi. While Jonah may be regarded by some modern Christian commentators as one or even the most important figure in the Old Testament,66 earlier writers apparently did not share this view. Duval’s authoritative study of the literature reveals it to be relatively modest in extent as well as inconsistent in opinion and emphasis.67 Tertullian, often an outlier, does express concern with resurrection, and one finds brief associations of Jonah with other figures saved by God (notably Daniel and the three Hebrew youths). Origen, who produced the most detailed commentary before Jerome, offered passing observations on aspects of typology. We have already encountered Eusebius becoming exercised over the potential mathematical inconsistency arising from Jesus’s comment on three days and three nights.68 However, the primary concerns of the earliest texts point in other directions, including the decline of Israel (related to the withering of the gourd plant) and the repentance and salvation of the Ninevites. By far the most extensive and erudite early Christian treatment of the subject, Jerome’s In Ionam, appeared in 396 CE, after the heyday of Jonah sarcophagi, and makes no reference to them. Jerome’s focus was not on resurrection

65 Dulaey, L’initiation chrétienne, 39–40. Reading back subsequent texts to elucidate earlier reception requires robust assumptions of intellectual consistency and continuity. The premise that Jerome or other late fourth- and fifth-century theologians added nothing to the substantive understanding of the Jonah theme is both unwarranted and unlikely. Nor should the geographical impediments be underestimated. Not everything written in the Greek East was received in Rome and widely disseminated among the élite and sub-élite constituting the Roman sarcophagus population. Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 2.613, remarks that within the restrictions imposed by exegetical traditions, theologians exercised considerable freedom in their interpretations of the Jonah theme, tailoring their messages to the particular audience and circumstances.

66 Martimort, “L’iconographie des catacombes,” 110, referred to Jonah as “un des symboles les plus importants de la Bible.” Donald G. Miller, cited by André LaCocque and Pierre-Emmanuel LaCocque, Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 50, called him “the high point of the Old Testament... the peak of Old Testament revelation.” His literary (Moby Dick) and popular (Disney’s Pinocchio) appeal are testimony to the modern fascination with his story, although it is almost entirely limited to the first two chapters of the book of Jonah.

67 Duval, Le livre de Jonas, considers Jewish precedents, Christian literature before Jerome (1.115–272), his contemporaries, responses to his In Ionam, and its fortuna. See also Allenbach, “La figure de Jonas.”

68 See note 51 above.
soteriology but God’s condemnation and rejection of Israel in favour of the pagans, and Jonah as a presage of the Passion where the Jews rejected Christ. 69

Thus, there is no *communis opinio doctorum* regarding the book of Jonah, and the theme of resurrection cannot be regarded as central to most theological commentaries, such as they are. Some theologians did remark Jonah’s soteriological significance, albeit without direct reference to image-making, and it is possible that these commentaries were repeated and became part of the oral culture relating to the story and the significance of the Hebrew prophet. More generally, a number of patristic writers fussed with the logical and theological problems caused by the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh, unconnected with the book of Jonah, and one might infer that these concerns were shared or even inspired by those of the lay faithful. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, “the major exponents of bodily resurrection through the period [between 200 and 400 CE] ... clearly reflect real discussion with worried believers.” 70 It is difficult to discern whether bodily resurrection absorbed the thoughts of Christian visitors to the tomb at this time. It is not remarkable among grave inscriptions. Dresken-Weiland reports only four fourth-century examples referring specifically to resurrection, none of which is on a sarcophagus. 71

A more promising source for a textual connection between Jonah and salvation might be early Christian prayers. These often enumerate a series of Old and New Testament figures

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69 To anticipate the consideration of images below, it may be observed that, as well as not being especially concerned with typology, the generally economical theological considerations of Jonah very rarely mention the scene under the cucurbita. This apparent discrepancy between the literary and the visual convinced Josef Engemann that earlier scholarly attempts (by Dassmann, Carletti, Dulaey and others) to tie the images to the old texts were misguided. Engemann, “Drei Jünglige,” 83–89 and “Biblische Themen im Bereich der frühchristlichen Kunst,” in Stimuli: Exegese und ihre Hermeneutik in Antike und Christentum: Festschrift für Ernst Dassmann, ed. Georg Schöllgen and Clemens Scholten (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1996), 554–555. His conclusion is shared by Allenbach, “La figure de Jonas,” 111.

70 Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 61–62. The examples she provides in 62n6, are not, however, very strong. In some cases, the writer seems to be responding to pagan critics. In others, the real or hypothesized interlocutor could as well be another Christian theologian as a lay believer. Her reference to Ambrose does seem to suggest the bishop’s concern with the beliefs of members of his congregation, although this source is somewhat later than the bulk of the sarcophagi.

saved by God. Duval calls them “lists.” That terminology is preferable to “litany” or “litany with refrains,” which are appropriate to later forms but might or might not be proper characterizations of the earliest versions. Commonly cited in this regard is the Ordo commendationis animae (or the Commendatio anime), a responsive prayer that persists to the present day. Its oldest sources are no earlier than the eighth century, but some scholars think it might reflect practice in fourth-century Rome. References to the Commendatio anime in the literature related to the Jonah theme rarely include a close examination of the problem of dating, and even more surprising, the question of whether Jonah was even mentioned. Regardless of the difficulties with this particular prayer, it is demonstrable that such lists of Old and New Testament figures did exist in Rome by the fourth century, and while the participants varied, Jonah was usually among them. The Apostolic Constitutions, for example, contains a lengthy prayer extolling God’s eternal strength that,


73 Jensen, Early Christian Art, 71. Alternatively, it could be a later medieval innovation. L. Gougaud, “Étude sur les “Ordines commendationis animae,” Ephemerides Liturgicae 49 (1935): 5, cited the Vita Austrebertae as the oldest reference to the prayer, the saint having died in 704 (although this Vita is now generally dated to the ninth century: Paxton, Christianizing Death, 123n96). Gougaud thought that the actual text of the litany appeared in only one eighth-century manuscript, the Sacramentarium Rhenaugiense now in the Zentralbibliothek, Zürich, but Damien Sicard, La liturgie de la mort dans l’église latine: des origines à la reforme carolingienne (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1978), 300n37, noted three other examples. Paxton, Christianizing Death, treats this type of prayer as a significant eighth-century innovation. Martimort, “L’iconographie des catacombes,” 105, dismisses it as a source for catacomb painting, in part because of what he regards as its late date.

74 The conventional wisdom holds that Jonah does not appear in the Commendatio anime: Jensen, Early Christian Art, 71; Stroumsa-Uzan, “Jonas of Aquileia,” 56n6; Mitius, Jonas, 90. Nonetheless, several scholars cite this prayer specifically in discussions of the Jonah theme without highlighting this issue. See Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 63 (comparing it to the Mi she’anah in which Jonah is named); Bisconti, “Il mite e la Bibbia,” 51; Carl-Otto Nordström, “Some Jewish Legends in Byzantine Art,” Byzantion 25–27 (1955–1957): 504; Wischmeyer, “Das Beispiel Jonas,” 176; Stuiber, Refrigérium Interim, 169–170; Martimort, “L’iconographie des catacombes,” 105n1. In fact, although not remarked in any of this literature, there is some inconsistency in the lists found in early texts of the Commendatio anime. In one example, the Sacramentarium Rhenaugiense, Jonah is mentioned, as observed by Gougaud, “Ordines commendationis animae,” 13. Ordo CCLXVI of that manuscript includes the prayer that God should free the souls of his servants as he did, inter alia, Jonah in the belly of the ketos (“libera domine animam serui tui illi, sicut liberasti ionam de uentre ceti”). See Hänggi and Schönherr (eds.), Sacramentarium Rhenaugiense (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1970), 272. They date the manuscript rather later than does Gougaud, to the turn of the ninth century (63–68).
inter alia, “cools the flame, muzzles the lions, pacifies sea monsters.” The references are evidently to the three Hebrew youths in the furnace, Daniel, and Jonah.

The establishment of a group of “salvation figures” in these lists has been especially prominent in discussions of Jonah emphasizing salvation, the idea being that he is likened in the prayers to others who were rescued by God’s favourable intervention. No doubt the lists, in both prayers and some theological texts, do present a series of such “saved” figures, but they should not be entirely homogenized. The lions’ den, the furnace and the belly of the ketos are all places from which men are rescued by God, in each case following a prayer, but this homology is limited. It takes into account neither the actions that landed Jonah in his predicament nor the dénouement in chapter 4 of the prophetic book. Moreover, none of the other Old Testament figures in the list prayers were types of Christ. Their claim to represent or elicit the Resurrection is far weaker and therefore of limited value in strengthening such a connection for Jonah.

Support for the Typological Jonah might also be sought in the realm of liturgy or catechism. As discussed in connection with the Old Testament Jonah, the documentary sources are limited. They suggest that the reading of the book of Jonah might have been a part of Roman liturgy or an element in the training of initiates or their baptismal rites, but provide no direct evidence. The presence of an early-fourth-century mosaic Jonah cycle in the presbytery of the basilica in Aquileia could be significant. Pelizzari argues that these images served a catechetical function, premised in part on his attempted reconstruction of the function of the space. If the story of Jonah was read or told to the catechumens, it would

75 Apostolic Constitutions, 7.35.7, translation in David A. Fiensy, Prayers Alleged to be Jewish: An Examination of the Constitutiones Apostolorum (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 71, who considers this part of the text as most likely “a Jewish Greek version of the Hebrew Seven Benedictions” compiled in Syria.

76 Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 2.611, remarked a further distinction, that while these other biblical figures were preserved against physical danger – saved from dying – Jonah was actually saved, symbolically, from death itself. Similarly, Uwe Steffen, Die Jona-Geschichte: ihre Auslegung und Darstellung im Judentum, Christentum und Islam (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994), 62, remarks that Jonah’s salvation is not “vor der Tod, sondern aus dem Tod” (emphasis in the original). One must, however, be wary of drawing subtle distinctions that were more likely to appeal to theologians than lay sarcophagus viewers.

77 See note 16 above. As remarked there, the Aquileia example is an isolated one, which may temper one’s enthusiasm for generalization.
not likely have been left without comment. One would expect preachers and teachers to emphasize Christian messages. Of course, as in the case of the patristic texts, various themes might have been elaborated, not necessarily emphasizing or even including the Hebrew prophet’s role as a symbol of the Resurrection. The reading could have been used instead to stress the importance of repentance and true conversion, like the Ninevites, or Jonah’s initial disobedience and later turn towards God. One strongly suspects, however, that the parallel between Jonah and Jesus would have been noted.

At the end of the day, the best textual evidence for the Typological and Salvific Jonah is the New Testament itself, the explicit gospel passages that connect the three days and nights spent by the Hebrew prophet in the belly of hell and Jesus in the heart of the earth. Here not some theologian but God himself announced the parallel and insisted on its importance to “this generation,” a perennial present tense. If we hypothesize that Christian viewers not only recognized Jonah but knew he had provided a sign of Christ, whether from homilies, catechetical instruction or the oral religious tradition of their community, then perhaps the supposition of more subtle clues or explications inferred from patristic texts or prayers is unnecessary.

  
  
  v) **Sarcophagi and soteriology**

There is no direct evidence of what viewers thought, but we do know something about what they saw. Proponents of the Typological Jonah often cite aspects of the forms of representation in support of this facet of the Jonah theme. Opponents rely on the same images as a potent counter-indication.

One element of the visual presentation sometimes regarded as consistent with salvation is Jonah’s nudity, a facet discussed separately below (“Naked Jonah”). Suffice it to say here that although it can support such a reading, his state of undress is not univocal. A more common argument is salvation by visual association: just as Jonah, Daniel, Noah and the three Hebrew youths were conjoined by theologians in their tracts and by the faithful in

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78 Recall the words attributed to Ambrose in the Milanese basilica. See note 13 above.
their prayers, so they often appear together on sarcophagi, reinforcing the viewer’s understanding of Jonah as a symbol of Christian soteriology.\(^79\) This claim is not, however, substantiated by the monuments. Popular themes will, by definition, sometimes be found together; however, the assertion that Jonah was more often coupled with episodes where God intervened to preserve a believer than with other prevalent biblical representations cannot be demonstrated. Most of the Jonah corpus consists of fragments from which it is impossible to conclude whether the visual context did, in fact, include such other “salvation” scenes. The cases where more complete iconography is preserved do not support a statistical inference in favour of a magnetic attraction among these particular themes.\(^80\)

If resurrection theology had been a critical facet of the Jonah theme on sarcophagi, one would expect this to be reflected in the choice of episodes. By analogy, in the case of mythological sarcophagi, one can infer from the relative prevalence of episodes from a particular myth in the sepulchral versus the domestic sphere the responses desired (and, presumably, obtained) from the viewers.\(^81\) For Jonah, this selection is a two-edged sword. The sarcophagus programs sometimes seem to support a Typological Jonah, but they also present challenges.

Engemann highlighted two problematical aspects: (a) there are no examples of the type and antitype shown together, and (b) the combination of swallowing and disgorgement (which would best correspond to the typological connection) is less common than other presentations of the theme (the rest scene, the three-scene cycle, and the combination of

\(^79\) The argument was made by Mitius, Jonas, 91. It may be observed that this claim actually conflicts with the invocation of nudity, since the three Hebrew youths, Noah and other supposed salvation figures are fully clothed.

\(^80\) Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort: Untersuchungen zu Jenseitsvorstellungen von Christen des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2010), 105, 240 and 308, provides tables indicating the frequency with which Jonah, Daniel and the three Hebrew youths are paired. There are some problems with her numbers; for example, Jonah is said to appear five times with Daniel (105 and 106n64 - clearly an erroneous list) but Daniel seven times with Jonah (240 and 240n782). More important, these statistics do not indicate an overall correlation and the aggregate numbers are quite small compared to the total corpus.

\(^81\) Zanker and Ewald, Mit Mythen leben, 43–45.
disgorgement and rest scene, i.e. Jonah at rest with the ketos nearby).\textsuperscript{82} The first argument, a negative inference drawn from the absence of the visual pairing of Christ and Jonah, is not persuasive. It presupposes that viewers required a visual hint to make a typological connection, or at least that early Christian sculptural practice normally juxtaposed Old and New Testament figures in this way. Such a coherent, programmatic approach to sarcophagus decoration is not evident on the monuments.\textsuperscript{83} More simply, the notion of typology is that the type recalls the antitype, so that explicit appearance of the latter is, ex hypothesi, unnecessary. Furthermore, representations of Christ's Passion or Resurrection generally do not appear until later.

Engemann's second argument, concerning the relative popularity of the various forms of representation of the Jonah theme, is more powerful and has found greater traction among typological rejectionists.\textsuperscript{84} One can take the logic one step farther than Engemann did: if Jonah's sepulchral popularity were based on the New Testament passages, the preferred form of representation should have been Jonah in the belly of the sea monster. Jesus referred not to the swallowing and disgorgement but the period of three days and three nights. Yet this image never appears on sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{85} One might also have expected that the moment when Jonah is spit from the ketos onto dry land, the symbolic depiction of salvation and resurrection in Mitius’s tripartite formula, should have a special place in the


\textsuperscript{83} Jean-Pierre Caillet, “Note sur la cohérence iconographique des sarcophages des décennies 320–340,” in Akten des Symposiums “Frühchristliche Sarkophage”: Marburg, 30.6.–4.7.1999, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 41–45, reviews the traditional “minimalist” view derived from Grabar and promoted by Deichmann and Klauser that sarcophagus decoration in the period before 350 was incoherent, a jumble of individual images that did not express a global conceptualization of the “économie du Salut” (41). He constructs a counter-argument that there was an often a subtle and tentative “syntaxe dans l’imagier funéraire” (45). Caillet’s more optimistic reading would still not suggest a regular cross-referencing of Jonah and Christ in order to support the typological meaning of the Old Testament prophet. Even such later and sophisticated monuments as the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus may not meet the standard of typological clarity demanded by Engemann. See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), and the critique by Alice T. Christ, “The Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus: Patron, Workshop, and Program” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1992), 35–39.


\textsuperscript{85} It is found in later medieval art. See note 25 above.
sarcophagus corpus. But while Jonah at rest under the cucurbita and the ship scene are regularly found in isolation on sarcophagi, the disgorgement almost never is. 86

Engemann’s less demanding requirement was that Jonah should commonly be shown entering into and exiting from the ketos. Explicit images of the disgorgement are not, actually, very common. Yet it is remarkable how often the ketos is depicted. In the biblical account, the sea monster appears after Jonah enters the water, in Jonah 2:1. The next eight verses contain his prayer and then the Lord tells the ketos to vomit him out on dry land. It is never mentioned again. In the scriptural text, the appearance of the ketos might be regarded as a sub-plot associated with Jonah’s repentance, within the larger scheme of the prophetic book that begins and ends with the conversion of the Ninevites. The monster’s role is clearly elevated in the Jonah sarcophagus imagery, appearing on about half of the examples. As briefly noted in chapter 4 and summarized in Table 4.1, most rest scenes include a ketos. Often, the monster is immediately next to the resting prophet, snapping at his limbs, still in the act of disgorgement, or just lurking about (as in ill. 7, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19). This particular form of representation accounts for about 25% of all Jonah sarcophagi, 36% of those with a resting Jonah. 87 In addition, a depiction of Jonah being swallowed by the ketos without any explicit reference to subsequent events, while more subtle, might still be sufficient to evoke the “resurrection” episode (compare ill. 4, 38).

One could cite, therefore, a declining series of incomplete or imperfect allusions to Jonah’s sojourn in the belly of the ketos and his “resurrection,” from swallowing and disgorgement examples, to the “pseudo-disgorgement,” the compressed scene with the ketos and resting

86 De Bruyne, "Refrigerium Interim," 113, took Stuiber to task for mistakenly saying that this form of representation never occurs alone (although, to be fair, Stuiber, Refrigerium Interim, 137, limited his comment to “der älteren Plastik” which could have meant only the earliest examples). De Bruyne mentioned two counter-examples, one a catacomb painting and the other a sarcophagus lid now in the church of Saint-Pierre, Aire-sur-l’Adour (Rep. III.18, ill. 9). It is true that the only Jonah representation on this lid is the disgorgement, but the short sides present the other two scenes: Jonah thrown from the ship on the left, and the rest under the cucurbita on the right. There is no suggestion that the lid and chest were produced separately. The disgorgement is, therefore, isolated in presentation but not entirely alone on this monument.

87 These statistics cannot be derived from Table 4.1. Of the 167 sarcophagi in the sample, 41 are of the form with the ketos next to or still engaged with the resting Jonah.
prophet, to the swallowing alone. Any of these, indeed any reference to the sea monster at all, might have served as a mnemonic for the Typological Jonah.

The visual choices are still, however, puzzling. Many Jonah sarcophagi, some 30% of all that are preserved, do not include any reference to the swallowing or disgorgement, no ship, no ketos. They display only Jonah’s rest under the gourd plant. While one might hypothesize that other scenes were originally included but are now lost, it is methodologically unsound to assume that recovery of all the lost complements to the surviving fragments would eliminate these isolated rest scenes or even reduce their prominence. Indeed there is explicit evidence to the contrary, like the Berlin Jonah sarcophagus — an intact front (albeit without sides or lid) on which the only Jonah representation shows him under the cucurbita (Rep. II.241, ill. 27). Nor can one assume that the average viewer would easily piece together a thematic ensemble from his or her imagination. Although many percentages have been cited in this discussion, the viewing experience was an individual, not a statistical, exercise. The mental state of viewer A regarding sarcophagus X cannot be inferred from the mental state of viewer B regarding sarcophagus Y. If Y depicts Jonah being swallowed and vomited up by the ketos and X has only an isolated rest scene, then A’s conception of Jonah as a figure of the resurrection must find some explanation other than the appearance of the sarcophagus seen by B but not by A. It could be prior experience, personal reading, sermons, participation in ritual, recollection of catechetical instruction, or assistance or narration by someone else at the tomb. Yet there is no cogent explanation for why the presentation of the theme would be so recalcitrant, that viewer reflection on the Typological and salvific Jonah would, seemingly by design, be rendered more difficult rather than facilitated by the choice of episodes.

It is significant that the majority of representations of the rest scene include a ketos in some capacity, but it is equally important that a very sizable minority do not. This is not a question of the glass being either half-empty or half-full. It is both. Most viewers saw some

88 Fragments identifiable as Jonah at rest might have been part of a monument with other episodes. But assuming that rest fragments were not disproportionately preserved, the statistics concerning the surviving objects should be regarded as significant within a reasonable margin of error.
indication of Jonah’s marine misadventure, but even in these cases the soteriological facet of the theme was often expressed tangentially, almost surreptitiously. Perhaps the mental effort demanded of the viewer was helpful in forcing a reflection on the implications of the Resurrection for the commemorative moment. If so, other biblical images employed on sarcophagi of this period seem to have escaped this level of subtlety.

In these circumstances, if Jonah sarcophagi are to be regarded as having been generally associated in the eyes of the viewer with Christian resurrection soteriology, the solution must lie elsewhere. The rest scene, in and of itself, must be argued to be conducive, rather than resistant, to that experience. This is precisely the effect, and likely the purpose, of the tripartite analysis first proposed by Mitius (swallowing/disgorgement/rest = death/resurrection/paradise); it corresponds as well to de Bruyne’s conception of early Christian art as an uplifting expression of Christian salvation. The repeated appearance of Jonah under the cucurbita is regarded under this theory not as a problem but an opportunity, a depiction of paradise that in and by itself supports the association with Christian resurrection theology. It is true that in most of these images (e.g., Rep. I.35, I.794 and I.747; ill. 4, 7, 22; but compare Rep. II.243 and II.185; ill. 5 and 16), Jonah’s peace and relaxation seem palpable. One could imagine him in heaven following his harrowing (in both the secular and Christian meanings) experience in the ketos and his miraculous resurrection or baptismal rebirth from the belly of hell.

This is an appealing appreciation of the languid figure of the prophet under the gourd plant but it must be appreciated how much at odds it is with the book of Jonah. The role and place of the “rest scene” in the historical account of the Hebrew prophet — and there is no reason to suspect that fourth-century Christian viewers doubted its historicity — is far from

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89 See note 56 above. A variant proposed in a catalogue entry by Umberto Utro in Fabrizio Bisconti and Giovanni Gentili (eds.), La Rivoluzione dell’immagine: arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio (Torino: Intesa Sanpaolo, 2007), 182–183, suggests that the rest scene this can be regarded as a further instance of salvation: the naked, exposed Jonah is miraculously protected from the desert heat by the refrigerium of the pergola, which recalls the resurrection of Christ and Jonah’s prefiguration of that event in his release from the ketos. The object of this notice is a three-scene Jonah cycle on a late fourth-century mosaic loculus closure in the Museo Pio Cristiano (inv. 31598). The conflicts with the biblical text discussed below apply equally to Utro’s interpretation. In particular, the Lord’s salvific grace is cut short with the sending of the worm.
paradisiacal. This conflict applies to other facets discussed below, notably the Idyllic Jonah and the Pagan Jonah under the guise of Endymion, but it is posed in its most blatant form under the rubric of the Typological Jonah because this facet expressly relies on a biblical understanding of the Jonah theme.

For Jonah's rest to be cast as an image of his (or the deceased's, or the Christian's) post-resurrection state, the plot of land east of Nineveh must be reconfigured as paradise and the prophet's brief respite there before being roasted by the morning sun transmogrified into his final and eternal reward. This is not merely extra- but anti-biblical. It distorts, reads out, even reverses the acts and words of God. In the scriptural account, Jonah's rest under the cucurbita was not the happy ending to a perilous sea adventure, readily susceptible of sublimation to a heavenly epiphany of bodily resurrection. It was, instead, a central episode in the dénouement of a complex plot involving the repentance of the Ninevites, their divine forgiveness, and Jonah's own final encounter with God. Disgorgement from the ketos may be taken as an allegory of salvation without doing violence to the story, but not the rest scene. It begins pleasantly enough in Jonah 4:6 (“Jonah was exceeding glad of the cucurbita”), but the bliss is cut short by a hot and burning wind sent by same Lord who provided both the plant and the worm, the agent of its destruction, subjecting the prophet to a heat so punishing that he asks for death (Jonah 4:8). In order to reconfigure the rest outside Nineveh as the fulfillment of the prophet's deliverance from the ketos, a symbol of or allegory for the reward awaiting the true Christian believer, the climax of the book of Jonah must be fundamentally rewritten. There is no evidence of such repackaging in any homilies, catecheses or patristic texts. One is almost tempted to hypothesize an alternative version of the story, a lost text or oral tradition that omits the preaching to the Ninevites and final moral, leaving Jonah forever in idyllic peace under his pleasant booth. Such hypothetical filler is encountered in the literature but must be rejected as methodologically unacceptable.

There is no easy solution. The unstated premise of proponents of the tripartite understanding of the Typological Jonah (and even many opponents who also treat Jonah at
rest as idyllic) is that viewers recognized the resting figure as Jonah but extracted him from
his scriptural and historical context to be understood in a new way. Jensen noted that a
choice of scenes (referring specifically to Jonah) may reflect abbreviation, abridgement or
citation. Viewers may “fill in the rest of the plot,” focus only on the episodes presented, or
“use the image as a pointer to a completely different idea or concept.”90 The happy ending
interpretation of the rest scene is an example of the last category, where iconography is
detached from its original context and charged with an entirely new meaning. Under this
hypothesis, viewers first transposed the scene of Jonah under the cucurbita to the moment
when he is cast on dry land by the ketos. One may cite in favour of such a reworking of the
narrative the visual combination of the ketos with the resting prophet, although one does
not normally assume that viewers treated such compressions as fundamental alterations of
the story. That would defeat the purpose of the sculptural technique. And while there are a
number of these representations, they still represent only one-quarter of all the rest
scenes. The second and more basic alteration is not temporal but goes to the heart of the
book of Jonah. Rather than suffering a final divine sting and admonition, the prayers of the
reluctant prophet are rewarded not only with escape from the ketos, but also unending
paradise.

In addition to this dissonance with the Old Testament text, the happy ending interpretation
of the rest scene presents a less direct conflict with the New Testament “sign of Jonah.” The
first element of the sign (Matthew 12:40, perhaps repeated in Luke 11:30) corresponds to
the swallowing and disgorgement of Jonah 1-2 with its overtones of disobedience,
repentance and divine rescue. The rest scene is entirely extraneous to this gospel message,
but it could relate to the second element of the sign invoked by Jesus: as Jonah was a sign
to the Ninevites so is the son of man to “this generation”; the penance of the Ninevites at
the preaching of Jonah caused them to rise up in judgment, and “behold a greater than
Jonah here” (Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:30, 32). This suggests an alternative approach to

90 Jensen, Substance of Things Seen, 30. She framed these alternatives in terms of what viewers were
“expected” to do. The analysis is equally helpful without this implicit claim of artistic or perhaps clerical
intention.

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the rest scene, different from the culmination of Jonah’s rescue from the ketos. Viewers could take both the book of Jonah and the gospel references to his “sign” at face value, connecting the representation with the biblical account in Jonah 4:5-11 and regarding it as an allusion not only to the repentance and salvation of the Ninevites but also of “this generation” — a reference in the gospels to first-century Pharisees and other Jews but now updated to fourth-century Gentile Romans, including the deceased and themselves. Unlike the traditional construction of the Jonah trilogy, the rest scene becomes no longer a simple depiction of idyllic peace but instead an element in a more complex and complete scriptural reference.

Such a resonance with the second element of the sign of Jonah would, as remarked above, be consistent with the dominant view of theologians, who saw the significance of Jonah’s story precisely in its relation to the conversion of the Gentile Ninevites. The audience for sarcophagi was mainly composed of just such converts, or individuals with Christian sympathies and intentions who had yet to take that serious and irreversible step. The salvation of the Roman élite and sub-élite depended, like the salvation of the people of Nineveh, on their turn towards the True God. Other symbolic forms could have been chosen to suggest this second typological element, and the resting prophet might not be a modern designer’s first choice. But Jonah under the plant sent and destroyed by God is not inappropriate and does seem potentially effective. The cucurbita, first physically and then metaphorically, occupies the final verses of the book of Jonah, from the completion of his successful if reluctant preaching to God’s final admonishment. Martimort described the scene as a witness to God’s mercy to the Gentiles, a turn of phrase particularly apt to the visual display.

The traditional tripartite interpretation constitutes a unitary soteriological approach to the Typological Jonah: all three scenes are appropriated into a single symbolic allusion to

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92 LaCocque and Lacocque, *Jonah*, 97, suggest that the story of Jonah is one of recurrent “resurrection” or salvation: of the sailors, Jonah and finally the Ninevites. They do not, however, refer to the imagery.
Crucifixion, Resurrection and Paradise. The reclining prophet serves to illustrate the eschatological consequence of the disgorgement. This neatly assimilates the experience of viewers, whether they saw a monument with a three-scene cycle, only the ship scene, Jonah at rest with a lurking ketos, or an isolated prophet under the cucurbita. The cost of doing so, however, is high. Christian viewers are required to regard the Jonah sarcophagi under a biblical facet that simultaneously melds type and antitype while restructuring the book of Jonah and deleting half of the Evangelical sign of Jonah. They must at once cleave to and depart from the scriptures. Alternatively, viewers who had been exposed to the entire book of Jonah with the gospel pericopes as interpretive aids (the hypothesized liturgical or catechetical reading) may be taken to have seen the episodes depicted on sarcophagi as direct and literal references to the Old and New Testament texts.

This alternative model has the advantage that it permits lay Christians to accept the historicity of the ancient story as well as its spiritual and allegorical relevance to their present, as announced by Jesus himself. It also corresponds reasonably well to the range of presentations of the Jonah theme on sarcophagi. Under the tripartite or happy ending approach, monuments with a rest scene and no reference whatsoever to Jonah’s marine adventure are excluded from any direct connection with the gospels. Restricting the sign of Jonah to its first element — equating the belly of the ketos to the heart of the earth — allows only explicit representations of the swallowing and disgorgement (plus, perhaps, the image of Jonah at rest with the monster nearby) to fit neatly into a Typological Jonah. The brevity of the gospel passages invites a broader understanding. The two aspects of the book of Jonah that constitute his “sign” are compressed into a short passage (in the Vetus Latina manuscripts where Luke mentions both elements, into a single verse). A viewer who engaged with representations of the Jonah theme as indicative of the full narrative and both elements of the typology might, when confronted with a monument restricted to the rest scene, nonetheless have recalled the complete relationship between Jesus and Jonah. Conversely, the viewer of a monument depicting a ship and ketos with no cucurbita or resting prophet could have expanded the biblical allusion in the opposite direction, to include the penitence and conversion of the Ninevites, an earlier generation of Gentiles
who heeded the sign, repented, shed their wicked ways, and were saved from death by a merciful God.

The Typological Jonah may thus be deconstructed into several possible experiences of the theme. The traditional, tripartite understanding regards swallowing and disgorgement as, respectively, death and resurrection. It incorporates the rest scene by disconnecting it from the scriptural narrative and recasting it as an image of paradisiacal reward. This is one way to read the diverse body of sarcophagus imagery, but it is also possible to retain the cucurbita in its Old Testament context. The ancient story and the two aspects of the gospel sign in this case establish a “virtual” program, a hypothetical unity among the images that are present and some that are not.

Finally, these two alternative, unitary approaches do not exhaust the potential reception of the Typological Jonah. Some viewers, confronting only ships and sea monsters might have restricted their thoughts to the first aspect of the gospel allegory; others, seeing only Jonah under the cucurbita, could have focussed on the conversion of the Ninevites and “this generation.” Or perhaps they reflected on completely different, non-biblical facets.

2. Jewish Jonah

Both the Old Testament Jonah and the Typological Jonah are Christian perspectives. Viewers were not, of course, unaware that a substantial portion of their scriptures had been written before the Incarnation and had served and continued to serve as the sacred texts of the Jews. But these books had long before been translated not only linguistically but also theologically into an intrinsic element of the Christian faith. The Biblical Jonah need not have had a Jewish resonance.

But it could, and this is what is meant by the Jewish Jonah, an experience of the funerary imagery by Christian consumers as, in some sense, specifically Jewish. This question has been considered in the sarcophagus literature only as a problem of sources, part of the search for extra-biblical — in this case Jewish — material that might explain particular elements of the visual forms. The potential impact of Jewish representations of Jonah, if
such existed, and of Jewish texts interpreting the biblical account, which certainly did, will be considered below. In addition, it is appropriate to revisit the Old Testament Jonah and ask whether the Jewishness of the prophet and his book could also have been factors in the appreciation of the Jonah sarcophagi.

Any consideration of a Jewish Jonah as a facet of the reception of Christian sarcophagi presupposes that these monuments were, in fact, Christian. A generally unexamined and unexpressed assumption is that monuments bearing themes from the Hebrew Bible are Christian, sometimes expressed by the circular reasoning that no Jewish examples have been found.\(^\text{94}\) The conventional view is probably correct, but the matter warrants a brief exploration.

a) Jewish sarcophagi?

Sarcophagi that depict Old Testament themes along with explicitly Christian representations are not problematic: a Jew who did not cross into the grey area between communities would not be likely to purchase such a monument.\(^\text{95}\) These combination pieces are consistent with a Christian theological project of appropriation and amalgamation, the reinterpretation of Jewish holy narratives as prefiguring, prophesizing and preparing the Incarnation, even if the precise character of the relationship between the themes may often be difficult to work out. The issue becomes more complex where the imagery is restricted to the Hebrew Bible. This category is not as large as one might think. While it is commonly observed that there was a statistical drift from Old to New Testament representations on sarcophagi during the fourth century,\(^\text{96}\) such a trend does not imply that the early

\(^{94}\) For example, Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort*, 323, concludes that while nothing in principle prevented Jews from purchasing sarcophagi with Old Testament imagery, no such objects exist. See also Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung*, 110. This presupposes that the counter-examples are not among these “Christian” sarcophagi. The question is briefly posed by Jaš Elsner, “Introduction,” in *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. Jaš Elsner and Janet Huskinson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 9n35.

\(^{95}\) On the definitional issue regarding religious affiliation, see the Introduction, pages 29 to 30.

sarcophagi excluded post-Incarnation references. On the contrary, Old Testament themes are rarely unaccompanied by New Testament or other demonstrably Christian scenes.

Most sarcophagi are fragmentary; often only the lids are preserved. In these cases, the original program can no longer be reconstructed. It is, however, appropriate to draw inferences from those monuments that are relatively complete. Almost all such sarcophagi that depict Daniel in the lions’ den or the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace also present at least one reference to the New Testament or the life of Jesus, Mary or Peter. As for Jonah, the number of well preserved examples is limited. Two of the best known, the sarcophagus in Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome (Rep. I.747, ill. 22) and the Jonah Sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Rep. I.35, ill. 4), include Christian iconography: the former has a representation of the baptism of Christ and the latter both the Raising of Lazarus and Petrine episodes (arrest and baptizing of the jailors).

There are also several relatively complete examples in which Jonah is accompanied only by “neutral” figures, usually shepherds or fishermen, as on a front in Berlin (Rep. II.241, ill. 27), a strigilated chest in Lucca (Rep. II.91, ill. 28) and a child’s sarcophagus in Copenhagen (Rep. II. 7, ill. 6). Another strigilated chest in Pisa presents a central kriophoros and two other shepherds on the front and Jonah scenes on the short sides (Rep. II.90, ill. 31); a frieze sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano adds a pastoral motif to the Jonah ship scene, with flanking kriophoros and orant figures. Whether all of these “neutral” examples should be regarded as combined Jewish and Christian imagery depends upon one’s view of orants, shepherds and sheep. Perhaps the closest Jonah comes to exclusivity is on the London

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97 Daniel in the lions’ den appears on about 56 metropolitan Roman sarcophagi catalogued in the Repertorium (38 in Rep. I, 7 in Rep. II, and 11 in Rep. III) 33 of which also include a Christian scene. Of the remaining 23, 15 are lids or parts of lids without the related chests and 7 are fragments of fronts. The single remaining example, Rep. II.91 (ill. 28), accompanies Daniel with Jonah on a strigilated chest, with standing shepherds at the ends. Two additional fragments with the Daniel scene are noted by Sotomayor, Sarcófagos de España, 67–70 (cat. 8, fig. 8.2) and 109–112 (cat. 17, fig. 4.2, 31), the latter including a renunciation of Peter. With respect to the three youths in the furnace, there are some 63 metropolitan Roman sarcophagi of which only 19 also present overtly Christian images. All of the rest are lids or fragments. There are 49 in Rep. I, 4 in Rep. II and 14 in Rep. III. Two further fragments are noted by Sotomayor, Sarcófagos de España, 97–98 (cat. 14, fig. 3.4) and 273–178 (cat. 30). The figures in this note are not absolutely fixed since a few objects are either so fragmentary or ambiguous that identification is uncertain and some attributed to Roman workshops may have been produced elsewhere (and vice versa).
Jonah sarcophagus (Rep. II.243, ill. 5). Apart from a single sheep and a peacock the imagery is restricted to ship, ketos and, most prominently, a seated prophet under the cucurbita.

In sum, the surviving sarcophagi corpus does not suggest that the Jonah theme, or any other theme from the Hebrew Bible, served as the exclusive decoration, without accompanying explicitly Christian iconography or “neutral” elements often regarded as Christian (and, in any event, not as Jewish). However, given the large number of fragments it is impossible to conclude that there might not originally have been more of them. Even if this were the case, it is unlikely, based on what we know about secure Jewish monuments, that the patrons of such sarcophagi were Roman Jews expressing their Judaism.

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98 One other group worthy of note presents the salvation of the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea as a panorama covering the full breadth of the front and effectively squeezing out any other scenes. See, in particular, Rep. I.64, 954, Rep. II.146, 185, Rep. III.21, 27, 43, 44, 119, 414. The standard discussion of this group of monuments is Clementina Rizzardi, I sarcofagi paleocristiani con rappresentazione del passaggio del Mar Rosso (Faenza: Fratelli Lega, 1970). Her consideration is partially updated by Jaš Elssner, “’Pharoah’s Army Got Drownded’: Some Reflections on Jewish and Roman Genealogies in Early Christian Art,” in Judaism and Christian Art: Aesthetic Anxieties from the Catacombs to Colonialism, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and David Nirenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 10–44, who refers as well to catacomb paintings and a lost fresco in Old St Peter’s. Both authors consider these Red Sea sarcophagi to be Christian, in Elssner’s case as the subject of “competitive genealogies” combining imperial and Jewish sources. Rizzardi catalogued twenty-nine examples, mostly small fragments. She considered that the ones in south-western Gaul were locally produced based on a Roman model (15), an opinion with which Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 299, agreed, although Rep. Ill regards them as Roman. A Jewish deployment of this theme is found in the program of the synagogue at Dura-Europos, circa 254. See Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990), 38–52. The fresco, however, is quite different from the consistent iconography of the sarcophagi. See Thomas F. Mathews, The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 76. Compare a typical sarcophagus in the Musée départemental Arles antique (Rep. Ill.119, ill. 32) with the Dura representation (ill. 33). And even though the Red Sea representations occupy the full fronts of the sarcophagi, they could have included Christian scenes elsewhere. Indeed, one more fully preserved example, in Split, has two apostles flanking a cross surmounted by a Christogram in a jewelled wreath on the right short end and two more figures, likely apostles, at the corners of a striated field on the back. Arheološki muzej u Splitu, inv. D 175; Rep. II.146. There is no suggestion in the Repertorium entry that this chest was recarved to add the Christian scenes, although that is always a possibility. The left side has a geometrical fish scale pattern, which is essentially identical to the short sides of one of the Red Sea examples in Arles (Rep. Ill.44). The Arles box is a simpler version of the one in Split, perhaps because of a different intended placement. Most of the others do not have preserved sides or lids.
Adia Konikoff compiled a catalogue of twenty-one Roman Jewish sarcophagi based on inscriptions, incised images of Jewish cult objects and find-spots. In a very few cases, Jewish symbols are combined with pagan or neutral imagery, the best known and best preserved example being a Seasons sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale Romano on which the anticipated portrait in the central tondo has been incongruously replaced by a seven-branched candelabrum. Another, more difficult case is a child’s sarcophagus in the Palazzo Rondanini with figures likely representing the parents along with the deceased sitting on a peacock. The impact on Roman sarcophagi of Jewish practice elsewhere might also be considered. Animals, both real and fantastic, are encountered in the East, while at the cemetery of Beth She’arim, fragmentary human figural representations, including a woman libating, a figure that seems to be Aphrodite and the remains of an Amazonamachy have been found. But nothing from the Hebrew Bible.

In the absence of any positive evidence of Old Testament imagery on Jewish sarcophagi, it might still be possible, although entirely speculative, to infer the existence of such objects from Jewish representations in other contexts or media. Such representations do exist, although as will be noted in the next section immediately below, there are no secure

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100 Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, inv. 67611; Konikoff, *Sarcophagi*, cat. 14; Koch, “Jüdische Sarkophage,” 192–193, and literature cited. Scholars have expressed divergent opinions whether the menorah was a last-minute change to an object in stock, an original design for a Jewish patron, or a recarving. In any case, the purchaser was presumably interested in expressing both Jewish affiliation and traditional Roman values.

101 Koch, “Jüdische Sarkophage,” 196–199. The Jewish attribution is based on the inscription, *JIWE* 2.556, particularly the use of the title Archon. The monument is so unusual that its authenticity has been questioned, although Koch accepts it. See Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort*, 323.

examples of the Jonah theme. On balance, while it may be an argument from silence, the attribution to Roman Jews of any metropolitan Roman sarcophagi with Old Testament images, and specifically with representations of Jonah, is unsupported.

b) Jewish images

Bezalel Narkiss argued that there must have been a Jewish model for the Christian depiction of the Jonah theme.\(^{103}\)

This initial creation of a detailed Jonah cycle could hardly have been by Christian artists of the third century. It must, in the first instance, have been the work of Jewish artists, based on midrashic sources, from which the Christians could have adopted the most christianizing elements. It was probably essential for a Christian of the pre-Constantinian period to have the pagan scenes and figures legitimized by a Jewish artist before he could use them.

This claim falls within a broader intellectual tradition of tracing early Christian art to Jewish visual sources and influences, a subject beyond the scope of this study.\(^{104}\) With respect specifically to the reception of the Jonah theme on sarcophagi, it is appropriate to inquire whether any such Jewish models are known to us and would have been known to early Roman Christians.

Old Testament scenes adorn the walls of the synagogue at Dura-Europos and are included in several Jewish pavement mosaics, but not Jonah. Nor is he found among the images discovered at such Jewish burial sites as Beth She’arim or on lamps, gems or other small objects considered to be Jewish based on archaeological context or accompanying signs and symbols.\(^{105}\) We do not know what was on the lost walls at Dura-Europos or among destroyed Jewish mosaics. But even if the Jonah theme was depicted in such contexts, eastern examples in immobile media would be of questionable relevance to the reception

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\(^{103}\) Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 71.


\(^{105}\) Weitzmann and Kessler, Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue; Hashlili, Ancient Mosaic Pavements; Avigad, Beth She’arim, 275–287; Magness, “Third Century Jews,” 140–141.
of Roman sarcophagi. Of potentially greater importance are portable objects, if they were
seen by Christians and understood to be Jewish. The conventional wisdom is that there are
no such objects, although this is based on the self-fulfilling assumption that Jonah
representations are Christian.\textsuperscript{106}

Mitius catalogued about forty \textit{Kleinkunst} Jonah representations, including gold glass, lamps,
African red slip ware vessels, gems, metalwork, cut glass, and ivories. More have surfaced
since.\textsuperscript{107} Like the Jonah sarcophagi, many of these can be excluded from any putative Jewish
Jonah corpus because they also have explicit Christian iconography. This is the case for the
Brescia \textit{lipsanoteca} (ill. 34), a copper alloy casket covering in the British Museum, and the
Podgoritza cup in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.\textsuperscript{108} A few include Christian symbols
or inscriptions, like the Christogram on a fragmentary gem in Ravenna with representations
of Jonah and Noah.\textsuperscript{109} Others have more subtle hints suggesting that they, too, were not
Jewish. A gold glass in the Vatican Biblioteca Apostolica depicts Jonah at rest with a
prominent, centrally placed eight-leaved flower, generally accepted as a symbol of the
Resurrection (ill. 35).\textsuperscript{110} On a carved gem (intaglio finger-ring) in the British Museum, Jonah
is accompanied by a shepherd carrying two sheep (ill. 36).\textsuperscript{111} Sculpture in the round seems
unlikely to be part of any putative Jewish Jonah corpus.\textsuperscript{112} A glass bowl from Cologne (but

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 71, takes this position with one possible exception, questioning whether a glass
bowl with gold glass medallions from Cologne might be Jewish (76n92). This object is one of the examples
considered below (note 113). See also Allenbach, “La figure de Jonas,” 101. Engemann, “Jonas,” 689–690,
asserts that no Jewish visual models are preserved, implicitly categorizing the Jonah examples as Christian.
\item Mitius, \textit{Jonas}, 111–113; Engemann, “Jonas,” 695–696, with references.
\item On the Brescia ivory reliquary, see Tkacz, \textit{Brescia Casket}. The metalwork is British Museum, P&E
1978,0102.70. See Ann Woodward and Peter Leach, The Uley Shrines: Excavations of a Ritual Complex on
\item Mitius, \textit{Jonas}, 101, 112 (cat. 161).
\item Biblioteca Apostolica, inv. 60714; Letizia Pani Ermini (ed.), \textit{Christiana loca: lo spazio cristiano nella Roma del
\item British Museum, 1856,0425.9; Herbert Beck and Peter Bol (eds.), \textit{Spätantike und frühes Christentum:
(Frankfurt am Main: Liebieghaus Museum alter Plastik, 1983), 616 (cat. 208, Stutzinger). Jonah with the
\textit{kriophoros} appears on other objects, such as a terra cotta lamp in the Staatliche Museum, Berlin, inv. 2354.
The “Christianity” of the sheep-bearing shepherd figure is not, of course, beyond question but there are no
indications that it was used on Jewish monuments.
\item The most important Jonah examples are the Cleveland marbles (see note 11) and a statuette in the
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. See Jeffrey Spier (ed.), \textit{Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art

possibly made in Rome), now in the British Museum, has embedded in its surface a number of gold glass medallions depicting Old Testament figures, including three or four that refer to the Jonah theme. However, if as has been proposed an additional medallion showing Christ performing a miracle with his wand, now in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, was once part of that bowl, its potentially Jewish character would be undercut.\footnote{British Museum, 1881.06–24.1; Spier, 
*Picturing the Bible*, 184–185 (cat. 13).}

There are some objects with representations of Jonah that do not include any indicia of Christianity. Most of these were found in Asia Minor or North Africa.\footnote{An interesting example is an engraved gem in the Museum of fine Arts, Boston; Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 188 (cat. 18). It includes three representations of a figure that appears to be Jonah: falling (rather than being thrown) from the ship, sitting (not reclining) under a tree (not a gourd plant), and standing and speaking. The catalogue entry suggests this could be his preaching to the Ninevites, something never seen on sarcophagi.} Being portable, this does not necessarily exclude Roman origin or circulation, but neither does it provide robust evidence of Jewish Jonah images in Rome. This leaves only a few remaining examples that were found in the city. A gold glass in the Musée du Louvre depicts a typical version of the ship scene, with Jonah entering directly into the mouth of the sea-monster (ill. 37).\footnote{Musée du Louvre, inv. S2053; Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 186 (cat. 14). Another example is a small medallion of Jonah at rest in the Biblioteca Apostolica, inv. 60655 (Mitius, *Jonah*, cat. 137).} The specific provenance is unknown. It is probably from a catacomb, which would not exclude a Jewish provenance.\footnote{Jewish objects have been found in catacombs traditionally regarded as Christian, like one depicting a menorah from the catacomb of SS Marcellinus and Peter, now in the Vatican Museums. See Elsner, "Archaeologies and Agendas," 115–116.} There are also lamps of Roman provenance depicting Jonah with no Christian indications.\footnote{An example dated somewhat later, to the fifth century, depicts a sea monster and a reclining Jonah under the cucurbita: British Museum, London, inv. Sl.620; Donald Michael Bailey, *Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Publications, 1975), 3.198 (catalogue Q1798).}

All of these objects have been routinely catalogued as Christian without discussion of any possible religious ambiguity. Given that other similar pieces are demonstrably Christian, and having regard to the complete absence of equivalent iconography accompanied by unequivocal Jewish images or inscriptions, this conclusion is not unreasonable. And if one does assume that some of these objects were actually Jewish, that would become relevant...
to the experience of the Christian sarcophagus viewers only if they (i) saw them, (ii) knew they were Jewish, and (iii) perceived the representations they bore to be indications of the Jewishness of Jonah, rather than simply derivative images based on a reverse assimilation of the Christian Jonah (which, indeed, they might have been). Narkiss’s own claim about lost prototypes cited above seemed to be limited to producers, the “Christian artists” (who, in the third century, were probably non-Christians producing monuments with Christian themes). He does not suppose that these hypothetical objects were seen and appreciated as Jewish by Christian viewers.

An inference that Christian consumers of Roman sarcophagi saw a Jewish Jonah based on their own experience of Jewish images is, therefore, speculative and unsupported. Precisely for this reason, Narkiss and others rely mainly on written, rather than visual, evidence. In particular, discrepancies between the book of Jonah and the presentation of the theme in early Christian art have led scholars to troll for clues in rabbinical texts and Jewish prayers or homilies.

c) Jewish texts

Rather than a lost visual prototype for the Jonah theme, Eduard Stommel proposed a lost Jewish text.\(^{118}\) Narkiss preferred to rely on an extant source, or at least one that can be partially reconstructed from later copies, the commentaries known as Midrash Jonah.\(^{119}\) He remarked that unlike the biblical account, the midrash (or, more precisely, one of its four surviving versions) says that Jonah was on dry land protected by a plant immediately after being vomited up by the ketos, rather than only after his visit to Nineveh.\(^{120}\) This would, indeed, be a better fit with those representations on Christian sarcophagi that press these two events together (of which, as noted above, there are several), although the other

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119 The manuscript tradition is discussed by Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 72n6. The surviving recensions extend back only to the ninth century, but he proposed an original source be as early as the first. On Midrash Jonah, see Duval, Le livre de Jonah, 1.103–109. A German translation is provided by Wünsche, in Aus Israels Lehrhallen, 2.39–56. An Italian version, with introduction and commentary, is in Chiara Bedini and Alberto Bigarelli, Il Viaggio di Giona: Targum, Midrash, commento di Rashi (Rome: Città Nuova, 1999). They characterize the midrash as a combination of homily, commentary and theological tract (24–25).
120 Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 66, relying on the De Rossi manuscript.
versions of *Midrash Jonah* put the scene with the plant after the preaching in Nineveh, following the sequence established in the book of Jonah.

It is possible that some Christians knew *Midrash Jonah*, either from participation in the Yom Kippur service (discussed below), through fellow Christians who were ex-Jews or, more generally, by reason of the cultural accommodation between and interpenetration of the two groups, including with respect to funerary practices.\(^{121}\) Yet it is doubtful whether such knowledge, if it existed, could have translated into an appreciation of the Jewish Jonah on sarcophagi. Apart from the one aspect remarked by Narkiss and noted above, *Midrash Jonah* is actually a rather poor fit with the visual programs. Narkiss conceded that “not all the details [of the midrash] were given artistic representation in the Early Christian period”;\(^{122}\) however, the principal difficulty is not the occasional omission but rather the many contradictions. For example, Narkiss considered that the disgorgement of a naked Jonah “is no doubt inspired by the midrash,” but according to this source (as he himself observed), Jonah should begin his maritime travails fully clothed and emerge from the belly of the ketos not only naked but bald, his clothes and hair burned off by the heat of the monster’s belly.\(^{123}\) The sarcophagus representations generally show Jonah nude and with a full head of hair at both ends of his misadventure. In this respect, they correspond better with the description in Paul’s apocryphal letter to the Corinthians: “God heard Jonah’s

\(^{121}\) On Jewish-Christian relations in general, see Rutgers, *Jews in Late Antique Rome*.

\(^{122}\) Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 64.

\(^{123}\) Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 65, following Carl-Otto Nordström, “Some Jewish Legends in Byzantine Art,” *Byzantion* 25–27 (1955–1957): 504–505. The midrashic text is, curiously, displaced. It follows not Jonah 2:11, where he is spit out onto dry land, but verse 4:3, where he expresses his wish to die after the salvation of the Ninevites. The connection seems to be made through the commentary to 4:2, where the midrash refers to God’s saving Jonah from the belly of hell. See Bedini and Bigarelli, *Giona*, 136–138. The bald or balding Jonah appears in medieval Christian art. See John B. Friedman, “The Bald Jonah and the Exegesis of 4 Kings 2.23,” *Traditio* 44 (1988): 130–144; Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 86–88. A striking example, although decontextualized from the biblical story, is the bald Jonah among other Old Testament prophets on the choir screen in Bamberg Cathedral, circa 1230. A more literal visual translation of the midrashic text is found in a number of later manuscripts where Jonah enters the ketos clothed and exits naked and bald. See, for example, the pen drawings dated 1435 in the Weigel-Felix *Biblia pauperum*, Morgan Library, New York, M230, f. 18v and 19v (images on the Index of Christian Art). Korol, *Die frühchristlichen Wandmalereien*, 141 and 145 claimed that there are late antique examples but the monuments cited are few, uncertain in their iconography, later than the sarcophagi, and not Roman: a wall painting at Cimitile/Nola (the subject of his study), dated to the turn of the fifth century, and some North African clay plates (no earlier than 350 CE – see Korol 145n606) on which Jonah is balding rather than bald.
prayer out of deepest hell, and no part of him was corrupted, not even a hair or an eyelid." To choose another example of conflict between *Midrash Jonah* and the sarcophagi, the text describes the vomiting out as a miraculous feat accomplished over a great distance. The ketos spit him over 5,000 kilometres to dry land. The sarcophagus representations often show Jonah deposited directly on the shore. And, according to *Midrash Jonah*, the plant that grows above him has 275 large leaves, enough to provide shade for four men, which is quite unlike the visual representations.

Carl-Otto Nordström, from whom Narkiss drew liberally, remarked a midrashic allegory of the ship on which Jonah flees and the world, occupied by the seventy nations, arguably reflected in a few medieval manuscripts beginning in the twelfth century through a ten-to-one compression, with six sailors representing the nations and Jonah the Jews. Nordström mentioned only one early Christian example of this iconography, the Brescia lipsanoteca (ill. 34), an ivory reliquary that does, indeed, present a six-sailor variant of the ship scene. The most common form of representation depicted three sailors; sometimes there were only two, and occasionally four. The appearance of six in Brescia may or may not suggest the impact of a Jewish textual source on early Christian art; even if it did, that casket was produced after the sarcophagi under consideration (in the 380s or later), probably in Northern Italy rather than Rome, and in a different medium. None of the almost one

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124 *Acts of Paul*, in Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2.377. Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 29, noted the connection with Luke 21:18, where Jesus says of the righteous that at the end of days: "But a hair of your head shall not perish." Augustine, *Ep.* 102.31.16–20, responding to a pagan critique of a clothed man entering the sea monster, notes that the Bible is silent regarding Jonah’s state of dress upon entering the ketos and observes that Jonah could have been naked. This theory, if it was prevalent a century before its formulation by Augustine, would also be a better match for the visual representations than the midrash.

125 *Midrash Jonah* says that he was spat “965 parasangs” to dry land: Bedini and Bigarelli, *Giona*, 117. This was a Persian measure of distance that the authors estimate to be on the order of six kilometres (117n60).


128 Tkacz, *Brescia Casket*, provides relevant literature on dating (19n1) and provenance (19n2).
hundred Roman metropolitan Jonah sarcophagi (or any of the catacomb paintings) with this representation has more than three sailors.

Attempts have also been made to connect the Jonah theme on sarcophagi with Jewish texts other than Midrash Jonah. Two of the three surviving antique Jewish homilies, both attributed to an anonymous contemporary or follower of Philo of Alexandria, concern Jonah.\(^{129}\) One provides certain interpretations that could theoretically have affected, or perhaps been affected by, Christian exegesis of the book of Jonah, including an analogy between the disgorgement by the sea monster and resurrection of the flesh. The link between this text and sarcophagus imagery is at best remote and not susceptible of demonstration.

Finally, Jewish prayers, like their early Christian counterparts, sometimes included lists of figures saved by God, including Jonah.\(^{130}\) In 3 Maccabees 6.6-8, for example, the prayer of the priest Eleazer recalls the Lord’s rescue of the three youths in the furnace of Babylon, Daniel in the lions’ den and Jonah wasting away in the belly of a sea-monster. Jonah is among twenty-nine biblical figures enumerated in the prayer of atonement, the Mi she’anah, most of whom, it should be observed, are never depicted on sarcophagi. These “lists” presumably influenced the formulation of similar early Christian prayers, but there is no evidence that they functioned as specific and direct sources for the Jonah representations on Christian sarcophagi.

The connection of Jewish texts with the Christian visual Jonah is, therefore, tenuous. Allenbach concluded that while it may be appropriate to seek Jewish sources for some Christian iconography, this was not the case for Jonah. The negative attitudes of Jewish theologians with respect to the story of the Ninevites “make it highly unlikely that there

\(^{129}\) Siegert and Roulet, Prédications synagogales, 17–51. On the Pseudo-Philo On Jonah, see Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 1.80–82; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 57. This homily was written in Greek, perhaps as early as the first century CE or as late as the fourth, and survives only in a sixth-century Armenian translation. It is cited as a potential precedent for the Jonah theme in early Christian art by Wischmeyer, “Das Beispiel Jonas,” 169; Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 63.

\(^{130}\) Duval, Le livre de Jonah, 1.96–97.
was a Jewish model for the Christian representations of Jonah.\textsuperscript{131} Rabbinical commentators notwithstanding, the book of Jonah did retain its position in the Jewish scriptural canon and also acquired an important role in Jewish rites and ceremonies. It is there that we may continue to seek a Jewish Jonah.

d) Liturgy, scripture and antiquity

Yom Kippur is characterized by prayer, fasting, repentance and atonement. At the close of the afternoon service, the entire book of Jonah is read, a practice that may have begun as early as the second century CE.\textsuperscript{132} As a central figure on the holiest and most sombre of Jewish days, Jonah's story could thereby have been adopted or appropriated by the Christian community, retaining its status as a holy text of the Jews. According to Stökl Ben Ezra, "Yom Kippur as observed by Jewish contemporaries of the Church Fathers contributed to an increasing use of the Yom Kippur imagery by Christians."\textsuperscript{133} He was referring to literary rather than visual imagery, and particularly to the rhetoric of atonement through repentance. Jonah figured prominently in that rhetoric among the Jews, and one could speculate that he might thereby have inserted himself into the Christian liturgy of the third and fourth centuries. Unfortunately, as previously remarked, very little is known about these practices.

A more direct way in which Christians might have been exposed to the Yom Kippur Jonah was through their actual observance of the Jewish holy day. Criticism of such participation is suggestive that it occurred, although the scale, chronology and geography are hard to assess. Preachers railed against Iudaizzantes, members of the congregation who adopted Jewish doctrines or observed Jewish "days," including fasting on Yom Kippur. They excoriated "half Christians" who adulterated their Christianity with Judaism. Most of this

\textsuperscript{131} Allenbach, "La figure de Jonas," 101: "...les présentations opposées de Jonas dans le judaïsme, et surtout l’attitude négative à l’égard de l’histoire des Ninevites rendent hautement improbables le fait qu’il y ait eu un modèle juif aux représentations chrétiennes de Jonas." Engemann, "Jonas," 690, also found no evidence of any connection between Midrash Jonah or other Jewish texts and the Christian images.

\textsuperscript{132} Stökl Ben Ezra, \textit{Impact of Yom Kippur}, 55–56, 58. \textit{Midrash Jonah} might have formed part of this liturgy, or perhaps of some other religious service. See Bedini and Bigarelli, \textit{Giona}, 59.

\textsuperscript{133} Stökl Ben Ezra, \textit{Impact of Yom Kippur}, 261. He also observes, however (55n219), that the reading of Jonah may not have been generalized in this early period.
evidence is found no earlier than the closing years of the fourth century, and little of it concerns Rome. As noted above, this text is generally considered a fourth-century compilation from Antioch but representative of earlier Roman practice. It may, therefore, provide some evidence of Yom Kippur observance by Roman Christians, probably few in number but sufficient to warrant a prohibition.

Experience of the Jewish Jonah through direct or indirect exposure to Jewish liturgy is hypothetical and unlikely to have been extensive. Another, more concrete factor that might account for such a facet of the Jonah theme is the Jewishness of the Old Testament. The book of Jonah as presented in the Septuagint and Vetus Latina translations is essentially the same as the old Hebrew texts. To the extent that it appeared in Christian liturgy, was cited in Christian sermons, read by literate members of the Roman sarcophagus population or became part of the oral culture of the Christian communities, the story retained its Jewish origins notwithstanding typological interpretation or Christian appropriation. Pace the second-century bishop Marcion who would have had it otherwise (and was branded a heretic for his troubles), the Hebrew Bible was Christianized rather than subjected to a damnatio memoriae. The religion of Jesus and his forebears was superseded or fulfilled, not retroactively annihilated. Even as the viewers of Jonah representations reflected on the

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136 On the Canons in the Apostolic Constitutions, see note 21, above. Stökl Ben Ezra does not mention the Roman connection.

137 Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 1.72–77; Allenbach, “La figure de Jonas,” 99–100. The most significant variant appears in the first-century CE Palestinian Targum, where the prophet is likened to Moses as a receiver of the law that he retrieved from the depths of the sea. This Mosaic Jonah has left no trace in Christian practices or images, although it is referred to by Dulaey, L’initiation chrétienne, 90, in an attempt to attenuate the negative view of the prophet otherwise attributed to Jewish writings (see note 131, above)
meaning of this imagery to them as Christians, a part of that meaning included the inescapable fact that the events recounted in the book of Jonah occurred long before the Incarnation. Jonah was Jewish, the Ninevites were not, and no one in the story was a Christian. The ancient prophet’s co-religionists were still encountered in Rome’s Jewish community, a living reminder to Christians of the old faith.

A Jewish Jonah was, therefore, part of the experiential equipment that members of the Christian sarcophagus population brought to their viewing experience. While the same was presumably true for Daniel in the lions’ den and other popular figures from the Hebrew Bible, the Jonah theme had the distinction of appearing in both the Old and the New Testaments. Jonah’s experience in the ketos and his preaching to the Ninevites were ancient historical events and, at the same time, an ever-present typological sign. The Biblical Jonah was a Jewish Jonah; his pre- or proto-Christianity was central to the meaning of his story. Its antiquity was not ignored or challenged but accentuated by the relationship between the “new” and the “old” books of the Christian canon. The latter recounted events that had occurred in illo tempore, long before the relatively recent foundation of Christianity, before even the foundation of the Roman Empire. This antiquity was a source of pride and legitimacy for Christian religious identity in a society that valued tradition.

3. Pagan Jonah: the myth of Endymion

The two preceding sections of this chapter considered facets of reception of the Jonah theme that reflect its historical origins in Judaism and the contemporary religious context of Christian scripture. The Pagan Jonah supposes a visual reception that connects the viewer to the myths of another religious tradition altogether. A relatively diffuse pagan resonance will be considered in connection with the Naked Jonah, and the broad question of the

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survival or adoption of Greco-Roman myth on Christian sarcophagi is an element in the Conclusion. Here the focus is a more specific relationship, between the representation of Jonah at rest under the cucurbita and the sleeping Endymion. The parallel is commonplace, even banal, yet the sarcophagus literature rarely explores its content, or clarifies whether the suggested association is formal, semantic, or both.

Endymion’s love story has little in common with Jonah’s prophetic ordeal. The moon goddess, Selene, was infatuated with a lovely youth, variously cast as a shepherd or hunter. She petitioned Zeus to grant him eternal youth and so he did, but only at the price of eternal sleep. The typical scene depicted on Roman sarcophagi shows Selene arriving in her chariot to make love to the ever-sleeping Endymion. Rather than a single-frame, it represents “a continuous cycle of nights and visitations, endlessly the same.”

In the following discussion, the formal similarity almost universally asserted between these two figures will first be tested. The conclusion is that there is a formal homology, but not necessarily closer than to other pagan sleepers. From the perspective of the viewer, the question is different. Whether or not workshops and designers adapted the form of the sleeping Endymion to render Jonah under the cucurbita, one must ask whether viewers connected the myth and the Hebrew prophet, and if so with what effect. In this regard, the discussion suggests that not all Christian viewers likely recognized the resemblance, and those who did would not generally draw any semantic inference. The myth of Endymion is a myth not only of Greco-Roman culture, but also of modern art history.

a) Form

A resemblance between Christian and pagan representations would be consistent with the widely-accepted, if unproven and probably unprovable, view that Christian and non-

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141 An analogy suggests itself to Mathews’s “emperor mystique” in *Clash of Gods*. Unlike Mathews, however, I do not suggest any psychological or sociological root in the historiography of the Endymion/Jonah relationship.
Christian sarcophagi in this period were made by the same craftsmen.\footnote{142} This claim is often linked to another common opinion that sees early Christian sarcophagi emerging from the Roman workshop responsible for the frieze on the Arch of Constantine.\footnote{143} There are other, more persuasive grounds for inferring the existence, and at least in the early phase of Christian sarcophagus production the dominance, of ecumenical workshops. One is style. Although styles can, of course, be copied, the close parallels between Christian and pagan sarcophagi or other monuments during the Constantinian period do support the hypothesis of common production facilities. Formal similarities are also striking. Whatever may be the semantic implications (if any) of the likeness between Endymion or Ariadne and the resting Jonah, or God the Father and Prometheus, or Christ and various imperial forms,\footnote{144} such examples do point to a sharing of models that could conveniently be carried out within a


\footnote{143} The view is often said to originate with Hans Peter L'Orange, Der spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1939), 225. The older literature is found in Klaus Eichner, “Die Werkstatt des sogenannent Dogmatischen Sarkophags: Untersuchungen zur Technik der konstantinischen Sarkophagplastik in Rom” (Doctoral diss., Ruprecht-Karl-Universität zu Heidelberg, 1977), 20n1, and Dagmar Stutzinger, Die frühchristlichen Sarkophagreliefs aus Rom: Untersuchungen zur Formveränderung im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1982), 77–78. Patrizio Pensabene, “Progetto unitario e reimpiego nell’Arco di Costantino,” in Arco di Costantino: tra archeologia e archeometria, ed. Patrizio Pensabene and Clementina Panella (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1999), 41–42, connected the reuse of material in the construction of the Arch with a decline in the production of Roman public monuments in favour of a flourishing of workshops devoted to private commissions, including sarcophagi, effectively reversing the flow of “influence.” This is not inconsistent with the existence of common workshops for pagan and Christian sarcophagus production.

workshop, although it could be and almost certainly was effected in other ways as well. There is also an economic or practical argument in favour of the common workshop. The regular annual demand for adult sarcophagi with Christian imagery at this time was less than 150 units per year (subject to spikes in the death rate), probably considerably less (Table 2.8). It would not be surprising if such modest and potentially ephemeral demand were absorbed by existing production facilities.

The likeness of various elements in the representation of the Jonah theme with pagan forms is, therefore, predictable and explicable. The ketos, for example, is typical of Roman domestic and funerary art; similar ships and sailors can be found on non-Christian sarcophagi. Since it was proposed by Viktor Schultze in 1880, the more narrowly focussed connection between the resting Jonah and Endymion has been generally accepted, progressing from theory, to settled fact, to a staple of the art historical literature, a textbook example of the derivation of Christian from pagan forms of representation. Often images are allowed to “speak for themselves,” the author displaying juxtaposed reproductions on a single page, as Thomas Mathews does with the Santa Maria Antiqua
Jonah and an Endymion sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (ill. 22 and 23).  

Yet this simple relationship is not self-evident. For one thing, Endymion is not the only mythological figure portrayed in similar pose. Ariadne, Dionysus and others have been cited (see, for example, ill. 24, 25). The stereotypical reclining position — one arm bent over the head, the other generally extended at the side — can also be found in representations of the deceased on non-Christian sarcophagi (ill. 26). One could conclude that Jonah under the cucurbita was merely a stock type recycled by sculptors to denote any dormant or resting figure.

147 Mathews, Clash of Gods, 32. On the New York Endymion sarcophagus (inv. 24.97.13), see Sichtermann, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, cat. 48; Anna Marguerite McCann, Roman Sarcophagi in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), 34–38 (cat. 3). This approach is also adopted by non-specialists. So Bazzana, “Cucurbita,” 320, compares the Jonah Sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Rep. 1.35 – erroneously dated in the photo caption as “early 3rd century”) and another Endymion sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Sichtermann, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, cat. 80; McCann, Roman Sarcophagi, 39–45 [cat. 4]).

148 Hanns Gabelmann, “Endymion,” in Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae (LIMC), III.1 (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1981), 742, rejected the formal connection. He described the resting Jonah figure as a particular pictorial invention (Bilderfindung), albeit one that was constructed by fusing antique precedents. This treats Jonah in a manner similar to other elements of the theme that can be traced to pagan or secular models, like the ship, sailors and ketos. Sichtermann, “Der Jonaszylkus,” 245, found the contextual differences between Jonah and Endymion — sleep versus rest, night versus day, clothed versus naked — too great to permit a derivation of the prophet from the mythological shepherd. Mazzoleni, in Fabrizio Bisconti, Temi di iconografia paleocristiana (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2000), 192, accepted the derivation of Jonah’s posture from Endymion but otherwise raised similar questions.

149 The illustrated examples are a second-century Ariadne sarcophagus in the Museo Nazionale Romano (inv. 214) and a Campana terracotta plaque, impressions of which are conserved in the Musée du Louvre, Paris and in the Musée d’Auxerre (Collection Campana, Dépot de l’État, inv. No. 72). In the latter collection the plaque is classified as “le sommeil d’Endymion,” but it is better regarded as Dionysus, as suggested by Stommel, “Zum Problem der frühchristlichen Jonasdarstellungen,” 115, because of the vine; one need merely add gourd fruits to transform this figure into Jonah. Dionysus reclining under a vine also appears on a sarcophagus in Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. 2430; Østergaard, Imperial Rome, 94–95 (cat. 41). Here, the god is on a wagon accompanied by Ariadne. Another figure in similar posture, a drunken, old satyr carried in procession on a sling, appears on the right side of the chest. On the relation between Jonah and other sleeping figures, see Bisconti and Gentili, Rivoluzione, 182–183 (cat. 42, entry by Utro); Stommel, “Zum Problem der frühchristlichen Jonasdarstellungen,” 115. Mitius, Jonas, 94, and Engemann, Deutung und Bedeutung, 115, included Rhea Silva and Mars on the list of pagan comparables. Aphrodite reclining below the figure of Ares on a sarcophagus in the Chiostro del Paradiso, Amalfi (Sichterman, Mythologischen Sarkophage, cat. 4) might be another example.

150 The illustration is a sarcophagus in the Villa Dervillé, Carrara. See Amedick, Vita privata, 24 (Addendum to chapter 1, not in the catalogue). See also the anonymous shepherd on a chest in Cava dei Tirreni, Badia Trinità di Cava: Amedick, Vita privata, cat. 35.
The formal comparisons of Endymion and Jonah may also be criticized as being selective. Examples can easily be found that do not correspond so neatly. Jonah on the London sarcophagus or on a lid in Osimo (Rep. II.243, ill. 5 and II.185, ill. 16) does not much resemble the typical Endymion. Both the biblical and mythological figures appear in an assortment of postures and poses. The angle of recline varies considerably, particularly among the Jonah examples. The prophet’s left arm, usually extended along the side of the body, may instead be bent and used as a support. Either figure may look up, away or down. This range of options could be cited as evidence in favour of the comparison between them on the basis that, excluding the outliers, the two groups globally show a reasonable degree of cohesion.\footnote{David L. Balch, “From Endymion in Roman Domus to Jonah in Christian Catacombs: From Houses for the Living to Houses for the Dead,” in Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context: Studies of Roman, Jewish, and Christian Burials, ed. Laurie Brink and Deborah A. Green (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 291–292.} It could equally be taken as confirmation that both figural types are simply adaptations of a stereotypical and recognizable signal for sleep. The pagan viewers of Endymion sarcophagi and the Christians regarding Jonah relied on the surrounding pictorial elements and accompanying iconography for identification, not the posture of the sleeper.

A further challenge to the direct formal connection between the languid Endymion and Jonah under the cucurbita is chronology. The popularity of Endymion sarcophagi fell between 220 and 250, and production declined drastically thereafter. Paul Zanker remarked only a single example securely dated between 270 and 310, although the abbreviated and diminutive form of Endymion asleep under a portrait clipeus seemed to continue into the early fourth century.\footnote{Paul Zanker, “Ikonographie und Mentalität. Zur Veränderung mythologischer Bildthemen auf den kaiserzeitlichen Sarkophagen aus der Stadt Rom,” in Lebenswelten: Bilder und Räume in der römischen Stadt der Kaiserzeit, ed. Richard Neudecker and Paul Zanker (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 2005), 244, 317. See also Gabelmann, “Endymion,” 739.} The Endymion monuments referred to in the text above, and commonly cited for comparison with Jonah in the sarcophagus literature, are dated to the late second century or the beginning of the third. The production overlap was, therefore, limited. The stereotypical sleeping form was, presumably, still available and generally known. However, it is misleading to juxtapose fourth- or even late-third-century Jonah
figures with Endymions carved much earlier as if they sat facing one another as works in process in the sculptor’s atelier.

On balance, the differences between representations of the sleeping Endymion and Jonah under the gourd plant are probably insufficient to deny any formal connection between the two. However, the resemblance is similar in kind, and not obviously tighter, than that between Jonah and other sleeping figures appearing on non-Christian sarcophagi.

b) Knowledge

Apart from form, another similarity between Endymion and Jonah is that each is numerically dominant in its respective category. The frequency of Endymion sarcophagi may explain why so little attention has been paid to whether Christian viewers are likely to have been familiar with them, or similar representations in other media, and thus able and inclined to connect Endymion to Jonah. Like any other external text or image — biblical, patristic, Jewish, or pagan — Christian viewers could reflect on the myth of Endymion to enhance their appreciation of Jonah sarcophagi only if they knew it, and more particularly could recognize its visual translation in the figure of the sleeping youth.

For the sarcophagus population of Rome, the élite and sub-élite who purchased these monuments and attended the commemorative rites at which they were displayed, knowledge of the myth was likely, of the image somewhat less so. The education of wealthy Christians in this period was assured in schools that provided classical instruction including recitation of Greek myths, and Endymion was presumably part of this canon. The reader or listener could not, however, be expected to have translated his or her memory of the story into the visual form of Jonah at rest without further clues. Modern publications compare reproductions of sarcophagi, but few Christian viewers of the Jonah theme had access to funerary depictions of Endymion. The probability of an early fourth-century Christian having visited the tomb of a deceased relative or close friend deposited in an

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Endymion sarcophagus cannot have been very high, both because of limited access to these spaces and, as remarked above, the cessation their production by this time. There is some possibility that the sleeping Endymion might have been encountered in the domestic context; a limited number of such representations survive in wall painting, mosaics and other media, although few in Rome.\textsuperscript{154}

The ability of Christian viewers of Jonah sarcophagi to draw the Endymion connection cannot, then, be taken for granted. Most were probably familiar with the myth, and a few might have seen representation of the sleeping youth. Perhaps the less knowledgeable were told of the formal connection between Endymion and Jonah under the cucurbita by other visitors at the tomb. In order to examine the case for a Pagan Jonah based on the representations of Endymion, let us nonetheless assume that Christian viewers generally did recognize a formal relationship between the biblical and mythological figures. The question then becomes whether this hypothesized association coloured their experience of the imagery on the Christian sarcophagi, going beyond an interesting and perhaps amusing formal parallel to a deeper, semantic understanding that might complement or even supersede the Biblical Jonah.

c) Meaning

Early proponents of the association between Endymion and Jonah did not stress any relationship other than form. Charles Rufus Morey thought the parallel between these two figures provided insight into the work of the artist rather than the experience of the viewer, a conclusion echoed by some subsequent scholars.\textsuperscript{155} Others, however, reached beyond form and workshop practice to posit a range of more profound connections, undeterred by

\textsuperscript{154} Examples in Gabelmann, “Endymion,” 728–731, include Pompeian wall painting, mosaics in Nîmes and Piazza Armerina, relief sculptures and clay lamps. Only a few are of Roman origin. Balch, “Endymion to Jonah,” argues that images of death were first present on the walls of the domus and then migrated to the funerary space. Notwithstanding the paucity of examples, he claims that Endymion can be seen to have moved from the house into the pagan tomb, from there to become the Christian Jonah. On late antique domestic decoration with pagan mythology in general, see Liebeschuetz, “Pagan Mythology,” 195–199. He does not mention Endymion.

the equally strong, and possibly stronger, resemblance between the reclining Jonah and other non-Christian representations. Endymion, not Ariadne or Dionysus, has been the object of scholarly claims for a Pagan Jonah. This preference is understandable, if methodologically suspect. Neither the somnolent Ariadne, lying with her upper torso exposed to the libidinous gaze of her future husband Dionysus and unaware of his approach, nor the inebriated Dionysus under the vine provides a very sympathetic model for a Hebrew prophet and type of Jesus. Endymion in a state of eternal sleep, on the other hand, is a noble figure of death and its conquest. One senses that his elevation to the status of preferred prototype is dictated by the desired outcome of the comparison.

Endymion was generally identified with the deceased. Such projections onto mythological sarcophagi were not uncommon, often effected or at least highlighted by the addition of portrait features to either or both the sleeping youth and the visiting goddess, suggesting the earthly couple now separated by death. In marked contrast to the pagan practice, biblical figures were almost never marked with portrait features. The only known potential (and controversial) Jonah example is the London sarcophagus (Rep. II.243, ill. 5), a unicum of uncertain provenance. Nothing prevented viewers from associating the figure of the reclining Jonah with the deceased, themselves, or the Christian believer in general, but the lack of portrait features should not be dismissed. Christians evidently had a different attitude towards their biblical icons than their pagan neighbours did with respect to mythological heroes.

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157 Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 67, rejects Ariadne and Dionysus as models precisely because they are not “identical in pose and in idea with the resurrected, immortal Endymion.” The pose may not actually favour Endymion, and using the “idea” as a selection criterion is self-fulfilling.
If the viewer did manage to associate Jonah with Endymion, and connected both with the deceased, what meaning might she or he have attributed to the dormant figure? At one end of a spectrum of suggestions stands John Dominic Crossan. Other proponents of a semantic association between Jonah and Endymion assume, either implicitly or explicitly, that it was a workshop shortcut that took on a life of its own. Crossan claims that early Christians actually wanted to depict Endymion, and hit upon Jonah as a means to that end. “They must have ransacked their biblical tradition to come up with a — what term do I use — equivalent?”161 This is a Biblical Endymion rather than a Pagan Jonah, not a mythological association with Jonah but a Christian mechanism for reproducing a pagan figure of consolation.162 The sentence just quoted reflects an ambiguity between production and consumption. The “they” who “came up with” Endymion-as-Jonah could be the sculptors or designers, but for the ruse to work viewers must be implicated. Viewers, too, must be assumed to have been aware that the image represented a Christianized Endymion.

Other scholars do not go this far and presume that the Christian patrons and viewers of Jonah saw the Hebrew prophet, not Endymion.163 It was precisely to ensure this result that the ever-present gourd plant was included (although one could argue, à la Crossan, that it was camouflage to permit the depiction of a pseudo-Christian Endymion). On a few late Endymion sarcophagi, the sleeping youth appears in miniature under a portrait clipeus, without his goddess-lover Selene. He can be distinguished from Jonah only by the absence of the cucurbita. This does not diminish but rather highlights the importance of that attribute. It enabled the viewer to know who was represented and fostered a flood of associations entirely different from those that might otherwise have been experienced.

Most semantic theories thus accept that viewers saw Jonah but contend that his perceived relationship with Endymion altered, enhanced or perhaps even determined their experience of the biblical scene. One curiosity of this reasoning is that the transfer of

161 Crossan, “Bias,” 234.
162 On consolation and mythological sarcophagi, see Zanker and Ewald, Mit Mythen leben, 62–115, and specifically regarding Endymion, 102–109.
163 Jensen, Substance of Things Seen, 29: “...this image is Jonah and not Endymion” and “we should also assume that early Christian viewers weren’t mistaken about what they saw.”
meaning from the mythological to the biblical personality becomes serendipitous, a fortuitous consequence of the sculptor’s having used a particular formal model. Under Crossan’s Endymion-as-Jonah, it is at least done on purpose.

Surprisingly, while emphasizing the relation between Endymion and Jonah, the literature is neither of one mind nor very forthcoming about what might have been its content. Endymion’s sleep has been likened to the Christian conception of an intermediate state between death and resurrection (supporting the theory of refrigerium interim, discussed below) or to the final Christian paradise (supporting the Typological Jonah, discussed above). David L. Balch suggested that the biblical theme was deployed in the service of “eschatological overtones” found in some pagan commentaries and the “early Roman Christians’ appreciation of aesthetic beauty” (compare the Idyllic Jonah and the Naked Jonah, below). They “reinterpreted and visually represented” certain mythological scenes, including, but not limited to, Endymion and Selene. Crossan was partially relieved of the difficulty of finding content in the transposition of meaning from Endymion to Jonah since he conceived of the latter as merely a vehicle to present the former. It is sufficient, on this view, to suppose that Christian viewers beheld in Jonah the “beautiful, serene, and consoling image of death” traditionally represented by Endymion.

Under any of these proposals, the viewer of the Jonah theme on a Christian sarcophagus had somehow to connect the image of the biblical prophet with Endymion. Serious inconsistencies between both their stories and the forms of representation had to be overcome. Jonah was a Jew called upon by the Lord to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh.

165 Mathews, Clash of Gods, 33; Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 67. Perhaps this is what is meant by McCann, Roman Sarcophagi, 37: “The Endymion myth lives on in Early Christian art in the story of Jonah, who is represented in the Endymion statuary pose [referring to the Vatican Jonah Sarcophagus, Rep. I.35] as a youth who also enjoys a blessed sleep and arises to Paradise.” Endymion is indeed “aroused” each night but one doubts the author meant to equate the sexual experience with Christian paradise.
He fled from Joppa, was cast into the sea, saved from the ketos, and finally accomplished his divine mission. The myth of Endymion is about a couple. The sleeping youth on Roman sarcophagi was a figure of consolation but also memorialized undying mutual love, perhaps celestial marriage. The representations depict Endymion and Selene, while Jonah's rest under the gourd plant is solitary. A viewer who associated it with the Greco-Roman myth had to rework the story and truncate the image, eliminating one of the protagonists and substituting an entirely new plot. Selene's nightly visits are sexual encounters. Jonah's story provides no place for an equivalent erotic relationship. Most scholars ignore the problem. Snyder tried to sublimate it: “The frequent appearance of the reclining Endymion on sarcophagi surely associates the myth of satisfactory rest from procreation with satisfactory rest from life itself.” Although Endymion’s encounters with the goddess did produce numerous offspring (fifty daughters according to Pausanias), the term “procreation” prudishly fudges the main purpose of her visits. More important, the metamorphosis of post-coital gratification into idyllic repose is not consistent with the iconography. With perhaps a rare exception, Endymion's sleep anticipates rather than follows the act. It is possible to regard Jonah’s image as erotic (see “Naked Jonah,” below). This is not, however, what the literature has generally meant by Jonah-as-Endymion.

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169 Selene is depicted approaching the sleeping Endymion. Viewers understood the representation as the beginning, not the end, of a night of love-making: Zanker and Ewald, Mit Mythen leben, 205; Koortbojian, Myth, Meaning, and Memory, 67 (“These sarcophagi present merely the first phase of an erotic scenario, the sequels to which are easily imagined”). There is one potential exception, a sarcophagus in Berlin (Sichtermann, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, no. 100), which, according to Koortbojian, replaces “the standardized scenes of arrival and seduction with those of departure and farewell,” although Zanker and Ewald (204) interpret this monument too as an approach rather than departure. Note, as well, that the similarly-positioned sleeping Ariadne is also about to be interrupted by the attentions of Dionysus, often seen to be approaching as her breasts are bared to his gaze.
Endymion sleeps, and although literary sources often equated sleep with death,\textsuperscript{171} the visual tradition generally maintained a distinction (compare ill. 21).\textsuperscript{172} Endymion thus offered consolation through a figure who never awoke but was not dead. If taken seriously, that notion could not have sat well with a Christian viewer attuned to this religion's conception of death.\textsuperscript{173} The figure's peace and serenity might conjure visions of Christian paradise, but following resurrection the deceased was presumably not meant to be eternally sleeping.

Not much of the Endymion myth could be retained and applied by Christian viewers. It had to be transmogrified, eliminating the pagan trappings and the sexual ministrations of Selene. The Idyllic Jonah, to be discussed next, might reflect some shared ground among Christians and non-Christians capable of encompassing aspects of both the myth and the book of Jonah. But this does not make Jonah pagan, even partly so. At some point, the specific association between the prophet and the mythical youth becomes more hindrance than help in understanding the Jonah theme.

4. Idyllic Jonah

The relevance of afterlife in pagan Roman funerary art has long been debated. A body of literature including and derived from the work of Franz Cumont promotes the view that many, perhaps all of these images were symbols of Pythagorean immortality and life after death and were experienced as such by their viewers. In Cumont's grand design, there is an "evolution of religious faith" that culminates in a paradisiacal vision, "the felicity of the
blessed." An early challenge to this interpretation was posed by Arthur Darby Nock in 1946. He characterized the “primary note” of Cumont’s interpretation as a “spiritual interpretation of life” centred on the yearning for immortality and its achievement after death. Human beings imagine “a state of felicity in some other plane” and Roman funerary art, according to Cumont, “… implies a possible participation in the glorious sequel to his death as well as in some counterpart of its laborious and painful antecedents.” Nock argued that mythological scenes and, a fortiori, scenes of everyday life, actually pointed more towards the virtutes of the deceased than his or her afterlife. A far more detailed and comprehensive examination of mythological, marine and bucolic imagery on Roman sarcophagi by Paul Zanker and Björn Christian Ewald reached a similar conclusion, resisting, like Nock, the retrospective projection of Christianized notions of afterlife. The Roman representations, in their view, facilitated mourning and expressions of grief, promoted a sense of well-being or happiness and extolled the life of the deceased. As Christopher H. Hallett summarized the findings of their Mit Mythen leben: “At the tomb, it turns out, Romans chose to speak not so much about death, but about life, as they knew and understood it.” The issue is by no means closed. A moderate position, in which afterlife remains part of the allegory and metaphor of both mythological and everyday life

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174 The quoted expressions are from the opening sentence and the title of the last chapter of Franz Cumont, After Life in Roman Paganism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922). The evolutionary model is most apparent in the opening chapter, “Historical Introduction” (1–43). Cumont claimed to have discovered a common spiritual understanding of death, finally expressed as “the idea of peace in the celestial light,” that he regarded as “dominant among the Jews and Christians as among the pagans” in the Roman Empire (198).


176 Nock, “Sarcophagi and Symbolism,” 19. He expressly remarks the propensity of funerary representations to look backwards to life rather than forwards to afterlife, the point of departure for a distinction with early Christian art drawn by Panofsky. See the citation on page 197 above.

sarcophagi, was adopted by Michael Koortbojian, and more recently Zanker has suggested that polyvalence may render the controversy moot.¹⁷⁸

These debates mainly concern an earlier period. The eschatological notions of pagan viewers and the extent to which they were aroused by sight of mythological or pastoral imagery could well have changed over time. Such a development might be linked to the social and economic upheavals of the third century, but even without such a trigger it would be surprising if spiritual attitudes remained immobile from Augustus to Constantine. Whether and to what extent the late Roman, non-Christian majority considered their own funerary representations to be expressions of some kind of afterlife cannot and need not be resolved here. There is little doubt that this was a preoccupation of their Christian neighbours. The facet of Jonah imagery considered in this section arises out of the view of some scholars that, in Elsner’s phrase, pagans and Christians may have shared a vague sense of “a better life in a better place.”¹⁷⁹

The connection of generic notions of peace and felicity to the Jonah theme has sometimes been specifically related to the Roman bucolic idyll, and the first sub-section below considers the evidence for a Pastoral Jonah. A similar Christianized idyllic state may, by extension, be proposed without the need for pastoral imagery, labelled here as “soft salvation,” the subject of the second sub-section.

¹⁷⁸ Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory*, 13–14, considers that the mythological imagery in general is connected to “religious ritual devoted to the dead and their afterlife,” a theme applied to specific myths elsewhere in the text (e.g., regarding Endymion, 78–82). See, now, Michael Koortbojian, “The Mythology of Everyday Life,” in *Iconographie funéraire romaine et société: corpus antique, approches nouvelles?*, ed. Martin Galinier and François Baratte (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2013), 147-169. Zanker, “Reading Images,” 177, observes that the “old controversy... cannot be settled once and for all” but that it “is losing its relevance and becoming marginalized” as one interpretation among several, all simultaneously “activated.”

¹⁷⁹ Elsner, “Introduction,” 11, used this expression to refer to a potential parallel between Christian images importing salvation and afterlife and pagan sarcophagi bearing representations of Endymion or Ariadne.
a) Pastoral Jonah

The association of Jonah representations with the bucolic idyll is not based on any biblical suggestion that Jonah was a shepherd.\textsuperscript{180} The connection is visual. For some, it derives from the figure of Endymion, himself described as either a shepherd or a hunter in the sources and depicted on occasion with attributes of one occupation or the other. Another pastoral association is the appearance of the kriophoros, or for the Christian interpreter, the “good shepherd.” More generally, shepherds and sheep were popular on late Roman sarcophagi and seem to have made their way onto a certain number in the Jonah corpus, leading to the formulation of the Pastoral Jonah.

i) Sheep, shepherds and Jonah sarcophagi

On Dresken-Weiland’s count, the third most common pairing with Jonah scenes is a shepherd, including the sheep- or ram-bearing kriophoros. She lists eleven examples, compared to the most common association, with Noah, which has thirteen, and the second place theme of the three Hebrew youths in the furnace, with twelve. Seven more instances could be added to her tally, plus another four that depict sheep but no shepherd.\textsuperscript{181} This total of twenty-two monuments may not represent a large proportion of the 200-odd Jonah sarcophagi, but one must bear in mind that most of those are fragments, perhaps as summary as a few hanging gourds. There are forty or so Jonah sarcophagi for which relatively complete iconography has been preserved and thirteen of the twenty-two with sheep or shepherds are among them. Since pastoral representations seem to have diminished in popularity more rapidly than those of Jonah, that proportion would be higher if later monuments were excluded.

\textsuperscript{180} Jerome, \textit{In Ionam}, Prol. 32–42, accepted the traditional view that Jonah’s father, Amathi (Jonah 1:1), was the same person referred to in 4 Kings 14:25. The family of that Amathi was from “Geth, which is in Opher,” understood to be the village of Diocesarea near Sepphoris (Tzippori) in the central Galilee. They certainly could have been shepherds, but neither the Bible nor early commentaries provide any hint of the prophet’s occupation.

In purely numerical terms, the combination of the pastoral motif with the Jonah theme is, therefore, not insignificant, and it appears to be more prevalent than with other Old Testament themes.\textsuperscript{182} Turning from quantity to quality, the character and degree of interconnection between Jonah and the shepherd or flock vary considerably.

The most striking example is a strigilated chest in Pisa (Rep. II.90, ill. 31).\textsuperscript{183} The front is ostentatiously pastoral. A young man bearing a sheep across his shoulders and looking to his left stands in the central field. Two more sheep are below looking up at him. At the left corner is a bearded shepherd carrying an animal (missing) in a sack on his shoulder, another sheep is at his feet. On the right stands another young man with a dog, presumably a third shepherd. The facial features and the hair of the central figure are reminiscent of later portraits of a youthful Christ.\textsuperscript{184} While the face of the chest is heavily pastoral, the short sides are occupied by Jonah scenes. On the left is a ship with furled sails and two men, one seated at the rudder and the other standing in orant pose, both dressed. On the right, Jonah reclines on a rocky inclined surface under a gourd plant, his right arm bent over his head. Unusually, he too wears a tunic. He holds a shepherd’s crook with his left hand and is surrounded by sheep. One grazes at his feet while another, along with a ram, stands above him on a rocky hill. Only the hanging fruit of the cucurbita betray this as Jonah.

The Pisa sarcophagus is the only surviving example where Jonah is explicitly depicted as a shepherd, rather than merely being associated with the pastoral calling by other representations on the same monument. There could, of course, have been others, but they must have represented a very tiny proportion of the Jonah corpus.\textsuperscript{185} Engemann

\textsuperscript{182} Compare Dresken-Weiland’s tables of correspondences in Bild, Grab und Wort for such other themes as Daniel in the lions’ den (240), Noah in the ark (290) and the three Hebrew youths (308).
\textsuperscript{183} Pisa, Museo Nazionale e Civico di San Matteo, dated by the Repertorium to the last third of the third century.
\textsuperscript{184} Compare the free-standing statue of Christ in the Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 61565, classified in Rep. II.132 as possibly part of a columnar sarcophagus and dated to the Theodosian period, or the acroteria of a late fourth-century piece in Mantua, Rep. II.151. Many other examples could be cited, e.g., Rep. III.61, 77, 79.
\textsuperscript{185} On the problem of the “unicum” in sarcophagus studies, see the comment in chapter 2, page 129.
considered the Jonah scenes to be a later Christian addition to a pagan sarcophagus.\textsuperscript{186} Whether this is correct or not, the depiction of Jonah-as-shepherd is no less remarkable.

A second example often cited in this connection is a sarcophagus in Berlin (Rep. II.241, ill. 27).\textsuperscript{187} Jonah reclines naked under hanging gourds surrounded by sheep, a bull and a dog, with two goats in an upper register above him. A kriophoros at the right corner is paired with a female orant at the left, along with two other figures dressed in exomis, likely shepherds. The pastoral motif is similar although less elaborate on the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (Rep. I.747, ill. 22) where the resting prophet is placed in symmetric relation to a standing kriophoros — separated by an orant and a seated “philosopher” — with three of the shepherd’s sheep or rams perched above his booth. An unusual pastoral motif appears on the London Jonah sarcophagus (Rep. II.243, ill. 5): an isolated and incongruous sheep with pride of place on the upper left, opposite the oversized figure of Jonah at the right.

In other examples, the relationship between Jonah and bucolic imagery is weaker than on the four monuments discussed above. A sarcophagus front in the Pio Cristiano Museum presents a kriophoros at the left corner and an orant at the right. They frame an inscribed tabula on either side of which are depictions of Jonah being thrown from the ship and grazing sheep (Rep. I.46, ill. 38).\textsuperscript{188} The placement and prominence of these two representations, and the lack of any other narrative or pictorial elements, serves to connect them. A diminutive shepherd placed just adjacent to the resting Jonah on the Vatican Jonah sarcophagus (Rep. I.35, ill. 4) might be taken to be meaningful, while more effort is required to connect the large, sheep-bearing, bearded figure looming over the small reclining figure of Jonah on a sarcophagus or loculus closure in Velletri (Rep. II.242, ill. 39).\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{186} Engemann, “Untersuchungen,” 73, 75–76, and “Christianization,” 85; followed in the Repertorium entry.
\textsuperscript{187} Museum für Späantike und Byzantinische Kunst, inv. 2704, dated to the last third of the third century. The Repertorium entry attributes this sarcophagus to a local workshop, as does Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “Bilder im Grab und ihre Bedeutung im Kontext der Christianisierung der frühchristlichen Welt,” Antiquité Tardive 19 (2011): 67, but Engemann, Deutung und Bedeutung, 107, considers it a metropolitan work. It was presumably for an adult given its length of 1.82 m, but it is extremely low and narrow (0.42 m).
\textsuperscript{188} A similar compositional relationship appears on Rep. I.958.
\textsuperscript{189} The Velletri monument is described as a sarcophagus or loculus plaque in the Repertorium entry, which also considers it the product of a local workshop. Most scholars consider it a plaque: Kurt Weitzmann (ed.),
Finally, the connection between Jonah and a pastoral motif on others of the sarcophagi listed at the beginning of this section is tenuous. Sometimes a shepherd seems to be part of a different aspect of the decorative scheme, as in the case of strigilated chests with central or corner kriophoroi and Jonah appearing on the lid. On a few fragments it is difficult to determine whether a sheep near the resting Jonah was part of that scene or another.\textsuperscript{190}

\textit{ii) The bucolic idyll}

As will be noted in the Conclusion, pastoral motifs are the only significant example of the importation to Christian sarcophagi of the themes from everyday life that became popular among non-Christians with the decline in the use of Greco-Roman mythology. Most of the examples are found in the Jonah corpus. Shepherds and flocks expressed visions of peace, bliss, and the simple life.\textsuperscript{191} While such imagined rural pleasure might be associated with the \textit{otium} of the villa, this theme was plainly spiritual or allegorical rather than realistic. The deceased were not wealthy sheep ranchers. The sentiment was not, however, “religious” in a sectarian sense and therefore need not have disoriented the Christian viewer. And since the Jonah theme appeared early in the production of Christian sarcophagi, workshop economics might have led producers initially to meet the new demand by introducing the prophet into a pre-conceived pastoral program.

This may be one way to describe the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (Rep. I.747, ill. 22), which is iconographically comparable to a child’s sarcophagus in Ravenna (ill. 40) that also depicts the “philosopher,” orant, kriophoros and sheep found on the Roman monument.

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\textsuperscript{190} As on Rep. I.149 and Rep. II.1.

but without Jonah or any other explicitly Christian element.\textsuperscript{192} Although not exhibiting an equivalent formal relation, it is also interesting to compare the Berlin Jonah sarcophagus (\textit{Rep. II.241}, ill. 27) with two fragments of a lid that are presented, undoubtedly by design, directly across from it in the Bode Museum. They are presumably non-Christian (or at least they are not demonstrably Christian) and have quite similar but more finely carved bucolic figures as well as a similarly disposed flock.\textsuperscript{193}

Sometimes, the additive process worked the other way; the sculptors inserted pastoral elements into the biblical scene. This is an appropriate description of the lone sheep on the London Jonah sarcophagus (\textit{Rep. II.243}, ill. 5) and the diminutive shepherd near the sleeping prophet on the Jonah Sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (\textit{Rep. I.35}, ill. 4). The same may be said of kriophoroi added to frame the Jonah theme without any apparent interaction, as on the child’s sarcophagus in Copenhagen (\textit{Rep. II.7}, ill. 6). In either case — whether Jonah was parachuted into a bucolic program or vice versa — the question is what impact the pastoral representations had on the biblical theme.

The Pastoral Jonah rests on the assumption that Roman Christian viewers shared a core of pastoral associations with their pagan neighbours, that both regarded the peaceful, happy and simple life of the shepherd as a positive model for the afterlife. The notion of a Pastoral Jonah is at once a Christianized bucolic idyll and a “bucolicized” biblical figure, or perhaps these are two ways to say (and see) the same thing. The pagan association of bucolic representations with bliss and felicity was, Provoost suggested, maintained by the Christians but simultaneously invested with a “deeper” — or, to be less judgmental, a further — meaning that connected this state with Christ.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{192} Museo Nazionale di Ravenna, inv. 411; Janet Huskinson, \textit{Roman Children’s Sarcophagi: Their Decoration and its Social Significance} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 69 (cat. 10.3). Huskinson classifies this monument as Christian without discussion, presumably on the basis of the orant and good shepherd.

\textsuperscript{193} Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst, inv. 4685a/b. Notices and images on museum web site.

Scholars have particularly relied on two visual bridges to span the distance between the pagan bucolic idyll and a Christian hereafter expressed by the Jonah theme. The first is the figure of Endymion, now taken as a pastoral model for the bucolicized Jonah. Apart from the difficulties with Jonah-as-Endymion already noted, this particularization of the putative connection encounters additional obstacles. For one thing, Endymion was not always presented as (or understood to be) a shepherd. This was one face of the myth and its visual expressions, but he was also known as a hunter. If the sleeping figure on Roman sarcophagi holds an attribute it is as often a spear as a crook. More generally, bucolic representations are not very common on Endymion sarcophagi, and as Hellmut Sichtermann remarked, even when the principal scene is inserted within a pastoral landscape, the latter seems most often to function as a stylistic rather than an iconographical motif. It is, therefore, questionable whether representations of Endymion provided the model for a Pastoral Jonah or even promoted the inclusion of pastoral elements with the Jonah theme, and more unlikely still that this would have been the viewers’ interpretation. The hard case is the Pisa sarcophagus (Rep. II.90, ill. 31), an outlier in this as in other respects. The reclining figure dressed in *exomis* holding a shepherd’s crook differs markedly from most representations of either the Jonah or Endymion, although he is reminiscent of the depiction of the mythological youth on a sarcophagus in the Palazzo Doria, Rome (ill. 41).

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195 Stuiber, *Refrigerium Interim*, 138, asserted that the iconographical and artistic derivation of the resting Jonah from a resting shepherd or a bucolic version of Endymion was "unmistakable" (*unverkennbar*). Morey, "Christian Sarcophagus in S. Maria Antiqua," 151, having accepted the formal derivation of the resting Jonah from the sleeping Endymion, regarded the appearance of sheep on the Christian sarcophagi as a vestigial effect of this borrowing, although without attributing any particular meaning to it.

196 Sichtermann, *Die mythologischen Sarkophage*, 38–39. The distinction is not always clear, but Sichtermann noted the lack of any apparent semantic relationship between the bucolic and mythological elements on these monuments. See also Himmelmann, *Über Hirten-Genre*, 149.

197 Sichtermann, *Die mythologischen Sarkophage*, cat. 93, plates 87.1 and 91.1. Another potential Endymion comparable is a relief in the Villa Albani, Rome (Sichtermann, *Die mythologischen Sarkophage*, cat. 93, plates 87.1 and 91.1). The Pisa and Villa Albani sarcophagi both place the flock (a single goat in the latter case) above the sleeping figure. The pastoral imagery on the Palazzo Doria monument consists rather of repeated sheep or goats along the lower edge that are not directly adjacent to Endymion. The characterization of the Villa Albani carving as Endymion is uncertain.
A different path from pagan bucolic representations to Jonah is through the shepherd as a Christian symbol, in particular, a Christianized kriophoros or “good shepherd.” Of the thirteen relatively complete Jonah sarcophagi with pastoral motifs, nine include a man with a sheep or ram across his shoulders. The modest absolute size of the sample is reason for caution, but it is nonetheless worth considering whether this particular form of representation could have evoked a Pastoral Jonah.

The debate over whether, when, or in what sense the good shepherd can be regarded as a Christian symbol has been repeatedly and thoroughly canvassed in the literature without achieving a consensus. Like other shared themes, the derivation of the kriophoros from pre-Christian sources is uncontested. Unlike most of these, however, it claims a biblical resonance as well. Dulaey proposed both Christological and salvific readings of the shepherd/sheep motif in the Old and New Testaments and early Christian writings. A poignant example is the parable in which the shepherd Jesus leaves ninety-nine of his sheep to go in search after the one that is lost (Matthew 18.12; Luke 15.4). The kriophoros is expressly evoked in Luke’s version: “And when he hath found it, lay it upon his shoulders, rejoicing.” This is obviously a “good” shepherd and that was the label assigned to the figure by Christian archaeologists, borrowing from another gospel passage where Christ describes himself as “the good shepherd (pastor bonus) [who] giveth his life for his sheep”

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199 On the history of the form in classical art, see Himmelmann, Über Hirten-Genre, 13–123.

200 Dulaey, L’initiation chrétienne, 61–74. See also Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort, 77–79; Bisconti, “Il mito e la Bibbia,” 40–41.

201 This is the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate Clementina but the reference to placing on the shoulders is faithful to the Septuagint. Dulaey, L’initiation chrétienne, 64, speculates that Luke may have invoked this image precisely because, being Greek, he probably knew it from its traditional sculptural context. The Lucan genealogy of the image is not helped by the fact that Matthew’s version of the parable, which lacks the kriophoros, was the text most often cited by ancient writers, but Dulaey optimistically proposed that “la mémoire amalgam[ait] spontanément les deux récits.”
(John 10.11). “Good Shepherd” is usually written with initial capital letters, presumably to underscore that the reference is no longer to an image but to Jesus himself.\(^{202}\)

The shepherd metaphor was versatile — the Emperor Julian used it for the good ruler,\(^{203}\) and in the second-century Christian revelation known as the *Shepherd of Hermas* an angel appears in this form\(^{204}\) — yet there is no reason to doubt that third- and fourth-century Romans could also relate pastoral allusions, and perhaps the kriophoros, to Christ. This does not require going so far as to accept Dulaey’s theological interpretations. Provoost claimed a rather different sort of Christian resonance for the kriophoros. He regarded it as an expression of a generic “pastoral spirituality,” quite unconnected to any scriptural passages or events.\(^{205}\) At the far end of the spectrum is the view that the kriophoros, at least in most

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\(^{202}\) On the importance and historiographical implications of the term “Good Shepherd,” see Alice Taylor, “The Problem of Labels: Three Marble Shepherds in Nineteenth-Century Rome,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 1 (2002): 47–59. The expression is not entirely without contemporary justification. It is often remarked that Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart George Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.49 (circa 337 to 340), referred to a statue in the marketplace of Constantinople as a “good shepherd” (employing the same words as the Septuagint). Even if that sculpture was really a reinterpreted pagan work, the passage is evidence for use of the gospel expression to describe the kriophoros. It remains, however, an open question whether Roman lay Christians invested this form of representation with the same meaning as did the eastern bishop.

\(^{203}\) Julian, “On Kingship” (Wilmer Cave Wright translation), 231: “And since he [who is truly a king] loves both the city and the soldiers, he cares for the citizens as a shepherd for his flock.”

\(^{204}\) *Shepherd of Hermas, Visions*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. and ed. Bart D. Ehrman. Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 234–237 (Vision 5). The passage is cited by Jensen, *Early Christian Art*, 38, as evidence for a mental connection between the good shepherd figure and Jesus, but the text is much earlier than the sarcophagi and the vision does not refer to a kriophoros. It describes a man “dressed in shepherd’s clothing – wrapped with a white goat skin around his waist, with a bag on his shoulder and a staff in his hand.” He is not carrying a ram and the “good shepherd” does not wear a goatskin. It is true that the angelology of Hermas is complex and some of his angel figures have been seen as Christological, but this particular vision of the “angel of repentance” (5.7) “sent from the most reverend angel” (5.2) does not seem an apt metaphor for Jesus. See Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 214–228.

\(^{205}\) Provoost maintained and developed this position in papers from 1974 to 2004: “Scene pastorali,” “Le caractère des images,” ”Pastor Bonus,” and “Apostolic World of Thought.” In his “Il significato delle scene pastorali del terzo secolo d.C.,” in *I monumenti cristiani precostantiniani: Atti del IX Congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana: Roma, 21–27 settembre 1975* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1978), 1.407–431, the earliest of these publications, he observed (424) that the absence of the term “good shepherd” in sarcophagus inscriptions was strong evidence against the “paradigmatic” biblical interpretation. However inscriptions almost never refer to the imagery on sarcophagi, so this is not a very probative fact. A possible, but much later, counter-example is a fifth-century Spanish sarcophagus preserved as an altar in the Iglesia de Santa Cruz, Écija. It has Greek labels for figures from the Hebrew Bible (Abraham, Isaac, Daniel) and also for the central sheep-bearer, referred to as ΠΥΜΗ/Ν or shepherd. Pedro Rodríguez Oliva, “Talleres locales de sarcófagos en la Bética,” in *El sarcófago romano: contribuciones al estudio de su tipología, iconografía y
early cases, is truly neutral, a bucolic form used in the same way and with the same meaning by Christians and pagans alike.\textsuperscript{206}

The kriophoros sarcophagus with no explicit Christian iconography or inscription has little claim to classification as such, and it is impossible to draw any inference regarding a Christian tonality to the appearance of the shepherd.\textsuperscript{207} Where the figure accompanies, or is accompanied by, such iconography the issue is more complex. The strong view that the kriophoros is inevitably a Christ symbol is too bold. It is certainly problematic in the not insubstantial number of cases where the sarcophagus presents two or even three “good shepherds.”\textsuperscript{208} In some circumstances, the viewer probably did regard the kriophoros as a

centros de producción, ed. José Miguel Noguera Celdrán and Elena Conde Guerri (Murcia, Spain: Universidad de Murcia, 2001), 145–147, fig. 8, took this as a reference to the gospel good shepherd (χαλὸς ποιμὴν). Himmelmann, Über Hirten-Genre, 161, fig. 75, accepted that reading but questioned whether it referred to Christ himself or merely a symbol. Apart from the kriophoros, there are other scriptural associations with sheep on mostly later fourth-century Roman sarcophagi, as where they accompany (Rep. I.30) or represent (Rep. I.138) the apostles. An early example is a depiction usually, although not universally, regarded as the separation of the sheep from the goats of Matthew 25:33 (Rep. II.162). On the difference of views regarding the interpretation of this monument, see Engemann, “Biblische Themen,” 550–553.

\textsuperscript{206} This approach was particularly promoted by Theodore Klauser. The historiography is discussed by Himmelmann, Über Hirten-Genre, 138–142.

\textsuperscript{207} For example, Rep. I.1 (Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. 31446) is a much restored fragment depicting a bearded shepherd with a ram on his shoulders surrounded by his flock, with no inscription or known find-spot. The restoration more than doubled the length of the chest and added most of the rams. Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 614, refers to it as a “nicht eindeutig christliches...Exemplar.” Other examples of the same general type include Rep. I.950 and 961. On Rep. I.945, a strigilated sarcophagus in the Palazzo Corsini, Rome, there appear a seated woman playing the lyre with muses on the left, a togate figure seated on a sella curulis with two others standing beside him on the right, and erotes and a circus scene on the lid. There is no inscription. The only purported signal of its claimed Christianity is a diminutive kriophoros in the central ellipse formed by the symmetrical strigiles. See Henning Wrede, Senatorische Sarkophage Roms: der Beitrag des Senatorenstandes zur römischen Kunst der hohen und späten Kaiserzeit (Mainz: von Zabern, 2001), 127–128 (cat. 21). Not included in Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage.

\textsuperscript{208} Among the metropolitan sarcophagi included in the Repertorium are one with three kriophoroi (Rep. I.29) and seventeen with two (Rep. I.74, 80, 239, 396, 565, 664, 756, 765, 769, 823, 826, 988, 1003, 1004, 1014; Rep. II.7, 97). Compare also a later Carthaginian sarcophagus in similar form, Rep. III.634. The Christian character of the so-called Three Shepherds Sarcophagus was doubted by Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 17, and more emphatically by Hugo Brandenburg, "Das Ende der antiken Sarkophagkunst in Rom: Pagane und christliche Sarkophag in Rom,“ in Akten des Symposions "Frühchristliche Sarkophage": Marburg, 30.6.–4.7.1999, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 32–33, even though he was the junior author of Rep. I in which it had been included twenty years earlier. However, it is still usually treated as Christian. See Jensen, Early Christian Art, 60; Provoost, "Pastor Bonus," 26. This Three Shepherds Sarcophagus and most of the double kriophoros monuments have no explicit Christian iconography, but four of them do: Rep. I.664 (lid with Jonah and the three youths in the furnace – an inscription uses the word depositus); Rep. I.756 (strigilated, central portrait bust in a shell clypeus over a resting Jonah); Rep. II.7 (frieze with Jonah cycle); Rep. II.97 (strigilated, central scene of Peter with the cock). Rep. I.769 has no Christian iconography but bears an
Christian symbol but the implications for the reception of the Jonah theme remain doubtful. In the dozen cases where a good shepherd is found on the same monument as Jonah the formal connection between the two is minimal. The kriophoros may be on the chest with Jonah on the lid, or on the sides, as in Pisa. It never seems to have any interlacing or interconnection with the Jonah theme.

The main difficulty with the Pastoral Jonah is that the suggestive examples are limited in number, far more limited than the literature promoting this facet suggests. The notion is also confined to representations of Jonah under the gourd plant. The many sarcophagi on which one finds a resting Jonah with no sheep, or no resting Jonah but only a ship scene (with or without sheep), present a serious challenge. And even rest scenes with pastoral elements rarely can properly be described as Pastoral Jonah representations because of the formal disconnect between those elements and the reclining prophet. In most cases, the bucolic representations have no tight visual connection with Jonah. Perhaps a shepherd or his flock could be perceived as related to the Jonah theme where the pastoral representation is adjacent to Jonah under the cucurbita (as on the Jonah Sarcophagus, Rep. I.35, ill. 4), or placed in some kind of symmetric relationship, on either side of a tabula on the lid or opposite Jonah (the isolated sheep on the London sarcophagus, Rep. II.243, ill. 5). By far the best examples are the Berlin sarcophagus (Rep. II.241, ill. 27) and the anomalous example in Pisa with Jonah the shepherd (Rep. II.90, ill. 31). But in most cases, there is no obvious iconographical relationship between sheep or shepherd and the figure of Jonah, just as on the Endymion sarcophagi.

inscription with the phrase in pace (universally although perhaps over-generously taken as a definitive signal of a Christian sarcophagus). There are other examples that might be claimed as Christian based on the find-spot (also somewhat optimistically often regarded as sufficient proof of Christianity), like Rep. I.396 in S Callisto. Duplication of the “good shepherd” is sometimes taken precisely as a counter-indication of the figure referring to Christ (Himmelmann, Über Hirten-Genre, 134–135, 157; Engemann, “Die bukolischen Darstellungen,” 259) and is presumably behind the negative presumption proposed by Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 17.

210 Ship scenes with sheep are rare. See Rep. I.46.
211 Other examples are a fragment in the catacomb of Praetextatus, Rep. I.590, and another in the Art Museum at Princeton University, Rep. II.1.
212 For example, a lid in the Villa Doria Pamphili, Rep. I.958.
In those relatively few examples where a Pastoral Jonah in the full sense is persuasive — an actual assimilation of the Roman funerary imagery of pastoral *otium* — one could conceive of either a shepherd Christianized by his proximity to Jonah (Himmelmann’s bucolic allegory) or the prophet “bucolicized” by the shepherd (Provoost’s pastoral spirituality). Most sarcophagi are not, however, particularly amenable to this facet of reception.

b) “Soft salvation”

Some who promote the Pastoral Jonah, such as Provoost, think of the idyll to which it points as having a Christian character. Christian viewers, it is argued, projected their own religious conceptions of life after death onto the pagan hope for a peaceful and blissful eternity. What might have been the Christian content to this idyllic afterlife? One is tempted to revert to the Typological Jonah and the view that Jonah at rest under the cucurbita, with or without sheep and shepherds, represents post-resurrection paradise. That would deny the Pastoral Jonah any status as an independent facet of the sarcophagus images; it becomes a reference to Christian heaven with sheep. But this is not what proponents of the Pastoral Jonah have in mind. The Christian’s hope for a “better life in a better place” might be conceived as a less doctrinaire version of salvation. This Christian idyll can be represented without the pastoral trappings, perhaps facilitated by the appearance of sheep or shepherds but not dependent upon it. The Pastoral Jonah is thereby “debucolicized,” an Idyllic Jonah *tout court*.

A text that de-emphasized resurrection of the flesh while preserving the hope for Christian salvation — what could be called “soft salvation” — would have been qualified as heretical, but the range of beliefs among sarcophagus viewers was broader than what was acceptable in theological discourse. The implications of this potential gap between learned and lay (but high status) appreciations of Christian soteriology are important for the appearance of early sarcophagi. The issue is part of a broader problematic concerning the origin of early Christian images, not the “source” in the sense of what formal models might have been

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213 Engemann, “Jonas,” 694, refers to a specifically Christian hope for salvation (*Erlösungshoffnung*) in connection with the Jonah theme often accompanied by supporting pastoral or marine elements.
used, but the question of who came up with the decorative programs. Workshops might use stock forms for the ketos, ship, sailors or a resting prophet, but someone must have promoted the representation of the Jonah theme and suggested or negotiated the scenes we find in the archaeological record.

The challenges faced by the workshops in creating Christian imagery that was new in both content and kind could be met, according to many scholars, only with the assistance of advisers, individuals more knowledgeable about what was required than either the producers or the consumers. Perhaps at some point — Brenk suggested 313, Koch 350 — there was increasing clerical involvement. The Jonah scenes are generally accepted as having appeared before either of those dates, which could support that view that clerical input was not decisive. This would be consistent with Rebillard’s view regarding the limited involvement by church authorities in funerary ritual. Even if “art-friendly clerics,” to use Brenk’s expression, were engaged in the design of the Jonah theme, there is little reason to regard the private funerary space as an arena for expression (or reception) of church doctrine. One ought not, therefore, to dismiss a Christian Idyllic Jonah solely on the basis that it would have been theologically unorthodox.

The problem lies, rather, in the realm of evidence. The other facets considered to this point have been referential, implicating some external text, practice, tradition or image. Without the bucolic connection, the Idyllic Jonah lacks an anchor. If one believes that pagan or

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217 On the private character of the space and the implications for images, see Gisela Cantino Wataghin, “Biblia pauperam: A proposito dell’arte dei primi cristiani,” Antiquitét Tardive 9 (2001): 259–274. Even if Jonah under the cucurbita had been designed for a particular Christian doctrinal purpose it could have been appreciated in a different way by viewers.
secular imagery at this time expressed an idyllic afterlife, then such a facet of the Jonah theme might be regarded as its Christian expression. This is, however, a purely intellectual parallel not grounded in any extrinsic evidence.

One other place to look might be epigraphy. As previously remarked, only four fourth-century epitaphs have been identified that refer specifically to resurrection, none on a sarcophagus. Instead, most Roman Christian inscriptions pre-dating the pontificate of Damasus in 366 that can be related to the afterlife mention community with God or Christ, eternal life or refrigerium. Other popular themes were expressions of grief or hopes for the deceased. Relying on this epigraphic data, Dresken-Weiland interpreted the visual Jonah theme as an expression of “being with God” (Bei-Gott-Sein) after death, not in the sense of an abstract idea but rather as a particularized wish, a personal hope for a proper Christian afterlife of the individual. This corresponds to what Engemann called “private apotheosis.”

Epigraphy must be approached with caution. Like the images, one might suppose that epitaphs are more faithful expressions of popular, rather than rigorously clerical sentiments, but inscriptions are not the same as images and one cannot be assumed to

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218 See note 71 above.
220 Dresken-Weiland, Bild, Grab und Wort, 115.
221 Engemann, "Untersuchungen," 71; Wischmeyer, "Die Cleveland-Statuetten," 263. Engemann cited the presence of an orant or other potential reference to the individual in support of this concept of Privatapotheose. In this regard, he may have relied too heavily on the only known example of a possible "portrait" Jonah, not accepted as such by a number of other scholars. See note 160 and related discussion above. Jean Guyon, "Les représentations du cimetière 'Aux deux lauriers,'" in La Mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain: actes du colloque de Caen, 20–22 novembre 1985, ed. François Hinard (Caen: Université de Caen, 1987), 307–308, examining epitaphs and graffiti in the catacomb of SS Marcellinus and Peter, remarked their invocation of a personal salvation. In one group of cases, he observed that the inscription lacks a verb and formulated the intriguing hypothesis that these should be read not by inserting an optative but an indicative, or even an exclamatory, form, not the hope for but rather an announcement of the salvation of the deceased.
slavishly follow the other. Most epitaphs and graffiti occupied a different space (catacomb walls, gold glass or other objects); they were not carved on sarcophagi. While many who could afford a sarcophagus did prefer only an inscription, the average patron and reader (or, more likely, hearer) of carved, scratched or painted texts was not a member of the élite or sub-élite that formed the sarcophagus population of Rome. This does not prevent these data from providing information about Christian views of the afterlife in early fourth-century Rome, but it is reason for caution in applying it to sarcophagus imagery.

The principal support for the Idyllic Jonah, for “soft salvation,” appears to be dissatisfaction with other interpretations of the rest scene. Once one cuts the biblical cord, rejecting any connection between Jonah under the cucurbita and both the events of the book of Jonah and the New Testament “sign of Jonah,” the remaining choices are limited. For scholars unprepared to cast their lot with Endymion, the main default solution has been a blissful hereafter. Engemann wondered whether perhaps the images of Jonah’s maritime misadventure might be seen as biblical Rettungsbilder and the rest scenes in quite a different way, as Christian allegories of a happy afterlife. “Is it possible,” he asked, “that Christians formulated their hopes for afterlife rather less clearly than modern interpreters would wish?” The Idyllic Jonah may, therefore, be a catch-all for some notion(s) of salvation falling outside the scope of Christian resurrection soteriology but essentially indeterminable from the available evidence.

5. *Refrigerium interim*

In 1957, Alfred Stuiber proposed that the intermediate state between death and resurrection was not only a subject of burning interest to early Christian theologians but also a motif expressed by lay Christians in their epitaphs and funerary representations. The

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223 De Bruyne, “Lois,” 185, claimed that while early Christian epigraphy often implored, images presented what was wished for as if it had already been accomplished. See, in general, the consideration of images as a distinct and non-derivative discourse in the Introduction.

224 Guyon, “Les représentations ‘Aux deux lauriers’,” 307, specifically remarked that a large proportion of the examples in his sample were simple graffiti, not incised epitaphs.

Zwischenzustand, he contended, was the key to understanding the appearance in catacomb painting and sarcophagus relief carving of orants and shepherds, Lazarus and Old Testament themes. A full chapter was devoted to Jonah, in which the depiction of the prophet under the cucurbita was construed as a central element in the visual presentation of the refrigerium interim.\footnote{226}{Stuiber, *Refrigerium Interim*, 136–151.}

Stuiber’s argument was entirely indirect — there are no examples of an association between the word refrigerium and the visual representation of Jonah. Almost from the moment of its publication, virtually every element has been challenged, beginning with a lengthy and damning commentary by one of his former teachers and a senior member of the Christian archaeology establishment, Lucien de Bruyne. In a firm, almost vituperative rejoinder, de Bruyne described Stuiber as unoriginal, careless, and wrong.\footnote{227}{De Bruyne, “Refrigerium interim.” In the forward to his book, Stuiber acknowledged de Bruyne as a teacher at the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana in Rome and de Bruyne returned the compliment, saying that Stuiber “est resté cher non moins comme ami que comme ancien disciple” (87), but this friendship had no moderating effect on the vigour of his rejoinder. De Bruyne portrayed his former student as a dangerous representative of the many mistaken theories that might appeal to a “public cultivé mais non spécialisé” and that risk diverting “l’écoulement normal de ce large fleuve qu’est devenu l’interprétation intégrale de l’art paléochrétien” (88). De Bruyne’s concern with the seriousness of this challenge to orthodoxy in early Christian archaeology (he was then Director of the Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana) was expressed in a sequel to his “Refrigerium interim,” an eighty-page article the next year, “Les ’lois’ de l’art paléochrétien comme instrument hermeneutique.” It was not directed specifically at Stuiber’s work, but he became the foil for its conclusion.}


The persistence of the critics is in itself sufficient reason to re-evaluate Stuiber’s contention regarding this possible facet of the Jonah theme.

**a) Words**

Refrigerium interim was devised as a solution to a theological conundrum. The expression is due to Tertullian but it reflects a broader and older tradition, one that survived or
resurfaced in the medieval conception of purgatory.\textsuperscript{229} If, as some theologians believed, only the souls of the martyrs could ascend directly to heaven, then what happened to everyone else? One answer was that the ordinary dead rested in a peaceful but not yet paradisiacal state waiting for the apocalyptic resolution. Theologians inevitably were not ad idem. The details of resurrection theology were unsettled and controversial. A first criticism of Stuiber’s work is that his summary of the patristic literature is too linear and monolithic. Christian writers who struggled with the issue — and not all of them did — failed to arrive at a consistent and coherent solution in favour of the *refrigerium interim*.\textsuperscript{230} A second difficulty with the reliance on patristic texts is the distance between theological theory and lay practice. It is questionable whether the conceptual understanding of an intermediate state, even if one could articulate a single or dominant position, trickled down to the community of Christian faithful. Stuiber himself recognized that theological speculations could not be taken as reliable indicators of the views of “ordinary” Christians, especially in connection with the cult of the dead and its generally conservative traditions.\textsuperscript{231}

Funerary inscriptions are another sort of text that Stuiber cited to corroborate and confirm his inferences from patristic writings. That view has not gone unchallenged either. Iiro Kajanto considered the epigraphic evidence too slim and ambiguous to justify the conclusion that lay Christians were preoccupied with *refrigerium interim*.\textsuperscript{232} The term *refrigerium* sometimes referred to the actual commemorative meal, a meaning evidently

\textsuperscript{229} Le Goff, *Naissance du Purgatoire*, remains the essential text on the development of the intermediate state as a temporal and spatial conception in medieval thought.


\textsuperscript{231} Having devoted one lengthy (43–105) chapter to the *Zwischenzustand* according to the opinions of early Christian theology, Stuiber observes in the opening paragraph of the next, concerning funerary epigraphy and images (105): “Die Theorien eines Theologen bedeuten wenig für den Glauben einer Gemeinde, die solchen Spekulationen verständnis- und teilnahmslos gegenübersteht; sie bedeuten noch weniger, wenn es sich um den ungemein konservativen Totenkult handelt, der in gewissen Grenzen unbeirrt seinen Gestzen folgt.” De Bruyne, “Refrigerium Interim,” 93, similarly noted that when considering early Christian art, “c’est le plan pratique qui compte.” He suggested (94) that the three major early proponents of the intermediate state conceded that their theory was not always shared by Orthodox Christians. Generally, see the discussion of texts in the Introduction.

\textsuperscript{232} Kajanto, “Hereafter,” 37–42. Kajanto also considered other words, such as *pax*, and reached the same conclusion. He conceded that the evidence did not entirely exclude a belief by lay Christians in a pre-resurrection passage in Hades or elsewhere but contended that it was inadequate to positively support such a view. See also Engemann, “Biblische Themen,” 551–552.
not helpful to a theory premised on preoccupation with Zwischenzustand. In other cases it had a broader, conceptual meaning, but these examples are too infrequent and generally too brief to warrant Stuiber’s reading of them as expressions of concern and insecurity regarding an intermediate state between death and resurrection. In most cases, refrigerium could as easily, or more easily, have referred to permanent celestial bliss, an idyllic state that is anything but interim. Stuiber had cited the lack of clarifying language pinning refrigerium to a definite soteriological system as evidence of insecurity about the status of the soul after death. Kajanto considered this “reticence” to reflect merely the brevity typical of early Christian epitaphs.

More recently, Jutta Dresken-Weiland undertook a quantitative review of epigraphic formulae that permits a more granular regional analysis. It suggests that while derivatives from refigrare are virtually absent in the East, they are somewhat more prevalent in the West and most common in Rome, where they appear in about 8% of the sample. This puts refrigerium in fifth place among twelve categories of formulae that Dresken-Weiland characterizes as relating to afterlife. Relative frequency is sensitive to how one defines these categories, and even the 8% figure depends on which epitaphs are included as “afterlife” references. The relatively modest absolute number of forty-five occurrences makes it difficult to share Andreas Merkt’s enthusiastic observation that “their [i.e. Dresken-Weiland’s statistics’] broad confirmation of a belief in a so-called in-between state [Zwischenzustand] represents one of the most important historical theological results of the project.”

At least as important as the number of appearances is their meaning. Like Kajanto, Dresken-Weiland remarked that refrigerium had two distinct usages, one concrete (a meal at the

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grave) and the other conceptual. Her conclusion on the content of the latter, however, was different from Kajanto's. She found in it a corroboration of Stuiber's Zwischenzustand.236

Since in the inscriptions that mention refrigerium there is no further reference to eternal life or resurrection, one assumes that refrigerium is a condition or a place that is different from eternal life or resurrection, in which, however, there is contact with God.

This is a revival of the “reticence” argument. Omission — the failure of the inscriber explicitly to contrast refrigerium with the final resting place — is elevated to an implicit definition of the term. Kajanto's criticism is persuasive: the brevity of most of the epitaphs renders the negative inference doubtful. How much can one read into a formula like bene merenti in pace et in refrigerium? The association of peace and an undefined refrigerium is consistent with a variety of eschatological theories, including perhaps an intermediate state but also, and with less interpolation, the final paradise or an indeterminate idyll. Reticence works both ways. Inscriptions that include additional language along with refrigerium positively suggesting the intermediate state of the soul are exceedingly rare.237 The qualifier interim is never found.

235 Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “Vorstellungen von Tod und Jenseits in den frühchristlichen Grabinschriften des 3.–6. Jhs. in Rom, Italien und Afrika.” Römische Quartschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte 101 (2006): 295. The author also observed that pagan references seemed to be restricted to the literal usage of refrigerium and were less frequent. This last conclusion is not obvious from a review of the Roman inscription databases. See also Merkt, “Schweigen und Sprechen der Gräber,” 61–62. Curiously, while Merkt notes in this passage concrete and conceptual meanings of refrigerium he does not specifically relate the latter to any Zwischenzustand.

236 Dresken-Weiland, "Vorstellungen Oikumen," 287–288: “Da in den Inschriften, die das Refrigerium erwähnen, keine weiteren Aussagen zum ewigen Leben oder zur Auferstehung erscheinen, wird man davon ausgehen, daß das Refrigerium ein Zustand bzw. ein Ort ist, der vom ewigen Leben und der Auferstehung unterschieden ist, in dem aber ein Kontakt mit Gott besteht.” Stuiber is expressly cited after this proposition (288n5). Kajanto is not referred to.

237 Kajanto, “Hereafter,” 37–42, in a spirit of fair play, does cite a few examples that could support Stuiber’s claim, including a rare and still ambiguous reference to “Abraham’s bosom” (41–42) and one (later and African) that apparently refers to the rest of the soul after the “first resurrection” (38). The less “creative” reading of refrigerium as meaning eternal life in paradise is common in the literature. See, for example, Danilo Mazzoleni, “Inscriptions in Roman Catacombs,” in The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions, trans. Cristina Carlo Stella and Lori-Ann Touchette, ed. Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, Fabrizio Bisconti and Danilo Mazzoleni, 3rd ed. (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2009), 149.
The last part of the citation from Dresken-Weiland above, her reference to "contact with God," raises a facet of funerary epigraphy related to the "soft salvation" discussed above. It does not seem to have any particular connection to refrigerium interim; on the contrary, such allusions to divine presence were, for Kajanto, counter-indications. One would not expect God to welcome souls in Hades, so inscriptions referring explicitly to divine reception or intercession with God are more properly regarded as descriptions of heaven than of any intermediate place or state. The theological implications of being with God pending resurrection are far beyond the scope of this discussion and it would be imprudent (and given the inconsistency among patristic authors, unfruitful) to be drawn into an arbitration of the contrasting views expressed by Dresken-Weiland and Kajanto regarding this group of inscriptions. It is, however, worth remarking that the explicit references to reception or intercession could denote something other than the refrigerium interim.

Kajanto's doubtful agnosticism seems appropriate. The epigraphic evidence, and in particular the use of the term refrigerium, is not especially consonant with either a theological conception of Zwischenzustand or a lay concern and uncertainty regarding the condition of the soul after death and before bodily resurrection. Few inscriptions positively support the argument and a number seem to undermine it. The fact that the word refrigerium becomes much less common in the epigraphic record over the course of the fourth century may also be noteworthy. This decline seems counter-intuitive if the employment of this term was a reflection of popular concern with resurrection theology. Even greater caution is warranted with respect to sarcophagi. The refrigerium inscriptions in Rome are mostly scratched or painted on the walls of catacombs, occasionally inscribed on marble grave plaques, but never on sarcophagi.

b) Images

Independent of literary and epigraphic evidence, Stuiber also argued that a wide variety of early Christian forms of representation — meals, shepherds, orants, Old and New Testament scenes, but especially the resting Jonah — all point to the refrigerium interim.

Ordinary Christians believed in the resurrection of the flesh and these images expressed the same timidity and caution (Zaghaftigkeit und Zurückhaltung) that he inferred from the epitaphs.\footnote{Stuiber, Refrigerium Interim, 202. Regarding the question of whether bodily resurrection was, in fact, a preoccupation of most lay Christians at this time, see the discussion above at page 202 above, and references.} For de Bruyne, this reading of the representations, particularly catacomb painting, blatantly contradicts the visual impressions. The images do not reflect any uncertainty regarding the fate of the dead. Quite the contrary, they exude optimism, serenity and the certainty of Christian salvation.\footnote{De Bruyne, “Refrigerium interim,” 118: “Mais les reflets immédiats et directs que cette croyance et ces incertitudes auraient laissés dans les monuments sont si rares et parfois même douteux qu’ils se trouvent pour ainsi dire noyés dans le miroitement que nous renvoie, à travers les monuments, la certitude du salut promis par le Christ.” The argument is repeated in different terms in the sequel, de Bruyne, “Lois,” 183–186.} Jacques le Goff thought de Bruyne too categorical in his evaluation of the imagery — the proposition “no one can fail to see the unlikelihood of such an assertion” expressed “the naïveté of the specialist” — but he agreed with two important propositions that lay at the heart of the criticism. The first is that catacomb paintings do generally seem to express certitude rather than insecurity. The second is that it is difficult to construct a proper visual rendition of such an abstract notion as refrigerium interim.\footnote{Le Goff, Naissance du Purgatoire, 73–74.}

It is, indeed, a challenge finding evidence for such a facet of the reception of Jonah sarcophagi solely by looking at them. The typical resting Jonah hardly appears tense or uncertain. On the contrary, most of these representations are calming and consolatory, mitigating rather than intensifying the viewers’ insecurity in the presence of death. The range of the prophet’s emotional states is somewhat broader in catacomb painting, where one finds, albeit rarely, a “sad” or “angry” Jonah, still poorly suited to expressions of so complex an intellectual condition as fear and uncertainty regarding the condition of the soul between death and resurrection. If this is what the sculptors were trying to communicate, they were singularly unsuccessful. Other visual formulae would have better suited that project. For example, although no examples before the ninth century are known, the intermediate state could have been evoked by representing the soul of Lazarus in the
bosom of Abraham, as recounted in the parable of the poor and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31.\textsuperscript{242} Jonah is not readily adapted to serve an equivalent function.

The case for Jonah at rest as a figure of the intermediate state of the soul after death is, therefore, weak. This does not mean that it could not have affected any viewers at all. Even leaving clerics aside, educated members of high-status families might have been absorbed by this theological problem, and one cannot exclude the possibility that some of them made the same associations as Stuiber and other modern scholars. There is, however, no reason to suppose that this particular reading was common to many patrons or formed a facet of the experience of many viewers.

Finally, it should be noted that only the scene of Jonah at rest under the cucurbita is directly engaged in this discussion. Stuiber conceded that the presence of other scenes altered its meaning, detracting from its status as a symbol of the refrigerium interim. His rationalization was that the rest scene was the oldest and original depiction of the theme, its meaning altered over time by the addition of other elements.\textsuperscript{243} This chronology is, however, problematic; the generally accepted sequence of catacomb painting suggests a different conclusion.\textsuperscript{244} As for sarcophagi, one need look no farther than the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (Rep. I.747, ill. 22), generally regarded as one of the earliest, which already depicts a multi-scene Jonah cycle.

### 6. Other facets

This residual heading groups three unrelated facets. Primal Jonah refers to the perspectives of comparative religion, ethnography and psychology. The Naked Jonah reflects a

\textsuperscript{242} Le Goff, \textit{Naissance du Purgatoire}, 65–66. Stuiber, \textit{Refrigerium Interim}, discussed this pericope in the context of patristic texts (51–53, passim) and grave inscriptions (119) but not images. Beat Brenk, \textit{Tradition und Neuerung in der christlichen Kunst des ersten Jahrtausends: Studien zur Geschichte des Weltgerichtsbildes} (Wien: H. Böhlau, 1966), 33, 101–102, indicated that the earliest representations of this scene appear late in the ninth century although he also cited a relief fragment from the martyrion of Seleukia-Pieria in Antioch, datable to the fifth-sixth century, that includes the first part of the parable without the bosom of Abraham. Whether there were such representations so early, and whether they were present in the West, is unknown. Other biblical allusions that could have evoked the refrigerium interim are noted by de Bruyne, “Lois,” 184–185.

\textsuperscript{243} Stuiber, \textit{Refrigerium Interim}, 149–151, referring to this evolution a process of “biblicization.”

\textsuperscript{244} De Bruyne, “Refrigerium interim,” 112–113; Engemann, “Jonas,” 691.
characteristic of the image that has often been remarked but without a sustained consideration in the literature. The Political Jonah is a notion derived mainly from the work of a theologian, Graydon F. Snyder.

a) Primal Jonah

The persistent popularity of Jonah — especially the story of his being swallowed by, confined in and disgorged from the ketos — has tempted scholars in a variety of fields to posit his tale as the product of a trans-historical and universal psychic structure that is expressed in a wide range of myths and rituals, legends and fairy tales, dreams and neuroses, poems and sagas. Gaston Bachelard inferred the profound importance of Jonah’s experience from its ubiquity in literary sources over many centuries: “Given its success, the image of Jonah in the belly of the whale must have deeper roots than a tradition that provides enjoyment. There must be corresponding reveries that are more intimate, less objective.”

The connection between the Jonah theme and myth has arisen in the sarcophagus literature primarily as an issue of source and influence, not reception. Sight of the image may elicit associations with some alien myth or ritual by reason of its ultimate derivation, but the projects are different. Jerome remarked that Andromeda was saved from a ketos by Perseus at Joppa, the same port city from which Jonah disembarked for Tharsis. Cyril of Alexandria drew a parallel between Jonah’s story and the legend of Hercules and Hesione, a closer comparison because in this case, the hero killed the sea monster from the inside after having been swallowed and spending, it may be noted, three days inside. Neither Jerome nor Cyril was an ethnologist. Whatever they meant to suggest by invoking these

245 Translated from Gaston Bachelard, La terre et les rêveries du repos (Paris: José Corti, 1948), 175. See also the discussion of the swallowing theme in ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary literary sources in Ziolkowski, Fairy Tales, 65–92.

246 Jerome, In Ionam, 1.104. Of Joppa he says: “hic locus est, in quo usque hodie saxa monstrantur in litore, in quibus andromeda religata, persei quondam sit liberata praesidio.” He also evokes Jonah, Joppa, and Andromeda in the same breath in Ep. 104.8. Both references were noted and commented upon by Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 14n6.

247 Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 15n11. On the importance of the three-day period in swallowing myths, see Steffen, Das Mysterium von Tod, 35–39.
parallels, it was not that Jonah was a fictional character in a fairy tale of Jewish folk culture based on Greek myths. Nor were they diluting their Christianity with paganism, conflating the prophet and type of Christ with Perseus or Hercules. They seem, rather, to be invoking or reflecting an association that points to a deeper level of mythological thinking.  

A direct linkage in the mind of the viewer between Jonah and these two specific myths is problematic. The Old Testament story includes no damsel in distress. Jonah does not conquer the ketos by his own prowess but is saved by his God, although even the pagan mythical hero “succeeds only deo concedente, with the consent of the gods.” And perhaps, as Snyder suggested with a different project in mind, “these stories had some currency in the minds of those who contemplated this symbolic narrative.” However the inquiry becomes more promising, and more interesting, when the net is cast more widely.

In 1907, Hans Schmidt considered Jonah’s story from the perspective of a cross-cultural mythical tradition, an effort revived by Uwe Steffen in 1963. These studies swept in myths spanning time and space, from India to North America, Greek legends along with Old and New Testament comparisons. Relying on this large and disparate group of stories, the authors flattened out divergences by positing, and in some cases hazarding to identify, a source or archetypal myth that does not reflect later inconsistencies. Schmidt’s examination organized the material into three categories: the fish as (i) enemy, (ii) saviour (or agent of salvation) and (iii) representative of the realm of the dead. Jonah’s tale was regarded not as a blending of these different strands but as an expression of all three.

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248 Duval, Le livre de Jonas, 13–16, was unconvinced that such texts reflected syncretism or even rapprochement. The same applied, in his view, to the visual juxtaposition of Hercules (without Hesione) and Jonah in the Via Latina catacomb, where he could see no real interlacing (véritable intrication) between the pagan and biblical representations. Ziolkowski, Fairy Tales, 75–76, on the other hand, does refer to these passages as a sign of potential connection between the pagan myth and biblical story, without further elaboration.

249 A point emphasized by LaCocque and Lacocque, Jonah, 61; Steffen, Das Mysterium von Tod, 103.


251 Snyder, “Sea Monsters,” 21. Snyder relied on the Greek myths and some Old Testament references to argue for the identification of Jonah with the danger of the sea monster and the sea in support of what is called here the Political Jonah.

252 Hans Schmidt, Jona. Eine Untersuchung zur vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907); Steffen, Das Mysterium von Tod, especially 30–44.
The themes elaborated in the study of myths are also reflected in rituals. The relationship between the hero and water or sea monsters may be re-enacted or represented in rites of initiation. The swallowing, in both myths and rituals, is usually considered to represent either (or both) death and a return to primal chaos, the regurgitation resurrection, renewal, recreation or regeneration. These interpretations have most often been invoked in connection with theories of derivation or common genealogy for the Jonah theme, but they are also relevant to reception, suggesting the possibility of a connection between the biblical story and immutable or at least widely shared and durable elements of human psychology, social structure and sacred belief systems, a Primal Jonah.

The symbolic rebirth and re-emergence from darkness into light in these myths and rituals may be assimilated to actual birth. The same association was remarked by Sigmund Freud in his only explicit reference to Jonah. Freud reported a dream related to him by a female patient that was told to her by her nurse. In the dream, the nurse was searching for a lost child and came upon a body of water and a narrow bridge. The patient observed that she had recently read the story of Jonah to her nurse and concluded that this explained the presence of the water in the dream. Freud agreed with this interpretation, adding that water represented the place from which children come, i.e., the womb, and cited the Jonah story in this connection. The narrow bridge was undoubtedly the birth canal.

The psychoanalytic association of Jonah’s disgorgement from the ketos with birth, or birth trauma, did not end with Freud. A more extensive treatment, although still relatively

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254 Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, 221.
256 Shulman, "Jonah," 338, notes that D.W. Winnicott and other psychoanalysts also made the connection between birth and Jonah. He refers (338n25) to a 1921 paper by Michael J. Eisler in which a male oral pregnancy fantasy is related to the story of Jonah.
economical, is due to Carl Jung and arose in his critique of the overly “biological” analysis of regression among the Freudian school. Jung suggested a "pre-sexual" stage in earliest infancy, or even before birth, in which the mother is sought in a symbolic rather than incestuous mode. As an archetype, he suggested the myth of the hero swallowed by a sea monster, especially Jonah:

The real point is that the regression goes back to the deeper layer of the nutritive function, which is anterior to sexuality, and there clothes itself in the experiences of infancy. ... The so-called Oedipus complex with its famous incest tendency changes at this level into a 'Jonah-and-the-whale' complex, which has a number of variants, for instance the witch who eats children, the wolf, the ogre, the dragon, and so on.

When Jonah was swallowed by the whale, he was not simply imprisoned in the belly of the monster, but, as Paracelsus tells us, he saw 'mighty mysteries' there. This view probably derives from the *Pirkê de Rabbi Elieser*...

In Jung's conception, the hero — and like him the analysand — descends into the darkness and engulfment of the womb to seek a treasure of enlightenment which is none other than the unconscious. This analytic exposition recalls a remark by Mircea Eliade that the shaman may enter the belly of a monster in symbolic initiatory rites in order to learn “science or wisdom.”

Jonah is, therefore, a voyager to his own origins and those of the cosmos, seeking wisdom about each. Both the student of comparative religion and the psychoanalyst have interiorized the combat and the prize so often found in the myths. Jonah might be regarded as confronting himself rather than the monster, with self-knowledge and faith rather than the female in distress as his reward.

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The connection between the ketos and birth can be found not only in myths or rituals of other religious traditions and in psychoanalytic literature but also in Midrash Jonah, where the plot of the prophet's captivity and ultimate release are more elaborately developed than in the biblical account. After three days, it is said, Jonah has still failed to pray. God is displeased. I gave you a place in the belly of the fish so that you would not suffer, he says, and yet you have not prayed to me. So I am sending a pregnant fish with 365,000 young so that you will suffer and pray. Jonah is spit out by the first fish and swallowed by the second. In its filthy and foul belly he finally makes his prayer. The biblical language (in the Latin and Greek versions accessible to most Roman Christians) is consistent with the metaphor of birth. The cavity of the ketos is either *venter* or *uterus* in the Vetus Latina translations of Jonah 2:1 and 2:2, both of which terms could mean the womb as well as the belly.

The figures of birth and rebirth or resurrection are dialectically conjoined. Eliade noted this “double symbolism,” the simultaneous representation in these myths and rituals of “the conclusion of a temporal existence” and “return to the germinal mode of being,” the cosmological *Urzeit* and *Endzeit.* This reading could neatly complement the argument associating the prophet’s story and the catechumen’s baptism and true birth, an association that is uncommon but is expressed on the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (Rep. I.747, ill. 22).

259 Midrash Jonah in *Aus Israels Lehrhallen*, 2.43–44 (German translation by Wünsche), and Bedini and Bigarelli, *Giona*, 107–110 (Italian translation). The latter authors note (110n31) the curious use of two different Hebrew words for the monsters, the first masculine and the second feminine, and the impact of this gender shift on midrashic and other commentators. The comparison between Jonah in the ketos and the embryo in the womb is also expressed by early Christian writers. See Duval, *Le livre de Jonas*, 80n58. The rather negative view of the pre-natal experience expressed in *Midrash Jonah* (the womb as filthy and foul) seems a more appropriate model than psychoanalytic “birth trauma” theory for a reader’s or viewer’s positive appreciation of the regurgitation of Jonah as rebirth. An unusual iconography on a sarcophagus in the Musée départemental Arles antique, inv. FAN92.00.2505 (Rep. III.40, ill. 13) depicts the swallowing of Jonah by the ketos on the left of the ship and Jonah at rest next to another rendition of the ketos on the right. One might be tempted to relate this to the “two fish” version of the story in *Midrash Jonah* but that seems unlikely.


262 The representations of baptism is uncommon on Christian sarcophagi. Other examples where it appears together with the Jonah theme are *Rep.* Ill.18 (ill. 9) and 42. Jung’s conception of the “Dual Mother,” (Symbols}
Apart from an association of Jonah’s adventure in the ketos with birth, the psychoanalytic literature provides a number of other interpretations that seem less helpful in assessing the Primal Jonah as a possible facet of the visual depiction of the theme on sarcophagi. Some traditional Freudians have argued that the story of Jonah reflects Oedipal or sibling competition and rivalry. Erich Fromm has the distinction among psychoanalysts of interpreting not only the swallowing and disgorgement but also the events of the final chapter, including the rest under the cucurbita. Here, he says, Jonah learns that love must be coupled with responsibility, that love and labour are inseparable. The existential psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a “Jonah syndrome,” a fear of greatness and fulfillment. Recent literature sees Jonah’s actions as indicative of depression, or perhaps a need to flee, or the need for each of us to “face our objects.”

It is difficult to apply such psychological and psychoanalytic theories with only the visual clues to guide us. In assessing the viewer experience in the presence of Jonah sarcophagi, the question is not whether interpretations and comparisons offered by the study of myth and ritual, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy or literary genres have hermeneutic or therapeutic validity. It is, rather, the likelihood that they could have had a formative effect on reception of the monuments. One obvious concern is the danger of applying “primitive” myths and rituals, later literary texts, fairy tales or modern psychological theories to fourth-century Roman Christians. If “we are not different from our ancestors,” then perhaps we can learn from their myths and legends; however, the outward similarity between Jonah’s tale and the myths and symbols of other traditions, important as it is, masks what may be stark differences of meaning.

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263 Shulman, “Jonah,” 337–343, provides a current summary of the psychoanalytic literature. This paper was one of a series on the subject of Jonah in Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 18 (2008): 271–370. The early Freudian readings, as well as Jung’s approach and Maslow’s “Jonah syndrome,” are also summarized in LaCocque and Lacocque, Jonah, 49–66, 70.

264 LaCocque and Lacocque, Jonah, 53, attribute this opinion to Jung.

The issue of whether there are persistent, species-specific psychic structures that might accommodate and colour the Jonah theme is not going to be resolved here. This author's prejudice would be towards an understanding of the mythological comparisons and psychoanalytic categories that accepts a Primal Jonah, but in the absence of a full-scale study devoted to the subject (and probably with considerable difficulty even then), demurs in settling its content. A deep resonance of the Jonah theme felt by early Christian sarcophagus viewers cannot be simply derived from, much less equated to, the myths, rituals, personalities and neuroses of people in other times, places and contexts. Nonetheless, it seem likely that viewers of the representations of Jonah on sarcophagi in the charged atmosphere of the tomb did experience intimations of a Primal Jonah, a mythical and psychological substratum to their biblical and other bases for understanding and appreciating the imagery. As the Jungian analyst Erich Neumann put it: “The mythical world lives in us as the psyche of the unconscious and as the world of the archetypes.”

Images of Jonah being cast into the jaws of a sea monster (swallowed, devoured, consumed) and spit up whole on dry land (regurgitated, rescued, reborn) could be paradigmatic of primal concerns with chaos and order, death and birth. The imbrication of mythological imagery with Christian initiation and belief systems is not easily sorted out. Perhaps ablution and immersion were associated with baptism, heroic triumph with repentance and grace, regeneration and rebirth with resurrection. Elements of other psychological interpretations (an existential Jonah syndrome, psychoanalytic object relations) are unverifiable and suspiciously modern. The Primal Jonah of the Roman Christian viewer ought not to be ignored but is better left inchoate.

Studies, 1990), 99, expressed doubt that the source of the story of Christ could be found in myths of “dying and rising gods;” he nonetheless urged the importance of a comparison between Christianity and such non-Christian mythologies, searching out common characteristics.


Foucault, as summarized by Paul Veyne, Foucault: sa pensée, sa personne (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), 16, argued that eternal themes are erased by endless variations. His example was the successive notions of pleasure in Antiquity, the flesh in the Middle Ages and modern “sexuality,” three general ideas formulated around “the undoubtedly real, probably transhistorical, but inaccessible kernel that lies behind them” (my
b) Naked Jonah

Jonah usually appears on sarcophagi as young, clean-shaven and naked. Only in a few cases is he old and bearded (as on Rep. I.44, ill. 12) or clothed (as on Rep. I.591, ill. 10; Rep. II.90, ill. 31). The question addressed under this heading is whether his state of undress in particular reflects a potentially significant facet of the viewers' engagement with the images. While the discussion focuses on the rest scene, Jonah is typically without clothes throughout the cycle of representations.

As a preliminary matter, there is a problem of nomenclature. Such terms as “naked,” “nude”, “unclad” or “unclothed” may elicit unwanted connotations and carry historiographic baggage. They describe a state of deprivation and establish full dress as normative, a linguistic result that seems impossible to avoid. The vocabulary may suggest a figure that is pleasing or embarrassed, innocent or erotic, natural or purposeful. In this discussion, the several labels are freely interchanged by design. This is the best way to minimize terminological distortions and to permit the images to control the discourse rather than the reverse.

Male and female nudity was commonplace in antique sculpture and a variety of figures appear unclothed on Roman sarcophagi: mythological, divine, fanciful, heroic, and real. Biblical personalities, however, generally keep their clothes on; in addition to Jonah, only Adam and Eve and Daniel in the lions' den are depicted nude. The dead raised by Ezekiel translation). So the Jonah theme as depicted on sarcophagi may be a third- and fourth-century variation of a real, but inaccessible, theme.


269 Madeline H. Caviness, “Epilogue,” in The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art, ed. Sherry C. M. Lindquist (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 321–323, was critical of Kenneth Clark’s distinction between happenstance nakedness and artistic nudity. Her proposed substitution of “unclad” or “unclothed” eliminates those particular associations but is otherwise no more satisfactory. The problems are, in part, language-specific. The English distinction between nude and naked, not reflected in many other languages, seems to drive much of this discussion.

270 Like Jonah, Daniel may also occasionally be found fully clothed, as on Rep. III.18 (ill. 9). Daniel's nakedness seems to have been a Roman preference not regularly followed elsewhere. Compare later examples in Ravenna where he is clothed: Rep. II.378, 379. Medieval art was more amenable to the nudity of biblical figures, with a variety of connotations. Nikolaus Himmelmann, Ideale Nacktheit (Opladen: Westdeutscher}
are also naked and the same form of representation is occasionally adopted for Christian miraculous resurrections. Christ is clothed but exceptionally appears in the nude in scenes of his baptism. Other than Eve, all biblical naked figures are male; even Susanna is generally properly dressed.

The nudity of Adam and Eve is “realistic” in the sense that it corresponds to scriptural narrative, and viewers might equally have perceived Jonah’s unclothed state as natural. His nakedness when thrown from the ship to the ketos, like that of the other sailors in most cases, conforms to a standard Roman visual sign of shipwreck or distress. In the rest scene, shedding clothes might be taken as a normal response to desert heat, complementing the soothing shade of the cucurbita. Such associations are consistent with a naked Jonah but, particularly the latter, not very persuasive as indications of the viewers’ dominant reactions. Most scholars who address the matter have preferred symbolic explanations, generally regarding nudity as an allusion to salvation and paradise. Thus Mathews labelled the naked Daniel and Jonah as “types of the resurrection.” They were so depicted because they already participated “in the glory of the resurrected

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271 The raising of the dry bones told in Ezekiel 37:1–14 is normally depicted by showing the Lord’s wand pointing to one or more doll-like naked figures on the ground (e.g., Rep. I.5, ill. 115; Rep. I.23, ill. 116). On these and the related New Testament images, see chapter 7, note 229.

272 The typical baptism scene on sarcophagi is formally similar to the creation of man with John resembling God and Christ the standing Adam, to the point that the images may be ambiguous (as on Rep. III.18, ill. 9). The most explicit examples, like Rep. I.757 and III.49, include water at Christ’s feet and a bird representing the holy spirit. See also Rep. I.150, 777, Rep. II.8, 9.

273 See “Susanna” in Bisconti, Temi, 282–284 (entry by Minasi), where some rare examples of a naked Susanna in catacomb painting are noted.

274 On clothed and unclothed sailors, see Lawrence, “Ships, Monsters and Jonah,” 289–290. On Jonah’s nakedness as a sign of shipwreck or danger, see Korol, Die frühchristlichen Wandmalereien, 140, and references in 140n582; Himmelmann, Über Hirten-Genre, 150. Compare a similar show of unclad sailors on the so-called Shipping Sarcophagus in Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, in. 1299; Østergaard, Imperial Rome, 77–79 (cat. 33); Amedick, Vita privata, cat. 57. It has also been suggested that the nakedness of the sailors indicated the prudent master’s decision to lighten his load as a precaution against the raging storm. See Narkiss, “Sign of Jonah,” 65. The Pisa sarcophagus (Rep. II.90, ill. 31), one of the rare examples on which the resting Jonah is clothed, also so depicts him standing in prayer on the ship.

275 See Ferrua, “Paralipomeni,” 54; Bisconti and Gentili, Rivoluzione, 182–183 (cat. 42, entry by Utro). The possibility that Jonah’s nakedness refers to the Midrash Jonah description of his clothing being vaporized by the heat of the monster’s belly has already been challenged above as inconsistent with his nudity when thrown to the ketos.
A gloss on the soteriological interpretation relates it to baptism; Jonah’s nudity in
the rest scene simultaneously signals his presence in a post-resurrection paradise as well as
the spiritual purity and the actual state of undress of the catechumen. His undress in earlier
scenes is equally consistent with the rite of baptism.277

This reading of the Naked Jonah is premised on a reciprocally reinforcing relationship with
the Typological Jonah: nudity both points to and is supported by the viewers’ understanding
that Jonah’s adventure foretold Christ’s descent and resurrection. Nakedness was a visual
attribute of the corpse, as remarked in the Ezekiel scene,278 and is thereby regarded as
providing a clue to the living Jonah’s symbolic death, although the parallel is imperfect since
Christ himself is fully clothed when pictured in his resurrected state, notably the *tradi
tio legis* discussed in chapter 7.

Treating nakedness as a sign of salvation or paradise raises some of the same concerns
already encountered with the Typological and Idyllic Jonah. Especially in the case of an
isolated rest scene, it requires a suspension or transformation of the viewers’
understanding of the book of Jonah and the situation of this event within the dénouement
of the narrative. Perhaps nudity might have been helpful in this regard if it could
corroborate the paradisiacal interpretation. Yet while the unclothed body could be
associated with death, its use in Christian sarcophagus iconography is not consistent. Jonah
and Daniel are usually depicted as unclad figures of salvation, but the three Hebrew youths
in the furnace and Noah are fully clothed (see, for example, *Rep*. I.23, ill. 14; I.52, ill. 15;

to a sculpture of Jonah rather than a sarcophagus, said that “his nakedness is evidently meant to signify idyllic
of Shame”), developed a distinction between nakedness without shame, exemplified by Adam and Eve before
the Fall, and “the nakedness of shame” thereafter. He associated the former, inter alia, with the figures of
Jonah and Daniel in the lions’ den, both regarded as symbolizing the new life after death.

277 Jensen, *Substance of Things Seen*, 44, *Early Christian Art*, 177 and “Economy of the Trinity,” 537; Smith,
*Map is not Territory*, 5–6. On the broader claim that Jonah was associated with baptism, see Steffen, *Die Jona-
Geschichte*, 78–80.

278 Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 5n16.
Rep. II.185, ill. 16). Nothing prevents the choice between nudity and dress from having different explanations in the presentation of different biblical episodes, but this lack of coherence is not comforting for the reliability of Jonah’s nudity as an unfailing and universal indicium of his resurrection.

The additional or supporting association with baptism is similarly both attractive and problematic. The practice of late-in-life baptism meant that many viewers, even though of a Christian persuasion, would not have personally experienced the rite, although they were presumably familiar with the practice and the implied nudity. Christ himself was shown naked in scenes of his baptism, his genitalia quite as unabashedly portrayed as Jonah’s. 279 This holy nudity is not based on scripture but could have resonated with the experience of catechumens. It is true that juxtaposition of that representation with Jonah is uncommon — the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (Rep. I.747, ill. 22) may be the only surviving example 280 — but as previously remarked, the absence of explicit representation of the type and antitype is far from fatal. 281 The most serious objection to the baptismal reading of the Jonah theme is the many examples of a rest scene with no water.

Salvific, idyllic and baptismal resonances are thus plausible, but not self-evident. Nor do they exhaust the range of potential viewer reactions to Jonah’s nakedness. An obvious if rarely discussed interpretation is eroticism, occasionally broached in the mythological comparison, as in Crossan’s claim that “Jonah-as-Endymion is nude, asleep, and sexually attractive.” 282 A sensual facet of reception for the rest scene does not have to rely on any semantic connection between Jonah and Endymion, about which serious doubts were expressed above. This comparison with the pagan mythological figure is nonetheless a convenient point of entry into the sexual character of the display of male nudity.

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279 This feature is particularly notable on Rep. I.13, I.777 (left end), III.49 (left side) and if one trusts an eighteenth-century drawing, III.510.
280 Rep. III.18 in Aire-sur-l’Adour (ill. 9) has the disgorgement of Jonah on the lid and a scene at the right corner of the front that could be a baptism but is more likely the creation of Adam.
281 See page 207 above.
282 Crossan, "Bias," 234.
At first blush, Crossan’s description seems accurate enough for Endymion, but upon closer examination one finds that while the youth is certainly asleep and was likely perceived as sexually attractive, he is rarely completely nude. In some cases he is clothed. In others, a drape or veil covers only part of his anatomy.\(^{283}\) It may conceal a bit of his upper torso and lie lightly across his bare leg, exposing his nether regions to the approaching Selene (ill. 29).\(^{284}\) Or it may cover most of his lower body, barely concealing or just as often revealing his genitalia, as if by happenstance (ill. 30).\(^{285}\) Even where his body is fully exposed it still appears in front of billowing drapery that has been pulled or blown away just before Selene (and the viewer) arrived on the scene (ill. 23).\(^{286}\) Christian archaeologists often refer to these semi-clad figures as “clothed” when contrasting Jonah and Endymion.\(^{287}\) Snyder described Endymion as “modestly covered by the veil of his divine consort,” proposing that the figure became a nude Jonah with the elimination of Selene.\(^{288}\) But “modesty” was far from the minds of producers and consumers of Endymion sarcophagi. The drape is suggestive rather than squeamish, often revealing just what it might be expected to conceal. When the veil appears to be in motion, it is being peeled away to display the sleeper’s erotic splendour, never the reverse. Together with the gesture of the arm crooked behind the head, this “clothing” of Endymion points to exposure, not disguise.\(^{289}\)

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\(^{284}\) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 47.100.4; Sichtermann, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, cat. 80.

\(^{285}\) For example on a sarcophagus in Cimitile: Sichtermann, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, cat. 78. A similar state of exposure is employed for other figures with an equivalent message, as in the depiction of Dionysus in Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. 2430; Østergaard, Imperial Rome, 94–95 (cat. 41).

\(^{286}\) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 24.97.13; Sichtermann, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, cat. 48.

\(^{287}\) E.g., Bisconti, Temi, 192 (“Giona,” entry by Mazzoleni); Ferrua, “Paralipomeni,” 54, for whom the sculptural disrobing of Endymion was purposeful, in order that the form might represent a properly biblical Jonah.

\(^{288}\) Snyder, Ante Pacem, 92–93. It is not clear why Snyder attributes Endymion’s drapery to Selene, who holds a billowing veil of her own.

\(^{289}\) On the erotic suggestion in the partly-draped Endymion, see Sichtermann, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, 33; Zanker and Ewald, Mit Mythen leben, 317 (cat. 13, entry by Ewald). Sichtermann expressed some reticence regarding the posture being described as a “Sich–Öffnen des Körpers,” a view attributed by him to St. F. Schröder, but only because it occurs unconsciously, in sleep. From the viewer’s perspective, and given the narrative context of the myth, Endymion’s presentation of his body to Selene, even unawares, would be a powerful signal of its availability. To the female gaze, the sculpted form appeared just as the youth did to his lover Selene. For the heterosexual male viewer, it evoked the fantasy of rape by a goddess. Homoerotic
The impact of nudity varies according to the space or context; one cannot automatically extrapolate from erotic statues of "sexy boys" in villas, baths and gymnasiums\(^{290}\) to the Endymion sarcophagi. However, his comeliness and sensuality were central attributes of the narrative and undoubtedly served in the funerary function of the image. Eternal youth, endless sleep and nightly love-making supported the consolatory message at the tomb. Particularly in late examples, greater emphasis was placed on the marital bond by depicting Endymion as an adult, or locating him under a portrait clipeus.\(^{291}\) Coupling, in both the spiritual and carnal sense, was central to this form of representation.

What about Jonah? Photographic comparisons with Endymion prefer early and especially attractive images of the Hebrew prophet but taking the corpus as a whole, he seems clumsier, not so lascivious, less ephebic. In part, this may be ascribed to stylistic and production developments, since most Jonahs are later than almost all Endymions. But there are also objective differences. The suggestive veil is gone, rendering Jonah more modest rather than less. Especially important is the disappearance of the looming figure of Selene (or Dionysus over Ariadne) presaging a sexual act. Jonah's narrative is entirely lacking in any equivalent innuendo. On the other hand, proper attention is still generally given to the rendering of genitalia (arguably echoed by the phallic gourds above); there is no sign here of the medieval censorship Caviness calls "phallocasm."\(^{292}\) This could but need not have been sexually suggestive. It might just as well reflect a naturalistic tendency of antique connotations are also, of course, a possibility. Note that in many cases, Selene's garment is also arranged to expose one or both of her breasts. Endymion, like Jonah, is occasionally, but rarely, depicted as a fully-clothed sleeper. Compare Sichtermann, *Die mythologischen Sarkophage* cat. 43 (not obviously Endymion), 85, 93 (ill. 41), 94, 95.

\(^{290}\) Elizabeth Bartman, "Eros's Flame: Images of Sexy Boys in Roman Ideal Sculpture," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, Suppl. Vol. 1, *The Ancient Art of Emulation: Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity* (2002): 261–271, focussed on the homoerotic character of statues of young boys in these contexts and in earlier centuries, although she also noted (270) their attractiveness to female viewers. She, too, remarked (262–263) that drapery was often regarded as more effective to highlight the exposed genitalia than total nudity.


\(^{292}\) Madeline H. Caviness, "A Son's Gaze on Noah: Case Or Cause of Virilophobia?" in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*, ed. Sherry C. M. Lindquist (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 120–125. Nor do these representations of Jonah at rest merit her labels "virilophobia" or "virilophilia," "hypoverility" or "hypervirility" (114–120).
sculpture, or if one projects the resting Jonah into an idyllic afterlife or Christian paradise, a detail appropriate for aesthetic or didactic rather than functional reasons.293

In assessing the extent to which Jonah on Christian sarcophagi might have had a facet properly qualified as erotic or sensual, care must be taken to avoid anachronism from both directions: a forward projection from Greek sculpture or a retrospective application of modern notions of sexuality.294 The former could at least have some heuristic value since wealthy Romans, pagan and Christian alike, did collect antique statues or Roman emulations of such works.295 Yet the restricted appearance of nudity on Christian sarcophagi belies any wholesale transfer of erotic or sensual ideals of the male body from the domestic to the funerary realm. Jonah was evidently a special case; clearly the sculptors of at least some specimens, notably the “beach boy” types (as in Rep. I.35, ill. 4; I.792, ill. 7; I.747, ill. 22), revelled in the delights of the male body, and their efforts to communicate this aesthetic impression must have succeeded with some viewers. Thus a sensual engagement with Jonah cannot be completely excluded, perhaps attenuated for representations that were (or at least seem to modern eyes to be) less conducive (e.g., Rep. III.40, ill. 13; Rep. I.11, ill. 20).

A further association of the male nude that complements rather than challenges the others discussed above is with the Roman hero, whose unclad physique was often appropriated by a variety of mortals, including soldiers in battle, the pagan deceased, and emperors.

Bynum, Resurrection of the Body, 33, notes that for Tertullian, genitalia “will have no function in the resurrection, but they will survive for the sake of beauty.” She attributes a rather different rationale to Jerome’s justification for preserving the masculine organ in heaven (91): “amputation of the members in the resurrection would mean we would all come to equality of condition,” a visual homogenization of gender that he apparently regarded as unsuitable.


Especially in nude imperial representations, allegorical heroism could bleed into idolatry, an implicit assertion of pseudo-, quasi- or actual divinity. One might expect the distinction to have been of some importance for many Christians, although apparently not Constantine, whose nude statue was perilously close to a pagan idol.\textsuperscript{296} This difficulty should not have affected the naked biblical figures, given their context and form. Funerary relief carvings of Jonah thrown headlong to the ketos or lying under the cucurbita were not readily assimilated to forbidden graven images. They did, however, comfortably partake of classical Greco-Roman heroic nudity, an association already broached in connection with the Primal Jonah. His escape from the monster, like Daniel from the lions’ den, depended on divine assistance through faith and prayer more than mere physical prowess, but the distinction with the divinely favoured pagan hero is one of degree, rather than kind.\textsuperscript{297}

Heroic nudity subsumes rather than excludes a sensual reading of the images. Virility connotes strength but also sexual energy; gods and heroes used their bodies to achieve more than one kind of triumph. However for the Christian audience, naked representations of Jonah or Daniel on sarcophagi were more likely to evoke the courage of Hercules or Meleager than the erotic anticipation of Endymion or Ariadne. Heroic nudity also provides a subliminal link to Christian salvation, signalling Jonah and Daniel as prophets, heroes of the faith. Perhaps this biblical status and narrative function distinguished them from some other figures of resurrection, like the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace, the merely steadfast faithful who remained clothed.

Jonah’s ostentatious, surprising and isolated nakedness — he was generally the only figure so portrayed on a given sarcophagus — must have affected viewers. The Naked Jonah is a facet in its own right to the extent that his nudity had a direct sensual impact. More often it served to underscore his role as a spiritual hero, a worthy successor to those whose moral

\footnote{\textsuperscript{296} The statue atop the porphyry column in the imperial form of Constantinople was considered to represent the emperor and was likely nude. It was probably a reused sculpture, perhaps of Apollo. See Bassett, \textit{Urban Image}, 68 and cat. 109B.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{297} See page 266 above.}
virtues and physical excellence attracted divine favour. The challenge faced by Jonah was
death itself, and his heroic survival implied salvation and resurrection.

c) Political Jonah

Along the salvation spectrum, this chapter has encountered facets of the Jonah theme
connected to Christian resurrection soteriology as well as “soft salvation,” a less doctrine
conception of an idyllic afterlife with Christ. One can also imagine a meaning entirely devoid
of eschatological overtones: Jonah is rescued rather than saved, not redeemed into
everlasting life but preserved from a mundane peril. Given the similarity of representations
on so many sarcophagi, this danger cannot be a hazard personal to the deceased, like a
real-life sailor’s shipwreck. It could have been the significant and ubiquitous challenges of
disease and violence in late antique Rome, but the possibility promoted by New Testament
scholar Graydon F. Snyder is instead a Political Jonah, a figure for the preservation of
Christian believers from harassment and persecution by the pagan majority and the state
before the Edict of Milan.

The theme running through Snyder’s Ante Pacem is that pre-Constantinian visual
representations were not biblical narratives but signs and symbols whose significance is to
be understood within the context of prevailing social and political conditions. “All the early
symbols stress victory, peace, and security in the face of adversity.”298 This is nowhere more
apparent than in the depiction of the Jonah theme, as Snyder observed elsewhere.

Surely the first Christians ... assumed the Sea and the Sea monster expressed the
power of non-Christian divinities. Surely they saw that power expressed primarily in
the Roman Empire.... They saw themselves as Jonahs entering into a threatening
culture on a daily basis. They knew that culture contained inimical Sea Monsters
seeking to destroy nascent Christianity. Unlike the Hercules myth, in which the hero
had to kill the Sea Monster, they knew God would cause the dragon [to] spew them

298 Snyder, Ante Pacem, 64, and see 14–21. Snyder’s conclusion (298–299) is that ante pacem “Jesus was not
understood in a promise-fulfillment nexus, nor in a guilt-redemption pattern, but in an alienation-deliverance
structure.”
out to safety and promised rest. The first Christians lived out the Jonah story every
day. That is why it became so popular.²⁹⁹

He cited as corroborative evidence the fact that this popularity waned sharply after the
“peace of Constantine,” when “the environment was no longer hostile to the Christian,
when the Christian community was no longer harassed qua Christian.”³⁰⁰

This facet of the Jonah theme — which Snyder claims to extend through all three episodes
in the cycle by summarily describing the scene under the cucurbita as “a rest from whatever
had already occurred”³⁰¹ — can remain at the level of social relations, or it might be
integrated into a broader conceptual framework for the development of early Christianity.
Jonathan Z. Smith distinguished between two world-views in late antique religious
traditions: the “locative” and the “utopian.”³⁰² Locative traditions are centred on place.
They reinforce boundaries, emphasizing stability, rectitude, confidence, and sanctification.
Utopian traditions are more dramatic. They breach boundaries, promoting salvation
through rebellion and transcendence. Christianity and its soteriology of resurrection
strained from the locative to the utopian in its early centuries. This is not to say the two
modes are mutually exclusive. There is no linear development or Darwinian evolution. Both
religious modes “remain coeval existential possibilities which may be appropriated
whenever and wherever they correspond to man’s experience of his world.”³⁰³ However,
relying upon and incorporating Snyder’s summary of the material evidence, Smith argued
that a locative tradition generally prevailed in early Christianity. In this way, one might
elevate the Political Jonah to, or complement it with, a Religious-Historical Jonah.

²⁹⁹ Snyder, “Sea Monsters,” 21, extending his reasoning previously expressed in Ante Pacem, 94. Reassurance
in the face of persecution is also noted as one alternative interpretation by Jensen, Early Christian Art, 78.
Steffen, Das Mysterium von Tod, 109, includes persecution with sickness and other earthly dangers attributed
to demons from which the supplicant sought to be “saved” in what he called “prayers of exorcism”
exoristische Gebete).
³⁰⁰ Snyder, Ante Pacem, 94.
³⁰¹ Snyder, “Sea Monsters,” 20. Within Snyder’s model one could suggest additional interpretations of the rest
scene, perhaps the peaceful state achieved through rescue from persecution or the bliss that rewards the
stalwart.
³⁰² Smith, Drudgery Divine, 120–133.
³⁰³ Smith, Map is not Territory, 101 (in “The Wobbling Pivot”).
There is something to the argument that many early Christian signs and symbols communicated confidence and preservation rather than (or as well as) soteriological breach. This would be consistent with de Bruyne’s perception of tranquillity and optimism in the visual representations, although not with his interpretation of those images as indicia of Christian salvation. The specifically Political Jonah and its manifestation on Roman sarcophagi is, however, problematic.

The first issue is chronology. Snyder is not alone in regarding 313 as marking a discontinuity in the status, behaviour and visual culture of Roman Christians. Jensen described the Edict of Milan and Constantine’s conversion, which she situated in the same year, as “a watershed moment for the church and, by extension, for Christian art.” As an art historical reference point, the event has little to recommend it. No stylistic or iconographical shifts are associated with the year 313, and none of the public monuments that provide such an important source for sarcophagus dating were made that year. An apparent uptick in the number of Christian sarcophagi has been linked to Christian legal emancipation by the modern historical imagination, but it could more easily be explained by demography (which, admittedly, was probably affected by the Edict, although not instantaneously) or burial practices. Accepting the traditional dating of sarcophagi (which may well contain an element of circularity associated with the “313 watershed” theory), there is little evidence to associate the production of Jonah sarcophagi with the Edict. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 do not suggest a precipitous decline in production either after 313 or during periods of alleged persecution. If one mechanically assigns half the monuments qualified as “first quarter of the fourth century” and one-third those dated “first third of the fourth century” to the period before 313, over 40% of the Jonah corpus would be post pacem. 

It was suggested in chapter 4 that the probability distribution in figure 4.2 should probably be shifted somewhat to the right, in which case this estimate would be

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305 This calculation is based on the underlying data used to construct those Figures, as explained in chapter 4, note 25. The result is that 74 of the 180 monuments would be assigned a production date after 313.
conservative. Under any reasonable supposition, a large proportion of these monuments were produced, purchased and viewed after, in many cases long after, 313.

Nor is that date pivotal for the kind of peace and security likely to have manifested itself in the choice of sarcophagus decoration. Tolerance of Christians in Rome did not suddenly replace persecution and harassment with the Edict of Milan. After a rough period under the Emperor Decius in the middle of the third century, Roman Christians fared reasonably well. The true extent of the persecutions of 303 has been debated, and the capital was probably less affected than other parts of the Empire. Constantine’s father, Constantius, largely spared the city from the application of the anti-Christian legislation. Even Eusebius (along with Lactantius the primary witness regarding the impact of the Diocletian persecution in Rome) grudgingly admitted that Maxentius was not hostile to the Christians. During the first decades of the fourth century, when Jonah sarcophagi were probably at the peak of their popularity, public expressions in favour of Christianity were a visible feature of the capital.

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307 Eusebius, *EH*, 8.14.1–6, admits that the wicked and licentious Maxentius ended any persecution of Christians in Rome, albeit impugning his motives for doing so. Because he is often a dubious and less than impartial source concerning Constantine’s foes, the concession regarding Maxentius is significant. Eusebius contrasts this (8.14.9) with the situation in the East under Maximinus. His praise for Constantius (*EH*, 13.12–13) is more likely to be suspect, coloured by his wish to preserve the purity of Constantine’s lineage. While not quite claiming Constantius for the faith (he was “most friendly to the Divine Word”), Eusebius distances him from any participation in Christian persecution. Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 15.6–7, generally corroborates Eusebius in this regard, indicating that Constantius permitted demolition of churches only in order to pay lip service to the decrees he otherwise failed to implement.

308 Roman citizens were confronted with a number unabashedly Christian monuments in the public space early in Constantine’s reign. The older view, associated with Richard Krautheimer, that the Emperor built churches only outside the walls in order to be less provocative to a non-Christian élite, has been challenged. See Olof Brandt, “Constantine, the Lateran, and Early Church Building Policy,” in *Imperial Art as Christian Art – Christian Art as Imperial Art: Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Justinian*, ed. J. Rasmus Brandt and Olaf Steen, Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia, Vol. 15 (Rome: Bardi Editore, 2001), 109–114. Reference should also be made to the chronology of conversion of élite and sub-élite Romans, discussed in chapter 2.
A second concern with the Political Jonah is the different treatment of other biblical episodes that purportedly had a similar function. If the number of Jonah representations produced at a given time is negatively correlated with the confidence and security of Christians, the same fate should be shared by these other themes. This is not always the case and there is a certain apologetic character to the distinctions drawn by Snyder. The sacrifice of Isaac, for example, is also regarded as a symbol for Christian salvation from religious harassment (“this scene does not differ greatly from Jonah and the Ketos, Noah in the ark, Daniel in the Lion’s Den, and Susanna”) but it grew rather than diminished in importance after 313. Snyder attributes this to the iconography having been “altered to parallel the sacrifice of Christ.” The three youths in the furnace was also retained through the fourth century by the same semantic shift; it ceased to represent political harassment and persecution and became a theological motif. 309 Given Jonah’s typological relationship to Jesus, something these other figures lacked, one wonders why he, too, was not revalorized and retained.

A third concern with treating the Jonah theme as a metaphor for rescue from harassment and persecution is its popularity compared to others better suited to that purpose. Both Daniel in the lions’ den and the three Hebrew youths in the furnace concern a conflict with idolatrous temporal authority. Daniel was punished because he would not pray to King Darius (Daniel 6:7-16), and the young men for refusing to worship a golden statue of King Nebuchadnezzar’s god (Daniel 3:10-21). One also finds sarcophagus depictions of the immediately preceding episode, an even more explicitly “political” moment as the three youths stand before the king refusing to acknowledge the idol. In some cases, as on a sarcophagus in San Lorenzo, Florence, the graven image is not Baal but none other than the king himself (Rep. II.10, ill. 42). 310 These other biblical stories cleave closely to the religious-political narrative of persecution and harassment. Jonah’s tale has nothing to do with it.

309 Snyder, Ante Pacem, 100–101 (Abraham) and 106 (three youths).
310 Other clear examples are Rep. II.20 (Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale P. Orsi) and Rep. III.492 (Maison Romane, Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, inv. 489A). See Mathews, Clash of Gods, 78–79. The scene also
There are other difficulties with this Political Jonah. Notwithstanding Snyder’s efforts, the rest under the gourd plant fits uncomfortably in the iconographical model, especially when it is not accompanied by the other episodes. And perhaps most important of all, it is unclear why the depiction of an allegory of deliverance from legal and social discrimination and persecution would appear almost exclusively in the funerary space, to be regarded by viewers in times of mourning and spiritual reflection.\textsuperscript{311} Christian mourners huddled before a sarcophagus in the private space of the tomb were likely to be thinking and talking about death or its eschatological implications, not politics.

Snyder’s Political Jonah need not be totally abandoned, but it is best regarded as marginal. Some viewers, although no longer themselves subject to religious persecution, might have recalled the events of the third century, or known of more recent difficulties experienced by members of their community in the East. But standing before a sarcophagus with images of the story of Jonah, the average viewer is far more likely to have elevated any thoughts of divine deliverance to the ultimate mortal hazard, the fate that had already struck the occupant of this very monument and would inevitably overtake him or her some day. Death, not persecution, had brought the viewers into contact with these monuments. It was a peril that no wealth, status or legal protection could overcome, but only God’s mercy.

7. Conclusion

Summaries may convey a false and unintended sense of finality, disguising nuances, qualifications and purposeful uncertainties. With this caveat, it is nonetheless important to review the multiplicity of Jonaths encountered in this chapter and draw some conclusions about the reception of these images that appear so often on Roman sarcophagi. There is no exclusive or composite solution. Viewers experienced a range of associations with varying

\footnote{appears on two sarcophagi in the Musée départemental Arles antique (Inv. PAP.74.00.1–5 and FAN.92.00.2480; Rep. III.38 and 41); in these cases, the resemblance of the idol to the king is not evident. \textsuperscript{311} It may be objected that in this early period only sepulchral spaces were “safe” for Christian expression. The archaeological record is not very forthcoming about ecclesiastical or domestic decoration in the first half of the fourth century; however, it is not a complete void and provides only one example of the Jonah theme, in the floor mosaic at Aquileia (see note 18, above). Jensen, \textit{Early Christian Art}, 75, also raises the sepulchral setting as problematic for the social context thesis of Snyder.}
degrees of intensity and immediacy, and this diversity of individual experience was compounded by the important changes in both Rome and Roman Christianity during the first half of the fourth century. Yet Jonah’s popularity cannot have been the coincidental result of a haphazard alignment of disconnected views, backgrounds and understandings. Not all viewers saw the same thing in the Jonah theme, but there must have been sufficient commonality and overlap in their intellectual responses to account for its repetition and relative consistency over a period of several decades.

Notwithstanding their preconceptions and agendas correctly remarked by more recent scholars, early Christian archaeologists were largely on the right track. The core of reception of the Jonah theme was a biblical, and more specifically a Christian, experience. The “paradigmatic” conceptions of some older literature have, with justice, been challenged. Some generalizations and unjustified inferences must be swept aside in favour of a more nuanced and perhaps even a substantially revised understanding of the Biblical Jonah. However, while recognizing that some dissident or uninformed fourth-century viewers probably missed the biblical point, most did not. They did not all draw the same lesson or think the same thoughts, but few were unaware of the Old Testament story and even if they were, more knowledgeable fellow mourners were present to assist them. Jonah’s repeated appearance on sarcophagi is indication enough of this familiarity, although it is difficult to pinpoint the extent to which it was due to catechetical training, liturgy, homilies, exposure to Jewish rituals, or just story-telling within the rapidly growing Christian community. Once Jonah was recognized, the average viewer (who was not “average” in socio-economic terms), often a recent convert or yet-to-be-baptised sympathizer, also made the connection with Jesus. Lay Christians regarded the Hebrew Bible as part of the Christian canon, and their exposure to the book of Jonah within the context of a Christian experience — church, training, community — must have included the “sign” cited by Jesus. This does not imply a high level of theological sophistication but merely a kind of typological convention wisdom, a popular understanding among the Roman sarcophagus population enabling viewers to appreciate the Christian significance of Jonah.
Some other interpretations of the Jonah theme can have had only marginal importance. For example, the form of the sleeping Endymion may help to explain the physical appearance of the resting Jonah as an indication of workshop practice, although even then only as the dominant representative of a popular pagan figural type, but the explanatory power of the mythological figure, theories of continuity and syncretism notwithstanding, is underwhelming. The claim that Jonah under the cucurbita represented the *refrigerium interim* of the deceased is also doubtful. Unlike Jonah-as-Endymion, this facet does at least connect to the Christian core of Jonah reception, but the evidence in its favour is weak. Literary sources are few and inconsistent, epigraphy debatable if not actually hostile, and the images themselves uncooperative. A third explanation or facet, the Pastoral Jonah, is problematic because it relies on over-enthusiastic claims for the presence of pastoral motifs on Jonah sarcophagi.

Note that these three problematic interpretations share an exclusive focus on the rest scene. However, unlike other biblical themes depicted on sarcophagi, most representations of the story of Jonah were not restricted to a single episode. Two-thirds of the surviving monuments include it but almost as many depict the ship scene, and over half of those with Jonah under the cucurbita also depict another episode, or at least a ketos (see Table 4.1). Thus while the representation of Jonah at rest dominates the art historical literature, a consideration of the complete corpus of monuments demands a more comprehensive range of viewer associations.

The Political Jonah claims to incorporate the entire cycle of episodes, but its extension beyond the swallowing and disgorgement is strained. It is not clear why a viewer would recognize a naked, reclining prophet lying under his booth as the logical consequence of being rescued from persecution and harassment. This is not the only or the principal difficulty with the Political Jonah. It is also anachronistic with regard to sarcophagus production; other biblical themes would have been better suited to any such message; and it is out of place in the funerary context.
The other extra-biblical facets of reception considered in this chapter deserve more serious attention. The importance and the precise content of the Primal Jonah are difficult to determine based solely on the images; yet there is something appealing in the mythical and psychological associations. Early Christian viewers were no more disconnected from their archetypes and evolution than are their descendents. The tomb is a special place, and death is an event inexorably bound with the central concerns of the human spirit and psyche. This Primal Jonah may have been more or less prominent in the conscious or unconscious engagement of some viewers and interacted with the core Christian element of reception.

The Naked Jonah is particularly complex; such suggestions as can be found in the literature to explain the implications of his unclad state — occasionally naturalism, more often “salvation” — do not satisfactorily account for the explicit and unusual depiction of the nude biblical figure. Sensuality cannot be rejected as an association in some cases, but it is unlikely to have been the principal impact of Jonah’s nakedness on most viewers. A more likely resonance is the heroic nudity of Greco-Roman mythology, and by extension the many statues of gods, athletes and emperors that decorated the private and public spaces of the city. Unlike the suspect Jonah-as-Endymion, this accommodation of a non-Christian resonance does constitute a fuzzy form of Pagan Jonah.

Representations of Jonah were certainly associated with the eponymous book of the Hebrew Bible. This is principally a Biblical Jonah within the Christian core of reception, the Jewish scripture having been appropriated as part of an “Old Testament” that precedes and prepares the New one. There was, in addition, a distinctly Jewish facet of the Jonah theme that likely coloured the engagement of many viewers. By evoking an ancient religious tradition fulfilled and superseded by Christ, it underscored the antiquity and historicity of the narrative, elements that enhanced its popularity and significance among fourth-century Christians.

Primal, Naked, Jewish, heroic Pagan and perhaps other Jonah facets are not posited as alternative interpretations of the theme as it appeared on Roman sarcophagi, but rather as non-exclusive aspects of the engagement of viewers, a halo of associations and resonances
that augmented, complemented, complicated or challenged the biblical core. That central facet of Jonah’s reception was itself elastic. Christian viewers who understood Jonah to be a prophet redeemed by God could adapt an orthodox, or clerical, view of resurrection soteriology to the appearance of the Jonah theme, the rest scene becoming a vision of paradise. This is the traditional tripartite approach of the Salvific Jonah that can be traced back to the nineteenth-century literature. Using the same basic taxonomy for the cycle of representations, other viewers could have blunted the hard edges of theological interpretation and its sense of rupture in the order of things (Smith’s “utopian” religiosity) in favour of a “soft salvation,” an idyllic afterlife that Christianized prevalent pagan or philosophical secular views. It might include Dresken-Weiland’s Bei-Gott-Sein or some other form of a spiritual community of souls.

These points on the salvation spectrum embrace a range of possible Christian commitments and comprehensions, but they share the “happy ending” interpretation of the prophet reclining under the cucurbita, a projection that reconstitutes the rest scene as a fulfillment of the disgorgement/resurrection. This reading conforms to neither the Old nor the New Testament, and while scholars are often fond of citing texts to bolster their interpretations, patristic sources, like the book of Jonah, associate his rest under the cucurbita with his preaching to the Ninevites. This does not preclude the happy ending reading by some viewers, but it does invite an alternative postulate, a biblical facet of reception that does no violence to either the story in the Hebrew Bible or the words of Jesus. Leaving the episodes in their narrative order one can understand the Jonah theme as depicted on sarcophagi to represent both elements of the gospel sign of Jonah: the references to swallowing and disgorgement — the ship scene and ketos — reflect the first, and the rest scene the second. The absence of any more explicit depiction of the events in Nineveh is puzzling, but perhaps no more so than other visual choices, like the failure to show Jonah in the belly of the ketos.

Things would be tidier if some grand organizing principle were available that could encompass all the alternatives and explain their differences. Some scholars have tried chronology, but the archaeological evidence does not support an evolutionary model, for
example three-scene cycles reducing to a single episode over time or vice versa. Typological groupings might hint at some analogy to the textual recension theory adapted to the study of manuscript illumination, but the uncertainty of dating prevents any reasonable reconstructive genealogy within the Roman corpus. Individual monuments were undoubtedly more or less susceptible to particular facets of reception. This is most obvious where scenes or elements are either included or excluded from the image or cycle, but it can also be suggested in more subtle ways, as through a greater or lesser emphasis on Jonah’s nudity, or his proximity to the ketos. The construction of sets of Jonah sarcophagi based on the recognized iconographical variations merely confirms the diversity of reception without telling us any more about it. Geography is another matter. The experience of the Jonah theme outside Rome may correspond to different formal or iconographical developments, although examples are not easy to find.  

Yet another organizing principle could be visual context, the other images with which Jonah was presented. Mitius had already suggested that specific meanings might be inferred in this way: paradise when Jonah was linked with Adam and Eve, salvation when he was found with Daniel in the lions’ den, Noah or Lazarus, hope for resurrection if there was a meal scene, and so on. Unfortunately, no clear pattern emerges from these examples. Other figures or scenes could have added suggestive facets to the viewing of Jonah but they cannot have been determinative.

Josef Engemann remarked at the end of a consideration of the funerary Jonah theme:

Thus, we only vaguely and obscurely imagine what beliefs catacomb and sarcophagus images of the third and early fourth centuries were meant to express. We can clearly recognize most of the biblical themes that are represented but not

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312 One might be an east-west divide suggested by Wischmeyer, “Die Cleveland-Statuetten,” 261. He proposed a philological explanation for the bearded philosopher form of Jonah among the Cleveland marbles: the Roman recension, even while adding or reducing scenes, maintained the naked youth, having parted from the eastern recension at some point in the third century. Wischmeyer hypothesized that they shared an earlier prototype, likely a model book or manuscript.

313 Mitius, Jonas, 99.

314 Translated from Engemann, "Biblische Themen," 556. The same author was somewhat less guarded in other publications.
the meanings, possibly applied to the afterlife, that patrons, artists and ultimately viewers might have connected with the images.

This observation is not so much a counsel of despair as a confession of humility. We cannot know precisely what early Christian sarcophagus viewers saw in the Jonah theme. This chapter has proposed some likely facets of that reception, rejecting any single, universal interpretation in favour of a flexible biblical core grounded in the religious experience of the Roman Christian sarcophagus population, surrounded by other more or less persuasive associations, additional facets that affected some viewers more than others.
IV. *Traditio legis*

Iconographical preferences in the decoration of Roman Christian sarcophagi did not remain static throughout the fourth century. Old and New Testament scenes persisted, but they often appeared along with and compositionally subservient to apostolic groupings that did not evoke specific biblical events. In these images, Christ is no longer merely the lead character in miracles or other stories from his terrestrial life and Passion; he is forcefully injected into and dominates the visible field. An important sub-set of the apostolic motifs is the so-called *traditio legis*, where the Lord stands between the princes of the apostles in an unearthly theophany. God is now revealed to the viewer as omnipotent, omniscient and eternal, rather than depicted in his temporary costume of humanity.

Like part II, this part begins with a chapter dedicated to definition and dating. The challenges in both respects are different. The forms that constitute the corpus of Jonah sarcophagi were constructed by designers and sculptors, but they were anchored, if not always with perfect clarity, in a biblical text. The *traditio legis* sarcophagi have no direct scriptural or textual source. As a consequence, delimiting the corpus and even ascribing a name become matters of judgment and potential controversy, whence the “invention” in the title of chapter 6. Dating, on the other hand, is less problematic and more easily addressed than was the case for the Jonah sarcophagi.

The *traditio legis* literature is a mass of conflicting interpretations regarding both details of the image and its overall meaning. Legitimate debates concerning derivation and theological interpretation too often obscure or pre-empt any consideration of original reception, marginalizing the fourth-century Roman Christians who were in a position to see these monuments. The goal of chapter 7 is to re-insert these viewers into the dynamic of meaning. As with Jonah, the discussion emphasizes and welcomes over-determination, although the range of facets of reception is narrower; they generally fall within the broad scope of Christian soteriology. If the polysemy of the Jonah theme is attributable to the
subtlety of its biblical text and a certain ambiguous tension between word and image, for the *tradtio legis*, it is mainly a function of the image itself: composite, complex and *sui generis*. 
Chapter 6. The invention of the *traditio legis*

If a sarcophagus or fragment presents a reclining figure, a boat or a sea monster, the historian decides for or against its classification as an instance of the Jonah theme. The judgment may be difficult if the monument is fragmentary or the form of representation unusual, but this is due to the state of the evidence, not any imprecision in the category. There could, in theory, have been examples that were actually experienced as both Jonah and non-Jonah by different viewers, or by the same viewer at different moments. Putting these strange cases to one side, we think we know what we mean by a representation of the Jonah theme, even if we cannot always be certain in its identification.

The *traditio legis* is a horse of a different colour. The class is not fixed and its connection with textual sources is a matter of opinion and debate. This chapter will first address the matter of definition and delimitation. It will then be possible to enumerate the relatively modest body of material that meets the chosen tests and consider its likely chronology.

1. Terminology and definition

In a lengthy article published in five instalments in 1857 and 1858, Count Henri-Julien Grimouard de Saint-Laurent defined a group of monuments executed in a variety of media on the basis of their shared iconography, which he described in this way: Christ is standing, usually on a mound, his right hand is raised in blessing or speech, and in his left he holds an unfurled scroll. He is flanked by two other figures, Peter receiving the scroll and Paul in a gesture of acclamation. Grimouard proposed the theme of these images in his title: “Le Christ triomphant et le don de Dieu.” Peter receives from Christ “le plus précieux de tous les dons,” namely, “le don de la loi Évangélique.”

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1 Henri-Julien Grimouard de Saint-Laurent, “Le Christ triomphant et le don de Dieu: étude sur une série de nombreux monuments des premiers siècles,” *Revue de l’art chrétien* 1 (1857): 289–299 (I); 396–405 (II); 500–510 (III) and 2 (1858): 117–123 (IV); 256–265 (V). His description of the typical form of representation is at I.290. The citations are at IV.117 and IV.123.
This image-type is commonly referred to as the *traditio legis* and has been for over a century. The name is consistent with Grimouard de Saint-Laurent’s interpretation and is often assigned his paternity.\(^2\) However, although Grimouard may have been the first to interpret and designate the monuments as a “don de la loi,” he did so in French, not Latin. There is nothing untoward about scholars translating such a label into their own vernacular, but the use of Latin is significant. As discussed in the Introduction, such neologisms are not innocent. They can colour scholarly discourse, implying antique authority for a modern invention. Here, the French *don*, already redolent with interpretive connotations, is not only dignified by a Latin translation but also rendered as *traditio* instead of the slightly less charged *datio*, an important choice, as will become apparent, given the debate regarding the meaning of the image. It is also noteworthy that *dare*, rather than *tradere*, is the root verb in the expression *dominus legem dat*, a formula associated with these representations and about which more will be said below.

Credit for the coinage of *traditio legis* is divided between Louis Duchesne and Anton Baumstark.\(^3\) In 1889, Duchesne remarked that the early medieval baptismal rite in Rome included handing over the Christian law to the initiate, which he called a "tradition de l’Évangile" or “*traditio legis christianae.*” Duchesne referred to an activity, not an image, but he did make the visual connection, describing the form of representation as an "artistic expression" of the rite. Many of the catechumens must, he surmised, have been struck by


its appearance in the apse of the church. Baumstark appears to have been the first to use the expression *traditio legis* specifically as a description of the image "discovered" by Grimouard. It appears in the title and text of a paper he published in 1903, which opens with this sentence:

The well-known composition grouping the three figures of the Lord and the two princes of the apostles which, representing the spiritual event of handing over of the law of the new covenant to Peter, is probably most succinctly labelled as *traditio legis* [am bündigsten wohl als traditio legis bezeichnet wird], has hitherto consistently been treated by St. Laurent, Garrucci, de Rossi, de Waal, Wilpert and Swoboda only as an occurrence of a Roman-western developmental type.”

None of the authors referenced by Baumstark employed the Latin expression. He did not mention Duchesne’s book on liturgy. His article seems, ironically, to represent the art historical origin of the label, ironic because his purpose was to challenge the exclusively Roman genealogy of the image, so central to the “traditio” interpretation.

Most later scholars succumbed to the Latin nomenclature, sometimes translating it back into a modern language, like Gesetzübergabe. Even those who rejected the ecclesiastical interpretation implied by the label could not seem to resist the momentum of an established terminology. One exception was Walter Nikolaus Schumacher, who felt so strongly about the matter that throughout his important article on the subject, he stubbornly referred to the Dominus-legem-dat-Szene, Dominus-legem-dat-Motiv and Dominus-legem-dat-Bild.

The accepted nomenclature, *traditio legis*, has two principal disadvantages. It implies a false antiquity, and it interprets in the guise of describing. It can be argued that *Dominus legem dat* is better on both counts. It is both authentic and at least partially descriptive, since this Latin formula is actually found on some of these very images. Schumacher’s proposal,

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5 Anton Baumstark, “Eine syrische ‘traditio legis’ und ihre Parallelen,” *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903): 173-200. The quotation is translated from page 173. The earlier works by the named authors are listed in his 173n1 to 173n6.
6 Schumacher, "Dominus legem dat."
however, is awkward and presents its own challenges, notably the intransigence of this formula (and, to a lesser extent, its appearance on other forms of representation). It has achieved some modest following but is more often ignored. Occasionally the problem of nomenclature is recognized indirectly by putting *traditio legis* between quotation marks, or preceding it with the qualification “so-called,” simultaneously accepting and questioning its claim.

One solution might be to modify Schumacher’s approach and call the image *datio legis*, effectively a substantive version of the inscription. But given a century of habit, this modest alteration is more likely to confuse than inform. In the circumstances, this study reluctantly retains the traditional *traditio legis*. The reader should, so far as possible, disregard its literal, let alone any allusive, meaning. The Latin words are intended solely as a neutral signifier, a shorthand way to refer to a particular form of representation.

The definition of the class of monuments to which the label applies encounters another sort of difficulty. Constructing an inventory of *traditio legis* representations requires rules for determining what is in and what is out, which elements are necessary and which are common but not essential. Grimouard thought he had discovered an inherent, visible similarity among certain monuments that created a natural category, an “invention” in the archaic sense (as in the Invention of the True Cross). But the current meaning of the word, something newly created or designed, is more apt.

The scope of the class is not determined by any external reference, like a biblical story, but by historians. Its contours may be fuzzy or sharp. Excluded but similar monuments might reflect the genealogy of the *traditio legis* or they could be deviant versions, or properly regarded as unrelated. With the benefit of 150 years of further research, Bas Snelders prepared an inventory based on three features: (1) Christ is in the centre holding an open

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7 The sarcophagus of Concordius in Arles, Rep. Ill.65, ill. 67 and a bronze lamp in Florence, ill. 111 (see chapter 7, notes 124 and 125). Both monuments are discussed below in this chapter and in chapter 7.
8 Only a few scholars other than Schumacher comment on the issue of nomenclature. Richard Krautheimer, “A Note on the Inscription in the Apse of Old St. Peter’s,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 319–320, expressed the view that the representation is “better identified it seems as *dominus legem dat*,” although he continued to use *traditio legis*. 
scroll in his left hand; (2) Peter is on Christ’s left and Paul on his right; (3) Peter catches the falling end of the scroll. Snelders was quick to point out that these were not the only elements in the composition; indeed, his thesis was precisely that since certain additional attributes were almost always included, the simplified version, which is rare but does exist, is not in any meaningful sense primary.

These rules established by Snelders are reasonable but not unassailable. They do have the advantage of rigour. Over-expansion of the category, for example calling every image of Christ enthroned between Peter and Paul a traditio legis, dilutes the typology to the point of incoherence. On the other hand, one might properly limit the definition to images with a standing Christ, since Snelders included only one seated example, Rep. I.677 (ill. 66) under his rules. Another possible limitation concerns the face of Christ. Excepting that same seated example, all these traditio legis sarcophagi depict Christ as mature and bearded, although a few representations in other media present a youthful figure.

In the discussion that follows, a “standard” traditio legis means a ternary representation in which a central, bearded Christ stands on a mound holding an open volumen flanked by the princes of the apostles, with Peter on his left catching or supporting the scroll with covered hands. Such variations as the young Christ will be noted. Additional elements are almost

10 The iconographical differences are so homogenized by this usage that interesting and potentially important peculiarities of the traditio legis are lost. Most important, these scenes of the seated Christ typically have no unfurled scroll, Peter and Paul usually trade positions, and Christ rarely has a beard. Such over-extensions are not uncommon. Cooper, Marius Victorinus’ Commentary, 76, uses the label to refer to the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, Rep. I.680, ill. 68. Cristina Gennaccari, “Museo Pio Cristiano in Vaticano: Inediti e additamenta,” Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Antiquité 109 (1997): 844–845 (no. 9, fig. 7), applies to Rep. II.89, depicting Christ enthroned holding a book between Peter and Paul both acclaiming him (not illustrated in the Repertorium). This last monument is also called traditio legis in Angela Donati, Pietro e Paolo. La storia, il culto, la memoria nei primi secoli (Milan: Electa, 2000), 210 (cat. 53, entry by Silvan). Robin Margaret Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art (London: Routledge, 2000), 108, uses the expression for a mosaic in Sant’Aquilino, Milan. Graydon F. Snyder, Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine, Rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 119, goes so far as to refer to the Velletri sarcophagus (Re. II.242, ill. 39) and the polychrome fragments (Rep. I.773, ill. 96) as early representatives of “the traditional traditio legis.” Hermann Otto Geissler, “Die Traditio Legis – Ein Eschatologisches Bildthemas?” (Master’s thesis, Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz, 2002), 29–36, discusses many monuments that have sometimes been regarded as of the traditio legis type but are excluded from his own list.
12 Subject only to the caveat regarding missing pieces and restorations in note 60, below.
always found — palms, rivers of paradise, sheep, and so on. Their presence is thus consistent with rather than a deviation from the standard. The monuments considered in the balance of this chapter are not limited to this defined standard form. Some that offend the rules in interesting ways will also be noted or discussed.

Any taxonomy risks being too narrow or too broad, too rigid or too loose. Ideally, the category comprehends all and only those monuments that viewers identified in a particular way, an unattainable goal. The repetition of the standard *traditio legis*, particularly on sarcophagi, nonetheless suggests that Grimouard’s insight was essentially correct: there is a recognizable group of monuments even if its precise boundaries are uncertain. At the same time, the definition of a standard *traditio legis* must not mask variations in its appearance. No two of these monuments are the same. Even excluding the outliers, every element of the composition is subject to significant, sometimes idiosyncratic, alternative renderings. Many of these suggest different understandings of the form of representation and demonstrate the challenge posed by its complexity.

### 2. Corpus and dating

Compared to the Jonah group, the number of *traditio legis* monuments is small, forty to fifty in all, depending upon the formal, geographical and chronological criteria adopted and one’s willingness to draw inferences from incomplete or fragmentary pieces. Given the modest number, but also because of some thorny problems regarding derivation and interpretation, it is both possible and desirable to expand the discussion to cover all media. As for chronology, many of the problems that bedevil all sarcophagus dating continue to apply, but with less force than was encountered in the discussion in chapter 4.

#### a) Monuments

It is convenient to begin with sarcophagi, not only because they are the subject of this study but also because they were the dominant medium for transmission of the early *traditio legis* (or at least they dominate the surviving examples). Some scholars consider it important to carry the inquiry forward into medieval mosaics, manuscripts and *Kleinkunst*.
There is no doubt value to that examination, but it cannot relate back to the experience of fourth-century viewers. This discussion will generally end with fifth century material.

i) Sarcophagi

Enumerations of *traditio legis* sarcophagi range from twenty-three to thirty-eight, most metropolitan.\(^{13}\) The number depends on the definition and the treatment of fragments. The catalogue below numbers twenty-four, plus two that are closely related or “transitional,” imposing a restriction to sarcophagi considered of Roman provenance. A few others produced outside the capital are also noted.

A standard *traditio legis* appears on nineteen sarcophagi (ill. 43 – 61) regarded by the *Repertorium* as metropolitan.\(^{14}\) In a few cases, the place of production may be challenged and the monument would then represent a copy of Roman iconography.\(^{15}\) The definition of the standard form above did not specify where on the monument the *traditio legis* should appear. There is some variation in this regard with respect to representations in other media, but in the case of sarcophagi it is always in the central field of the front (as required by Snelders’s rules) except for an unusual monument in the Musée Archéologique of Lamta, Tunisia, which may or may not be the work of a metropolitan workshop (Rep. III.642, ill.


\(^{14}\) Rep. I.28 (of which the central element is Rep. II.158), 58, 200, 675, 676, 679, 724, 1008, Rep. II.127, 131, 149, 150, 152, Rep. III.25, 53, 428, 465, 499, 642. Two of these are lost (Rep. I.1008, Rep. III.465), the identification being based on a drawing or engraving, and the face of Christ is lost on Rep. I.724 but is assumed to be similar to the others.

\(^{15}\) Guntram Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000), 488–489, attributed Rep. III.465 (lost, formerly in the Musée Saint-Remi, Reims, ill. 57) and Rep. III.499 (Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, Saint-Maximin-La-Sainte-Baume, ill. 58) to local workshops in south-western Gaul. The literature reported in the *Repertorium* entries suggests that this is a minority view and the author, Christern-Briesenick, categorized both as metropolitan. Rep. III.642 (Lamta, Tunisia, ill. 59) is a special case. See the discussion and note 16 below.
It curiously combines hunting scenes and family representations with an off-centre *traditio legis*. Also particular to this example is the small orant figure below Christ, perhaps serving a function similar to the diminutive kneeling figures appearing on a number of other monuments.  

Given the importance of the unfurled *volumen* as a defining element of the *traditio legis*, differences in the form of its depiction are worthy of note. In most of the standard examples, Christ holds a rolled-up portion of the scroll and a long, unravelled surface hangs towards or into Peter’s covered hands (e.g., Rep. III.53, ill. 55; Rep. II.150, ill. 52). Less of the scroll is visible in a few cases, as on the sarcophagus of Gorgonius in Ancona (Rep. II.149, ill. 51), and almost none is exposed on the monument in Saint-Maximin-La-Sainte-Baume (Rep. III.499, ill. 58). This detail may be relevant to the question of whether any text, now lost, once appeared on the unfurled portion of the *volumen*.

Finally, a formal division appears within this group of nineteen sarcophagi. In most cases, the three principal figures are arrayed across a plain background, grouped between two columns, or depicted in front of an architectural structure (the so-called “city-gate” group).

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17 Discussed in chapter 7, pages 387 – 389.

18 Of the standard group, other shortened scrolls, although longer than these two, appear on Rep. I.58 (ill. 44) and Rep. III.25 (ill. 54).

19 Discussed in chapter 7, pages 367 – 368.
However on a significant minority (eight), the scroll crosses a column to reach from Christ to Peter (as on Rep. III.53, ill. 55).  

The nineteen standard *traditio legis* sarcophagi depict a standing Christ. Many other sarcophagi include a seated Christ. The distinction between these and the *traditio legis* group is not limited to posture. For example, Christ may be flanked by apostles other than Peter and Paul. He may make a different gesture or hold a codex instead of a *volumen*. Only one of these seated examples shows the tell-tale unfurled scroll and Peter’s covered hands, close enough to the *traditio legis* to warrant if not inclusion in the corpus then at least a separate notice. Commonly referred to by its earlier inventory number as Lat. 174, this sarcophagus (Rep. I.677, ill. 66) has attracted considerable scholarly attention. It is often cited in discussions of derivation because of its relationship with the famous sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Rep. I.680, 68). Both depict a youthful Christ holding a bookroll seated above Caelus, with Peter standing on his left and Paul on his right. The differences between this monument and the *traditio legis* are, however, significant. To get from one to the other Christ must rise to his feet, grow a beard, reposition his right hand, unfurl the scroll and hold it out with his left hand. Peter must lean forward to support the end of the bookroll with covered hands. Rep. I.677 falls between the two forms, whence the label “transitional.” Christ remains beardless and seated above Caelus (unusually depicted as a young deity) but Peter and Paul appear in their accustomed positions for the *traditio legis*. Most important, the scroll is partly unravelled, and defying gravity, extends towards Peter’s waiting, covered, hands.

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20 Also Rep. I.200 (ill. 45), 676 (ill. 47), 679 (ill. 48), 724 (ill. 61), Rep. II.127 (ill. 49), 131 (ill. 50), Rep. III.465 (ill. 57).

21 As indicated by the lengthy list of references in the *Repertorium* entry. Scholars sometimes cite it as indicating that the *traditio legis* included seated examples; however, it is the only extant one of its type and although perhaps not unique, one should not assume there was ever an extensive group of such monuments (regarding the problem of the “unicum,” see chapter 2, page 129 and note 78). Rep. I.677 is sometimes regarded as “transitional” but it could just as easily be contemporaneous with the standard *traditio legis* examples, reflecting a retrospective approach to posture and facial appearance (the young Christ).

22 The “fall” of the scroll more horizontally than laws of physics would predict is common on *traditio legis* sarcophagi where the scene extends across a column. It appears on many of the examples cited in note 20.
Several other monuments sometimes included in the *traditio legis* group are fragments from which the full image can only be inferred. Two of these preserve enough of the left side to make out Christ, Paul and their gestures, but with no indication of Peter and the bookroll.\(^{23}\) Three others provide incomplete information regarding the other side. The first, *Rep.* I.288 (ill. 62), preserves the upper half of Peter with his cross, the left side of Christ and the all-important scroll while the other two are progressively less complete: *Rep.* I.116 (ill. 63) shows a portion of Peter with his cross and a bit of the scroll; *Rep.* II.154 (ill. 64) omits the scroll altogether. All of these fragments may reasonably be regarded as remains of the *traditio legis*, but even if they are, they provide little information about the original form of the representation. Adding them to the nineteen secure standard *traditio legis* forms brings the total to twenty-four. Another fragment, *Rep.* I.528 (ill. 65), might reflect the deviant or transitional form of *Rep.* I.677 (ill. 66), as suggested by the reconstruction proposed in the *Repertorium* illustration.\(^{24}\)

The *traditio legis* sarcophagi are very much a metropolitan phenomenon, although a few examples are attributed to non-Roman workshops. Two, thought to have been produced in Marseilles in the fifth century, present a standard *traditio legis* (*Rep.* III.299, ill. 69; see also *Rep.* III.300). Another, roughly contemporaneous monument from a local workshop in Arles falls just short of the standard form: Christ’s scroll fails to cross the adjacent pilaster to reach Peter’s outstretched, and uncovered, hands (*Rep.* III.120, ill. 70).

Several sarcophagi from Ravenna also deserve mention. All are closely related stylistically and illustrate the Ravennate penchant for a smooth background against which the figures stand out. The first, notwithstanding its clearly local appearance, imitates the standard Roman *traditio legis* of the type with a shortened *volumen* (*Rep.* II.379, ill. 71). On the others, Christ is seated and there are no palms or other symbols. Among these, the closest to a standard *traditio legis*, although still quite different, is a sarcophagus now in

\(^{23}\) *Rep.* II.126 and 130.
\(^{24}\) *Rep.* I.528 is included on the *traditio legis* list by Ulrike Lange, *Ikonographisches Register für das Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage, Bd. 1 (Rom und Ostia)* (Dettelbach: J.H. Röll, 1996), 103. Note the small bust of a figure, likely Caelus, below the presumptive Christ.
Sant’Apollinare in Classe depicting Peter in the customary position, carrying a cross and extending his covered hands, but receiving nothing. Instead Paul, on the left in mirror-image posture to Peter, receives a closed bookroll in his covered hands. The seated, beardless Christ holds an open diptych on his knee with his left hand (Rep. II.390, ill. 72).

Other Ravennate monuments are progressively more distant from the Roman model. One shows Christ and Paul in a similar relationship but the figure on the other side is no longer Peter (Rep. II.382). Another does present both Peter and Paul, again with Christ holding a rolled up scroll towards the latter, but the intervening column prevents it from reaching Paul’s outstretched arms (Rep. II.381). Eventually, the traditio legis momentum totally dissipates in Ravenna, as on a sarcophagus in the Ravenna Cathedral, where Christ holds out his right hand towards Paul, an open book in his left, and the apostles lean forward with covered hands holding their crowns of martyrdom (Rep. II.389).

Finally, on a late-fourth century sarcophagus produced in northern Italy (Rep. II.250), Christ stands with the traditio legis-style right-hand gesture but holds a folded-over rather than dangling scroll in his left. Peter and Paul are reversed. No other attributes (palms, mound) appear, rather like the Ravennate examples.

Half a dozen sarcophagi or fragments are excluded from this inventory although they have been labelled somewhere else as depicting the traditio legis. Two are so categorized in the iconographical index to the third volume of the Repertorium, but neither meets the basic requirements adopted here. Mikael Bøgh Rasmussen questioned in a footnote whether a fragment in San Lorenzo fuori le mura might be a traditio legis, but the piece is too small to support any conclusion. The centre of a sarcophagus in the Cathedral of San Pietro, Mantua, largely lost, preserves hints of the traditio legis (what appears to be Paul, perhaps

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25 This monument was described by Johannes Kollwitz and Helga Herdejürgen, Die ravennatischen Sarkophage, ASR VIII.2 (Berlin: Mann, 1979), 57–58 (cat. B6), as depicting the Gesetzübergabe an Paulus. They also included a similar monument in San Francesco, the so-called sarcophagus of Bishop Liberius (58–60, cat. B7), which has since been rejected as a modern work: Rep. II, page 144; Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 387.


the mound under Christ’s feet), but the figure at the right is probably female. Provoost tentatively proposed three more. Two are insufficiently complete to warrant their inclusion but the third, while it fails to meet the criteria, is nonetheless of some interest (Rep. I.26, ill. 73). A beardless Christ seated on a rock gestures with his right hand before a standing apostle (who resembles Peter) while holding a partially open scroll with his left on the other side before a young approaching figure. Between that figure and Christ stands a bald man who could be Paul. The Repertorium notice comments that this could originally have been a traditio legis representation, but heavily reworked. If so, it is either a novel version with Paul on Christ’s left receiving the volumen or a botched restoration.

ii) Other media

Wall painting

Only two frescoes have generally been accepted in the literature as representing the traditio legis. A painting on the lunette of an arcosolium in the catacomb ad decimum near Grottaferrata (ill. 74), i.e., at the tenth mile post from Rome, appears to be of the standard form, although the state of conservation prevents a precise reading. It displays a nimbed, bearded Christ on a mound from which four rivers flow. He holds an unfurled volumen with the words dominus legem dat (perhaps a later addition). The scroll is received

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29 Provoost, Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal, 1.61, referring to Rep. III.38, 293.

30 Snelders, “Traditio legis,” 322n6, includes only Grottaferrata. Other lists include both: Fabrizio Bisconti, Temi di iconografia paleocristiana (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2000), 289 (entry by Spera); Arbeiter, Das Mausoleum der Constantina, 126. Surprisingly Provoost, Vroegchristelijke Beeldtaal, 1.61, mentions no catacomb paintings of the traditio legis.

by Peter on his left with covered hands, while Paul stands on his right with arm raised in acclamation. The apocalyptic letters A and ω appear next to Christ.\(^\text{32}\)

Another painting, in the catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, has been largely destroyed.\(^\text{33}\) Only the vague tops of three figures can be made out. Wilpert made a sketchy drawing filling in the form of a standard *traditio legis* except for Christ's facial type (beardless and with short hair) and support (he stands on a globe rather than a mound).\(^\text{34}\)

Two other wall paintings often mentioned in this connection fail to meet the requirements adopted above. One is a famous fresco in the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter, Rome (ill. 75) depicting Christ seated between Peter and Paul.\(^\text{35}\) There is no open scroll. The other is in the catacomb of San Gennaro, Naples.\(^\text{36}\) Aside from being a non-metropolitan work dated to the sixth century, it is too far from the standard form to warrant inclusion: the young, beardless Christ holds an unfurled scroll on his knees rather than extending it to Peter. The roll may have included the *dominus legem dat* formula, but if so, it is illegible now.

\(^{32}\) A description provided by Scaglia in 1913 is more forthcoming than the surviving image. It is quoted by Recio Veganzones, “Las pinturas de la catacumba,” 387, who also reproduces an early watercolour by Wilpert (fig. 11 at 389). John M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum: Christian Propaganda at Rome in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries: A Study in Early Christian Iconography and Iconology* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1982), 11, expressed the view that the text on the scroll was probably added later. The apocalyptic letters are also suspect.


\(^{34}\) Wilpert's drawing is reproduced by Warburg, “Sobre un cubículo decorado,” 77 (fig. 10), who argues (76–77) that residual traces of pigment support Wilpert’s reconstruction. The globe resembles the support in the Naples mosaic discussed below.


Caskets

Three fourth-century boxes in different materials include images of the *traditio legis*. They are often designated as reliquaries although their functions cannot be ascertained with certainty.

An ivory casket, now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Venice (ill. 76), was found in 1906 across the Adriatic from Ravenna in Istria, near Pola at Samagher (it is commonly named after one of those two towns). Small panels with doves, lambs and a laurel wreath accompany the major carvings found on the four faces and the lid. The right side bears an unidentified, fragmentary ciborium while the left presents several figures, including a central group with a child before a narthex or basilica (various locations have been proposed as the likely model). On the front are more figures standing around an empty throne (there may once have been a metal cross). The rear panel shows six figures and architectural elements that, as will be discussed below, are important for a theory regarding the decoration of Old St Peter's. The lid, unfortunately not fully preserved, depicts what was probably a standard *traditio legis* with palms and lambs. Peter seems somewhat elevated and may be stepping onto a rock with his right leg, as found in some other examples (e.g., the slate mould in Trier noted below, ill. 87).

The other two caskets are similar to one another in iconography but not in style, size or material. The first is a small silver box discovered in 1966 at Nea Herakleia, near Thessaloniki, now in its Museum of Byzantine Culture. Its *traditio legis* appears on the

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front (ill. 77), accompanied by Daniel in the lions’ den and Moses receiving the law on the sides, with the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace on the back. The *traditio legis* presents only the basic ternary composition with no additional elements — no mound, rivers, lambs, palm trees or phoenix. The same minimalist approach is found on a much larger box of Proconnesian marble in the Museo Arcivescovile, Ravenna, the so-called casket of Saints Cyricus and Julitta. The adoration of the Magi is on the front, the ascension of Christ on the back, Daniel in the lions’ den on the right and the *traditio legis* on its left side (ill. 78). The Nea Herakleia casket is generally regarded as Theodosian. The Ravenna box probably dates from the early fifth century.

**Glass**

Two Roman gold-glasses now conserved in the Vatican Biblioteca Apostolica and the Toledo Museum of Art (ill. 79 and 80) miniaturize the standard *traditio legis* while preserving paraphernalia like palms and the mound with four rivers. The formula *dominus lege[m]* dat appears on the scroll in Toledo, the missing letter “m” being either an error or an elision. The Vatican gold-glass displays an incomplete text, probably *[dom]inus*. The upper portion of the scroll is damaged so that additional text, if present, can no longer be read. The scroll is long enough to have contained the rest of the formula, but only with an inversion of the word order, placing *dominus* at the end rather than the beginning of the sentence. Alternatively, *dominus* might have served as a synecdoche, the remaining words being implicitly written on the part of the scroll wrapped in Peter’s mantle.

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39 Inv. 77, measuring 50/51 x 37.5 x 20.5 cm. See Patrizia Angiolini Martinelli, *Corpus della scultura paleocristiana, bizantina ed altomedioevale di Ravenna* (Rome: De Luca, 1968), 81–82 (cat. 138), who dates it in the 440s. The Museo notice indicates “fifth century.”


41 Hellemo, *Adventus Domini*, 80, following Cäcelia Davis-Weyer, “Das Traditio-Legis-Bild und seine Nachfolge,” *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 12 (1961): 28, explained the single word *dominus* by insufficiency of space. But while the portion above the word is damaged, there was adequate exposed *volumen* to have supported the full *dominus legem dat*, although that is evidently not what was written. Thus Grimouard de Saint-Laurent, “Le Christ triomphant,” I.295, suggested the transposition of *[dom]inus* to the
Five incised glass fragments from Rome (or Ostia) may be associated, more or less securely, with the *traditio legis*. One, now in the Museo Histórico, Valencia (ill. 81), preserves enough of the representation to make out the ternary composition and bits of two other scenes. The *traditio legis* unusually includes the apocalyptic letters A and ω around a Chi-rho symbol above the scroll. A collection of a dozen or so crudely-cut fragments constitute the Obernburg plate in the Prähistorische Staatsammlung, Munich (ill. 82). They have been reconstructed into three registers, two with presumed biblical scenes. At the top is a variant *traditio legis* with the apostles reversed. This surprising alteration cannot be the result of looking through the glass the wrong way since all three figures have captions confirming their identity (another feature unique to this object). Perhaps it reflects a Pauline preference on the part of the patron. Peter does not acclaim Christ but instead holds a closed bookroll in covered hands.

Three other fragmentary glass plates are in the Vatican Biblioteca Apostolica. The first, found in Ostia, may safely be considered part of the right side of a *traditio legis* (ill. 83). It preserves a stylized *volumen* presented as a flat rectangle, on which appears (although unreadable on the reproduction) the abbreviated formula *lex domini*. As on the Valencia glass, the letter A appears at the left of the Chi-rho although the anticipated ω cannot be made out. Too little of the representation remains to determine anything else about its form. A second fragment, also from Ostia, provides a portion of what could be the left side end of the phrase (although he thought the full text was *pacem dat dominus*, based on the preserved text in the mosaic at Santa Costanza, discussed below). Vattuone assumed that the word *dominus* was part of the full formula in the normal word order (note 40 above). However, while there may be place above, there is no place below for the *legem dat*. Thus, unless Grimouard’s reordering hypothesis is accepted, the single word must be taken as only implying the rest. Yet the maker of this particular gold glass was not reticent about text. An inscription across the base of the image, below the *traditio legis* and above the lambs, reads: IERUSALE . IORDANES . BECLE, referring to the river Jordan and the cities of Jerusalem and presumably Bethlehem (the C may have replaced a ř). The common exhortation found on gold glasses, *Pie Z[esus]*, appears at the top.

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44 Inv. 60313; Donati, *Pietro e Paolo*, 216–217 (cat. 72, entry by Vattuone).
of a *traditio legis* (ill. 84). The central, standing figure is probably Christ, but the beardless man at his side does not resemble Paul. A third fragment preserves only the face of Christ with beard and nimbus, his shoulder, right arm and right hand in the typical *traditio legis* gesture (ill. 85). This object has not been classified as a *traditio legis* but it probably was.

**Bronze**

The *traditio legis* is found on the obverse of a bronze medallion in the Vatican Museums. Reproductions do not permit the details to be determined, but an old sketch by de Rossi shows a standard *traditio legis* surmounted by the exclamation Zosime Vivas (ill. 86).

**Slate**

The left portion of a relatively large (21 cm diameter) slate mould found in Trier in 1985 depicts a figure with the recognizable features of Peter, one foot on a rock, extending his covered hands. A palm tree can be seen behind him. When the negative mould is used to make a positive impression, it appears as the right half of a *traditio legis* (ill. 87). The object is unique for both its medium and northern origin. Lacking the figure of Paul, and with only a slight suggestion of Christ at the edge of the fragment, it is not possible to judge the complete form.

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45 60314/15 (two fragments); Donati, Pietro e Paolo, 216–217 (cat. 72, entry by Vattuone). This object is accepted as a *traditio legis* example by Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 126, and Fabrizio Paolucci, *L'arte del vetro inciso a Roma nel IV secolo d.C.* (Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2002), 48–49, although it is doubted by Geissler, *Traditio Legis*, 34–35 and bears a question mark in the Donati catalogue. It is impossible to tell whether it is an unusual variant or a different scene.

46 Paolucci, *L'arte del vetro inciso*, 77 (his fig. 107, page 76). Paolucci does not comment on the iconography. This object is not included in any of the usual *traditio legis* inventories. As well as the cross placed over Christ's right arm, where a Christogram appears on others of the glass fragments, this one seems to have a Chi-rho incongruously superimposed on or formed from the features of his face.

47 Museo Sacro, inv. 60956; Donati, Pietro e Paolo, 214 (cat. 60, entry by Goffredo); G. B. de Rossi, “Le medaglie di devozione dei primi sei o sette secoli della chiesa,” *Bulletino di archeologia cristiana* 7 (1869): 43–45.


**Marble**

Apart from sarcophagi and the Ravenna casket, one other marble *traditio legis* monument is known. It is an incised slab, probably a loculus closure, that was found in the cemetery of Priscilla in Rome and is now conserved in the Convento delle Oblate cistercensi, Anagni (ill. 88). The image shows a standard *traditio legis* with palms, mound and lambs exiting stylized miniature cities on either side representing Jerusalem and Bethlehem (compare *Rep.* II.150, ill. 52).

**Mosaic**

The only surviving monumental example of the *traditio legis* in Rome is an apse mosaic in the imperial mausoleum of Santa Costanza (ill. 89). The date, important in the discussion of the genealogy of the form of representation, has been estimated anywhere from 350 to the early fifth century. Achim Arbeiter, after carefully reviewing the evidence and scholarly opinions, reasonably suggested circa 370. The mosaic generally reflects the standard form with the notable exception that Christ is young and beardless. The face, however, is a later restoration and a seventeenth-century report describes the figure as bearded. The figures are more stylized than on most of the sarcophagi, and Christ appears among the clouds of what is likely meant to be the eastern sky. The scroll now bears the legend *dominus*

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51 The Santa Costanza mosaic is often considered in the *traditio legis* literature. The most recent and extensive treatment is Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 109–152, providing a careful examination of the *traditio legis* and *traditio clavis* apse mosaics, restoration history, and detailed review of the literature. Arbeiter’s own conclusions and inferences regarding the *traditio legis* are summarized at 144–147.

52 Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 147. The building is dated by Rasch (in that volume, p. 89) to the 340s. Absent specific archaeological evidence, Arbeiter’s proposal was based on a review of the literature, comparison to the full corpus of *traditio legis* monuments, and factors like the religious-political climate.


54 This is a common inference for images of this type and was proposed in connection with the Santa Costanza apse mosaic by Hellemo, *Adventus Domini*, 73. Although not remarked in the literature, the interpretation gains some credence in this case from the actual orientation of the building. The *traditio legis* is in the left axial niche and the entrance is on the northeast. See the orientation plan in Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, tafel 185B (the *traditio legis* is in the larger niche on the left labelled "m"). The viewer of the image is therefore facing southeast. It may be going too far to suggest that this is roughly the direction of...
This reference to “peace” instead of “law” has engendered considerable discussion, with some scholars endeavouring to divine different meanings for the two formulae. The better view is that the word was mistakenly changed during restoration.\(^{55}\)

Facing this mosaic in the opposite axial apse is another (ill. 90), traditionally regarded as the *traditio clavium* of Matthew 16:19 (“And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven”), although this interpretation has sometimes been doubted.\(^{56}\)

Outside the metropolis, another *traditio legis* mosaic is preserved in San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples (ill. 91).\(^{57}\) This is its only appearance in a baptistery. It is not in the centre of the cupola but sandwiched among pastoral and New Testament themes. Generally dated to the late fourth or early fifth century, the scene has been connected by some scholars with the rite carried out below, perhaps to certain particularities of the Neapolitan liturgy. It is in the standard form save that Christ stands on a globe rather than a mound. The complete and

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\(^{56}\) Walter Nikolaus Schumacher, “Eine römische Apsiskomposition,” *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 54 (1959): 140–148, argued that because the representation is rare in this period and particularly with the awkward arrangement of the two figures, it must originally have included Paul, with no reference to keys. Arbeiter, however, considered a sufficient portion of the mosaic original to doubt Schumacher’s proposed reconstruction: *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 112–115. Fabrizio Bisconti, “Variazione sul tema della Traditio legis: Vecchie e nuove acquisizioni,” *Vetere christianorum* 40 (2003): 264, pointed out that the *traditio clavium* was a recognized if not common fourth-century form of representation found, for example, on Rep. II.124. See also a late fourth-century silver ewer in the British Museum: Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 244–245 (cat. 67). The Latin expression *traditio clavium* is an interesting conflation of the biblical text, which uses the verb *dare*, not *tradere*, and the entrenched formula *traditio legis*.

correct formula *dominus legem dat* appears on the unfurled scroll. Below the Latin text are other, illegible marks that could be interpreted as pseudo-Hebrew.\(^{58}\)

Other Roman apse mosaics are sometimes cited in connection with the *traditio legis*, like those in the Roman church of Saints Cosmas and Damian and a series of ninth-century examples.\(^{59}\) While such monuments are undoubtedly of interest in a general study of the form of representation, its derivation and *fortuna*, they fall outside the scope of this inventory.

The most important monumental *traditio legis* does not survive and may never have existed. A lost apse composition in Old St Peter’s, usually assumed to be mosaic, has long been proposed as the *Ur*-image for the *traditio legis* (a possible reconstruction is ill. 92). In the words of Herbert L. Kessler: “The ultimate model [for a ninth-century fresco at Müstair] surely was the apse of St. Peter’s which may have been adorned with a *traditio legis* already by the middle of the fourth century.”\(^{60}\) The main source of evidence for this theory consists

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\(^{58}\) Suggested by Franz Nikolasch, “Zur Deutung des ‘Dominus-legem-dat’-Szene,” *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 64 (1969): 61, based on a comparison with similar technique in Santa Maria Maggiore; accepted by Hellewijn, *Adventus Domini*, 86. Pierre Vallin, “Dominus legem dat: à propos du baptistère de Naples,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 54 (1966): 265, following Maier, *Baptistère de Naples*, 42n4, proposed instead that the extra characters were meant to signify that the *volumen* was covered with additional text. The form of the letters supports the former solution. Compare the difference between Latin and Hebrew letters on the mosaics of Santa Sabina (see page 378 below).


\(^{60}\) Herbert L. Kessler, *Old St. Peter’s and Church Decoration in Medieval Italy* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2002), 189–190. A more categorical judgment was expressed by Andaloro and Romano, “L’immagine nell’abside,” 81–82. Earlier proponents of the Old St Peter’s prototype include Schumacher, “Eine römische Apsiskomposition,” 148–178, and Krautheimer, “A Note on the Inscription,” 318, 352–361 (with references to older literature in 318n11). The theory is commonly repeated in exhibition catalogues. See, e.g., Paolucci, *Petros Eni*, 154–156 (cat. III.6, entry by Evans). Josef Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1929–36), I.175, had proposed instead a lost early fourth-century model in the Lateran baptistery including only Christ and Peter, which suggestion does not seem to have attracted support. Recent scholarship has generally been cautious about the Old St Peter’s theory. See Bøgh Rasmussen, “Traditio legis – Bedeutung und Context,” 38–45; Jean-Michel Spieser, *Autour de la Traditio Legis* (Thessalonike: Ephoreia Byzantinon Archaeoteton Thessalonikes, 2004), 13–16; Beat Brenk, “Apses, Icons and ‘Image Propaganda’ before Iconoclasm,” *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011): 112–115; Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 145–147, 152. A balanced summary with bibliography is provided by Andaloro, *L’orizzonte tardoantico*, 87–90 (cat. 2a, entry by Moretti). Not only the iconography but also the date of any apse mosaic in Old St Peter’s is controversial. G. W. Bowersock, “Peter and Constantine,” in *St. Peter’s in the Vatican*, ed. William Tronzo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11–12, argued that the common “Constantinian” attribution of the original building was a retrospective historical construction and that it was most likely built by his son Constans. Sible De Blaauw, *Cultus et decor: liturgia e architettura nella Roma*
of drawings, circa 1600, prepared to record the appearance of the apse before its destruction following a papal decree of 1605 (ill. 93). Since the late antique mosaic had been replaced under Innocent III (1198-1216), any inference about the earlier decoration rests on the assumptions that the fourth-century program was well preserved 750 years later, and that the thirteenth-century version faithfully reproduced the original. Even so, the form of representation on the drawings is not, in fact, a traditio legis. Christ appears holding a closed book seated between Peter and Paul. These difficulties with the Renaissance evidence led Schumacher to develop an elaborate argument that a traditio legis prototype did appear in Old St Peter’s but only in a lower register, below the main composition reflected in the drawings.

A second source for the Old St Peter’s theory is the Pola casket. As remarked above, there is a traditio legis on the lid and a scene with an architectural feature on the back (ill. 76). This structure, a sanctuary with twisted columns, is commonly accepted as a representation of the Constantinian aedicule of Old St Peter’s, suggesting to some that the traditio legis on the lid portrayed the apse mosaic above. The casket could have been a memoria of some visit to the church, perhaps by Galla Placidia (392-450) upon the coronation of her six-year old son Valentinian III as Emperor in 425. Invocation of the Pola casket raises two distinct questions: whether the architectural element does reveal the interior of the shrine of Old St Peter’s in the middle of the fourth century, and if so, whether the traditio legis on the lid is properly connected to the scene on the back.

The principal clue connecting the interior depicted on the rear of the casket to Old St Peter’s is the columns. According to the Liber Pontificalis, Constantine gave the basilica “vined columns from Greece.” Dale Kinney, voicing a widely-held consensus, concludes that

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tardoantica e medievale: Basilica Salvatoris, Sanctae Mariae, Sancti Petri, trans. Maria Beatrice Annis (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1994), 2.459, and Krautheimer, “A Note on the Inscription,” both considered the mosaic to be a traditio legis and regarded it as a work of Constantius II.


63 Longhi, La capsella eburnea di Samagher, 109–137. In favour of the connection to Old St Peter’s, see also Paolucci, Petros Eni, 154–156 (cat. III.6, entry by Evans); Bisconti, “Variazione sul tema,” 263; Kessler, Old St. Peter’s, 189–190.
these “must be the famous twisted columns that immediately became St Peter’s hallmark.” The additional step of equating those columns with the ones on the Pola casket is open to question. There is an uncomfortable circularity in the reciprocal identification of the image on the casket as the church and the appearance of the church from the casket. Twisted columns are admittedly rare and the archaeological evidence supports their early presence in Old St Peter’s, but others were later brought into that basilica, having apparently been used elsewhere. The inference that the Pola casket depicts just this shrine is, therefore, inviting but uncertain.

Moreover, if the image on the rear of the casket does reproduce the sanctuary of Old St Peter’s, it does not inexorably follow that the traditio legis on the lid represents its apse. The box has other images with no apparent connection to that church: a hetoimasia on the front and two other architecturally framed scenes on the sides. One of these depicts the entrance to a church from its narthex, the other an interior ciborium. Other Roman churches have occasionally been suggested as models for these scenes. It is also noteworthy that while the lid and the back are often presented as if the traditio legis was directly above the shrine, that is not how the box was made. The bottom edge of the traditio legis representation abuts the front, the face with the hetoimasia, not the back with the twisted columns.

A third source of evidence for a traditio legis in the Constantinian basilica, after the drawings and the Pola casket, could be a letter written by Peter Damian (c. 1007 – 1072) to

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65 See, for example, De Blaauw, Cultus et Decor, 2.472. Bowersock, “Peter and Constantine,” 8, considered that the representation on the Pola casket provides “a fairly precise notion of the way in which the second-century shrine was incorporated into the fourth-century basilica.” The identification of the image on the Pola casket as a depiction of Old St Peter’s (and vice versa) is sometimes buttressed by reference to a lost and controversial medallion in the Biblioteca Apostolica. See Pani Ermini, Christiana Loca, 2.143–144. The medal also has twisted columns supporting an entablature. This devotional object, the so-called Successa medallion, is known only from a cast and its authenticity has been questioned. See Lucy Grig, “Portraits, Pontiffs and the Christianization of Fourth-Century Rome,” Papers of the British School at Rome 72 (2004): 223n105.
66 See Longhi, La capsella eburnea di Samagher, 43–96.
67 The clasp and hinges are not original but their placement is presumably correct taking into account the space for them visible on the ivory.
Abbot Desiderius (discussed further, for other reasons, in chapter 7). Its subject is the rationale for Peter’s appearance at Christ’s left side in ancient Roman representations, evidently troubling to the eleventh-century observer. The letter is interesting in the present context because it observes (or claims) that this form of representation goes back to Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester.  

Kessler considered it likely that Peter Damian “had real examples in mind,” referring to Santa Costanza (ill. 89) and Santa Pudenziana (ill. 94) as possibilities. The former is a traditio legis but not the latter, and neither is contemporary with Pope Sylvester or Constantine, although Peter Damian likely would not have known that. It is possible, but not subject to demonstration, that he was thinking of the eleventh-century state of the apse in Old St Peter’s, before the intervention under Innocent III.

None of the three bases for asserting that the fourth-century apse displayed a traditio legis is very robust. The Renaissance drawings might suggest there was a monumental figural composition, if one assumes the thirteenth-century mosaic continued the earlier decoration, but they do not indicate a traditio legis form. Neither the Pola casket nor Peter Damian’s intriguing comments quite bridge the gap to St Peter’s. Bøgh Rasmussen attributed the persistence of the arguments for an archetype in Old St Peter’s to scholarly discomfort with the lack of a firm origin for the image and the perceived need to connect it with church politics and the primacy of Peter. Leaving aside the ad hominem argument, his pessimism is persuasive.

iii) Summary

Having regard to self-imposed definitional and chronological restrictions, twenty-four metropolitan traditio legis sarcophagi have been identified, plus the seated “transitional”

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68 Petrus Damiani, Ep. 159 (sometimes called De picturis principum apostolorum).
Rep. I.677 and a possible fragment related to it, and five more from outside Rome. One can add some sixteen objects in other media: two catacomb paintings, two monumental mosaics, three caskets or reliquaries, two gold-glass and four incised glass objects, a slate mould, one bronze medallion and a marble loculus closure. Where the state of preservation is sufficient to make out the details, the standard traditio legis is almost always accompanied by a variety of additional attributes (palms, lambs, the mound), the minimalist versions on the Nea Herakleia and Ravenna boxes being notable exceptions. The reversal of Peter and Paul on the incised glass dish in Munich is also of interest. A different sort of reversal, in the direction of the “traditio,” occurs on two Ravennate sarcophagi: Rep. II.390 (ill. 72), and to a lesser degree, Rep. III.382.

The formula dominus legem dat is preserved on the Naples and Santa Costanza mosaics (in the latter case with pacem replacing legem, probably due to a restoration error) and the Grottaferrata fresco (perhaps a later addition, but if not too much later, with the same implications). It is found, subject to a missing “m,” on the Toledo gold-glass, and suggested by the truncated ...inus on the Vatican gold-glass. An abbreviated version, lex domini, appears on one of the cut glass pieces. No such text is visible on any of the sarcophagi.

b) Dating

Like the Jonah sarcophagi, the traditio legis monuments provide no squarely datable inscriptions. However, this group does present more external evidence of chronology than the much larger Jonah corpus. The best documented example is the sarcophagus of Flavius Gorgonius in Ancona (Rep. II.149, ill. 51). Its inscription refers to two of the deceased’s

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71 Not included is a fragment of fabric in Berlin that depicts Peter and what may be an enthroned Christ with a Greek inscription: “Peter receives the Psalter on bended knees.” Geissler, Traditio legis, 28–29, 69, related it to the traditio legis because Peter apparently receives a book from Christ. Since Christ is seated, the object is probably too late, and no one (including Geissler) suggests that the volumen on the traditio legis is a Psalter, it is not included in this inventory. Manuel Sotomayor, San Pedro, 129, called it “una escena completamente aparte.”

72 Compare Rep. I.26 (ill. 73) where the figures are also reversed, although that may be due to mistaken restoration.

73 Huskinson, John, Concordia Apostolorum, 30, suggested that the shift in favouritism from Peter to Paul could reflect a local attachment to the apostle of the Gentiles. See also Cooper, Marius Victorinus’ Commentary, 84–85.
functions, *comes rerum privatarum* and praetorian prefect, both in the past tense. Literary sources indicate that he held the first, less exalted office in 386.  

We cannot be certain how long Flavius lived after retiring as prefect, nor whether the monument might have been produced somewhat after his death (or, theoretically, before, with the inscription later incised on the tabula), but it is unlikely to have been made before 390 and can probably be assigned with reasonable assurance to that decade, or perhaps even the next.

Less definite but still useful extrinsic information is available with respect to the luxurious and monumental sarcophagus in Sant’Ambrogio, Milan (Rep. II.150, ill. 52). It bears no inscription but is generally thought to have been installed in the original basilica, which was built beginning in 379 and dedicated in 386. The latter date coincides with the relocation of the imperial court in Milan, considered a *terminus post quem* for the sarcophagus by some.  

Dresken-Weiland, in the *Repertorium* notice, contented herself with a dating of 380–400. Unlike many such ranges, this one can lay some claim to external support.

One monument dated by inscription that is often discussed in the context of the *traditio legis* is the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Rep. I.680, ill. 68). Alice T. Christ claimed that “in August 359, according to its inscription, the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus was deposited” in Saint Peter’s. However, the inscription makes no reference to the deposition of the sarcophagus, or of Bassus for that matter. It refers only to his death (*iit ad deum*) and the monument was very likely produced thereafter. Nonetheless, a dating in the vicinity of

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74 See the prosopographic references in the *Repertorium* entry; Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophage Roms*, 91. Symmachus, Ep. 1.39, referred to a certain Gorgonius of Ancona in correspondence with Ausonius. The letter has been dated to 379, which would not further advance our inquiry into the date of the sarcophagus.


77 If the sarcophagus was actually ready in time for his funeral, it must have been commissioned earlier by the deceased or his family. While the preparation of such luxury monuments in advance is often suggested (see Introduction, note 49, in this case there is no hint of a previous commission in either the inscription or the distichs on the lid, and what little we know about the circumstances of his death would suggest otherwise: Bassus died *neofitus* during his term in office as prefect at the age of forty-two. Dresken-Weiland, *Rep.* II, page XIV, expressed doubt that the sarcophagus was commissioned in advance. On the text of the distichs, see Alan Cameron, “The Funeral of Junius Bassus.” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 139 (2002): 288–290. The
360 is sufficiently precise and would be valuable if one accepted an orderly progression from the Bassus sarcophagus, through the “intermediary” seated variant traditio legis (Rep. I.677, ill. 66), to the standard form. There is, however, no equivalent of biological evolution in the production of sarcophagi. A seated Christ holding a partly opened volumen could presage the traditio legis, but it could equally represent a vestigial or conservative form.

The “body of accepted facts,” to recall the language of the general consideration of dating in the Introduction, thus consists of one relatively securely dated sarcophagus (Ancona) and another with a date suggested by the architectural and political context (Milan). Both fall in the period 380 to just after 400, probably later than earlier within that range. For a corpus of twenty-four monuments this is not a copious amount of information, but neither is it insignificant.

Two further factors offer possible constraints on the dates of traditio legis sarcophagi. The first, and more speculative, is doctrinal. John Huskinson proposed that the form of representation was probably developed under Pope Liberius (352-366) in the aftermath of the spiritually problematic imperial reigns of the Arian Constantius II (337-361) and the pagan Julian (361-363). Cäcilia Davis-Weyer remarked that Liberius’s successor, Damasus (366-384), convened a synod in 382 and produced a claim for primacy over the eastern churches based on Rome’s special connection with both Peter and Paul by reason of their activity and joint martyrdom in the capital under Nero. She related this literary image to the traditio legis, the development of which might, therefore, be associated with clerics in the circle of the Roman bishop, most likely somewhat earlier than 382 since Damasus was influential during the pontificate of his predecessor. These two analyses situate the beginnings of the traditio legis somewhere between the late 360s and around 380.

The second, more widely accepted temporal constraint posits a terminus ante quem. Scholars are in general agreement that Roman sarcophagus production ended in the first

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full inscription (ICUR 2.4164) reads: “Iun(ius) Bassus v(ir) c(larissimus) qui vixit annis XLII men(sibus) II in ipsa praefectura urbi neofitus iit ad deum VIII kal(endas) sept(e)mbres) Eusebio et Ypatio co(n)ss(ulibus).”

Huskinson, Concordium Apostolorum, 115.

decades of the fifth century. It is an inference from silence — apart from imports, no later Roman sarcophagi have been identified — and the explanation is controversial. Some see a connection with the sack of Rome in 410; others prefer a social or intellectual cause, a change in mentalité. In either case, this suggests a relatively narrow period of production, spanning less than fifty years.

Individual traditio legis sarcophagi are assigned dates in the Repertorium and elsewhere based on the usual technique of comparative analysis, relying in particular on the Ancona and Milan examples (Rep. II.149 and 150) but also a number of other datable monuments that seem to be similar, either stylistically or iconographically. This comparative process presents the same issues discussed in the Introduction. How can we know whether a particular sarcophagus that is similar in appearance to another was made at the same time, or even within a relatively short interval? Workshops may have continued to follow old precedents and practices. Some patrons may have been particularly attracted to earlier models. The debate regarding the relationship between the sarcophagus in Sant’Ambrogio, Milan (Rep. II.150, ill. 52) and the Borghese Sarcophagus in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (Rep. III.428, ill. 56) is illustrative. The traditio legis on the front and the similar iconographies on the side panels confirm a close connection between the two monuments. Some scholars

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80 Brandenburg expressed doubt regarding the causal connection between the Gothic invasion and the end of Roman sarcophagus production. See Hugo Brandenburg, "Das Ende der antiken Sarkophagkunst in Rom: Pagane und christliche Sarkophage in Rom," in Akten des Symposiums "Frühchristliche Sarkophage": Marburg, 30.6.–4.7.1999, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 19–39; Hugo Brandenburg, "Osservazioni sulla fine della produzione e dell’uso dei sarcofagi a rilievo nella tarda antichità nonché sulla loro decorazione," in Sarcofagi tardoantichi, paleocristiani e altomedievali: Atti della giornata tematica dei Seminari di archeologia cristiana (École française de Rome – 8 maggio 2002), ed. Fabrizio Bisconti and Hugo Brandenburg (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archaeologia Cristiana, 2004), 1–34. See also Dresken-Weiland, Introduction to Rep. Ill. XVIII. Both scholars refer to some of the contrary literature, including Koch, Frührchristliche Sarkophage, 223, 339, 360. See also Wrede, Senatorische Sarkophage Roms, 92. Whatever the cause, Koch’s list of external evidence for sarcophagus dating discloses no datable inscriptions after 408. The Probus sarcophagus (Rep. I.678) could in theory be later, 412 or even 431, but it could also be dated to 388, depending on which member of the family it was intended for. Brandenburg, “Osservazioni,” 5–7, discussed the suspected late examples showing that Roman production declined rapidly and concluding that it ceased no later than the first third of the fifth century.

81 See the chart in Koch, Frührchristliche Sarkophage, 355–360.

82 The right short sides present a group of togate figures with Abraham, the left sides the ascension of Elias to Heaven and Moses receiving the law. The backs are quite different. The elaborate “teaching” scene of the Milan chest is replaced on the Borghese sarcophagus by striated panels around a central shepherd and
have argued that the Milan monument was the model for the Paris, and others the opposite. Such disagreements recommend caution regarding both specific dating proposals and claims of chronological priority.

Another potential basis for assigning dates to the traditio legis sarcophagi is comparison with monuments in other media. More often than not, however, the dating of these representations relies upon, rather than informs, that of the sarcophagi. Some are generally accepted to be later manifestations of an already established theme, thus offering no assistance in establishing chronology. Monumental works could be particularly important because most scholars favour (or assume) an existing or lost apse decoration to have been the source of the form of representation. The only surviving specimen in Rome is the apse mosaic in Santa Costanza, best dated around 370. This is consistent with the conventional dating of the sarcophagi but provides no independent corroboration. The example in Naples is certainly later. The possibility of an archetypal model for the traditio legis in a lost composition, whether in Old St Peter’s or elsewhere, cannot assist in formulating a hypothesis for the date of its appearance on Roman sarcophagi.

The literature has assigned the entire group of traditio legis sarcophagi to a relatively narrow range, generally within the last third of the fourth century, and without further differentiation. This situates them after the terminus post quem suggested by Huskinson (perhaps only slightly earlier than indicated by Davis-Weyer’s reasoning) and comfortably before the terminus ante quem imposed by the end of Roman production. The seated “transitional” version (Rep. I.677, ill. 66) is dated only a bit earlier in the Repertorium, to the togate figures at the corners (the back is separated from the front and conserved not in Paris but at the Musei Capitolini, Rome, catalogued as Rep. I.829). A likely explanation is a different anticipated placement.

83 The two positions are reflected in the Repertorium entry, although the Borghese sarcophagus is dated “late fourth-century,” suggesting the Milanese monument would be the earlier. Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage, 362, considered that either priority could be correct.

84 Dagmar Stutzinger, Die frühchristlichen Sarkophagreliefs aus Rom: Untersuchungen zur Formveränderung im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1982), 163–176, discusses workshop practice and chronology in the late fourth century with considerable focus on the Milan-Borghese example. Her attempt to tease out relative dates by discerning “developments” from one monument to another relies on the questionable assumption that time’s arrow pointed in one direction in the carving trade.

third quarter of the century. A few of the standard group are placed closer to the year 400 and two, the Verona sarcophagus (Rep. II.152, ill. 53) and one of the fragments (Rep. II.154, ill. 64), into the beginning of the fifth century. Koch dated twenty-one of the twenty-six composing his *traditio legis* group as “Valentinian-Theodosian,” meaning 360/370-400. He did not mention three of the fragments, gave an alternative of possibly after 400 for Rep. I.724 (ill. 61), and suggested circa 400 for two that he regarded as non-metropolitan productions (Rep. III.465, ill. 57; Rep. III.499, ill. 58).  

Figure 6.1 follows the approach in Figure 4.1 for the more numerous and chronologically diverse Jonah group. The result is simpler, because almost all the *traditio legis* sarcophagi fall in the last third of the fourth century with perhaps outliers in the first part of the fifth.

![Figure 6.1](image)

**Figure 6.1 Number of Roman *traditio legis* sarcophagi by date**

The probability function, analogous to Figure 4.2, yields a tight distribution with the curve falling steeply on both sides, especially on the left.

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This conclusion regarding the dating of the *traditio legis* group is consistent with the increasingly steep incline of the wealth pyramid in the fourth century. As a group, these monuments are relatively large and elaborate, which is to say expensive. Some are especially luxurious and demonstrably destined for the highest strata of patrons and viewers. Over the course of the fourth century, the rich got richer and the sarcophagus population, albeit more heavily Christianized, represented a progressively smaller portion of the total.
Chapter 7. Meaning and reception

The *traditio legis* has received a variety of hotly defended and vigorously contested interpretations. It is only a slight over-simplification to assign scholars to one of two schools of thought. The investiture theory dominated the literature until after the middle of the twentieth century. Its narrowest statement regards the scene as the bestowal of authority on Peter and his Roman church. This would elaborate Matthew 16:18, where Jesus instructs Peter to build his church “upon this rock” and gives him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. A more liberal form of investiture theory gives equal, or nearly equal, weight to the two princes of the apostles, Peter’s privileged status as recipient of the *volumen* being balanced by Paul’s position at Christ’s right hand. Finally, investiture may be expanded to the apostolic college as a whole, and implicitly to the church as its continuator. Peter and Paul are *primi inter pares*, representatives of the ecclesiastical and evangelical roles cast by Jesus on his disciples and inherited by the church.

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4 The synecdochic reading is not restricted to investiture theorists. Fabrizio Bisconti, “Variazione sul tema della *Traditio legis*: Vecchie e nuove acquisizioni,” *Vetera christianorum* 40 (2003): 266, argues that precisely because the image expresses the “mystery of resurrection” rather than historical events, the presence of Peter and Paul can only be a visual reduction. See page 383 below.
The other interpretive school regards the *traditio legis* as "eschatological" (the term and its meaning(s) will be discussed towards the end of this chapter). This is based in part on the almost invariable presence of such symbolic attributes as palms, lambs, rivers or a phoenix, but also on the overall form of the image and its predominant use in the funerary space, at least among the surviving monuments. Like investiture, eschatology is not a monolithic interpretive strategy. It may refer to the Christian understanding of history, the Incarnation and Resurrection, the theological status of the soul, or the second Parousia, whether imminent or indeterminate.5

Scholars from both parties generally adopt one of three hermeneutic approaches. Although no longer common, some prefer a single, univalent interpretation. Most accept, perhaps grudgingly, a hierarchy, permitting some role for less favoured alternatives.6 A third, smaller, group ascribes to the *traditio legis* a composite, “unisex” meaning, collapsing any hierarchy into a blur of imperial, ecclesiastical, apostolic, eschatological and apocalyptic associations.7 The univalent approach imposes a singular experience on all viewers of all monuments, while the hierarchic system establishes an unwavering order of precedence. The preferred interpretation often relies on certain forms or elements and it may have a particular doctrinal hue. Monuments that include these characteristics become the primary


7 For example Klaus Berger, “Der traditionsgeschichtliche Ursprung der 'traditio legis',' *Vigiliae Christianae* 27 (1973): 118. concludes (my translation): “The representation of the traditio legis means: Peter and Paul are the principal authorities; their teaching has its source in a heavenly text that Jesus handed them upon his leave-taking. But the content of this text is an apocalypse, i.e., instructions regarding the relationship between the fulfillment of commandments and the last judgment. Those who can trace this doctrine back through Peter and Paul to Jesus himself may be assured of everlasting life.” See also Barbara Mazzei, "La pittura e la scultura funerarie: tangenze e divergenze nel processo di formazione del repertorio paleocristiano," *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011): 92.
or “correct” examples. Viewers of the desired persuasion are the normative beholders. The compendious interpretation has the potential to avoid those criticisms, but only if it is truly multivalent and not yet another imposition of one meaning, in this case a universal smorgasbord, on all subjects and objects.

What is missing in these approaches is recognition of diversity. The traditio legis sarcophagi are largely a Roman phenomenon, although some produced in the metropolis were exported to Northern Italy and Gaul (leaving to one side the variants actually produced elsewhere). Given the chronology of this group of sarcophagi, the original viewers can be assigned to a relatively brief period, no more than half a century. They belonged to a narrow — and progressively narrower — upper stratum of wealth and status. For the most part they can be assumed to have been Christians, relatives and friends of deceased individuals who had professed that religion.

Yet even within the last decades of the fourth century, and restricting ourselves to this group of “high-end” sarcophagi, the Roman sarcophagus population included senatorial families and comfortable office-holders. They had different educational backgrounds; the degree and nature of their religious commitment could vary considerably, both between and within families. There is no reason to suppose that all the viewers of a particular traditio legis sarcophagus experienced it in the same way or with the same intellectual, spiritual and emotional result.

Like their beholders, the monuments also have their individual traits. Since Grimouard de Saint-Laurent recognized this iconographically defined group of representations, its coherence has been accepted, even if its boundaries remain uncertain. The emphasis on similarities, valuable though it is, cannot and should not mask the differences. Some of these could be attributable to workshop habits (perhaps the number and placement of palms) and others to patronal preferences (like the addition of diminutive figures). The choice of columnar or city-gate architectonic elements could arise from either. There may have been irrelevant distinctions, like the crooked or straight right arm of Christ, but others undoubtedly mattered.
The diversity of viewers and images demands humility in projecting, accepting, rejecting or ranking interpretations.\(^8\) The approach here takes seriously the activity and individuality of reception, particular to the viewer, the monument, and the occasion. Confronting a novel and complex image, the beholder must deconstruct and reconstruct. The emotional context does not suggest a rigorous analytic exercise, but nor is an intuitive, holistic and settled understanding of the image very likely. Viewers muddled through by casting their eyes across the representation, taking in its parts and forming opinions as to what it all meant, what the image said to them about death and their departed friend or loved one. Attention would naturally focus on the central figure of Christ, but he was engaged in different actions with each of Paul and Peter on his right and left. Scholars ignore the work of the viewer, accepting the *traditio legis* as a fixed, distinctive, and integrated form. It is, of course, a single image, but that singularity is achieved only through an effort on the part of the spectator, a resolution and assimilation of its parts.

After settling on the identification of the actors in the ternary scene, the discussion in this chapter proceeds by disaggregating the left and right sides of the image. It is tempting to imagine that the viewer’s “reading” progressed from left to right based on literary habit. In any event, that is how we will proceed. The headings adopt Christ’s vantage point rather than the beholder’s because of the importance of the right-left distinction in antique and medieval iconography. Before reassembling the component images, the elements that do not naturally associate with one side or the other — the background to and the context of the *traditio legis* — will be remarked. The final synthesis addresses some implications of the construction of the image, and more generally returns to the experience of the whole.

1. **The three men**

The conventional, indeed the universal understanding of the *traditio legis* is that the three standing, male figures are, from left to right (as seen by the viewer), Paul, Christ and Peter.

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\(^8\) Contrary to the hubris of Huskinson, John, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 25: “The origin and meaning of the *traditio legis* is much debated but its basic message is clear: the two Roman apostles, Peter and Paul, stand as witnesses to the, initially young, Christ, triumphant in Heaven.” This clarity apparently escaped the many scholars who expressed different views.
Of all the monuments only one, the Obernburg incised glass plate (ill. 82) explicitly identifies (and reverses) them. Before delving into the subtleties of their complex interactions one must be satisfied that fourth-century sarcophagus viewers knew who they were.

The particularization of the portrait features of Peter and Paul has been much studied.⁹ Peter’s was settled earlier and is more easily constructed because of the many events of his life that appeared in catacomb painting and on sarcophagi. Scenes associated with the life of Paul are less common, and his physiognomy developed mainly in opposition to the figure of Peter as a Roman sculptural convention for double portraiture. Both apostles are identified by inscription on many gold-glasses. By the middle of the fourth century, the figural types now familiar in medieval and Renaissance painting were fixed: Paul with high forehead and pointy beard, Peter with short hair and close-cropped, almost squared beard.¹⁰ There is no reason to suppose that viewers of the traditio legis sarcophagi would have failed to recognize the apostles. If some did, a companion at the tomb could undoubtedly have instructed them.

Although Christ is the most recognizable of all to the modern observer, this familiarity should not quickly be imposed on fourth-century viewers. The Lord’s personal iconography was not unequivocal. The bearded, mature form on the traditio legis sarcophagi (the figural type is discussed below) that became dominant in later centuries was not yet widespread.¹¹

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¹⁰ Which is not to say that there are no exceptions. The so-called Two Brother Sarcophagus (Rep. I.45), for example, includes evidently Petrine scenes but the figure looks more like Paul. It is dated in the Repertorium to the second third of the century, probably in part because of the unsettled portrait features.

¹¹ The precedents for the bearded Christ referred to in this discussion are monuments because the literary record provides no significant assistance. Josef Sauer, “Das Aufkommen des bärtigen Christus-Typus in der frühchristlichen Kunst,” in Bulicev zbornik: naucni prilozi posvecé ni Franu Bulicu, prigodom LXXV. godisnjice njegova života od učenika i prijatelja IV. oktobra MCMXXI, ed. Mihovil Abramic and Viktor Hoffiller (Zagreb: Narodnin Novina, 1924), 303–307, may have provided the last serious, if brief, attempt to find patristic assistance. Acknowledging that there was no explicit support for the depiction of the bearded Christ in early
Instead, a youthful figure with locks of curly hair was the norm. To begin with sarcophagi, one finds this younger form used almost exclusively to represent Jesus in the many miracle and other narrative and biblical representations that populate Christian sarcophagi. There seem to be only two secure exceptions. One is the appearance of several bearded Christ figures on the polychrome fragment in the Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome (Rep. I.773, ill. 96). The other is on the right short side of Rep. I.677 (ill. 66), standing before a kneeling woman. In these two cases, Christ is quite different from the *traditio legis* in hair style and general demeanour.

The young facial type is also the usual figural choice when Christ is accompanied by apostles in “teaching” scenes, including on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Rep. I.680, ill. 68) and the back of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus (Rep. II.150, ill. 52). Again, there seem to be only two known exceptions. Christ is even depicted clean-shaven standing with his Christian literature (303), he attempted nonetheless to tease out such an inference. For example, in their critique of the Carpocratian heresy, several theologians remarked that the sect’s adherents worshipped a portrait of Jesus alongside others of Greek philosophers, Homer, or Asclepius (306). Sauer concluded that Christ must have been bearded as one would expect the others to have been, but his sources do not provide much support. Augustine, for example, observes that the Carpocratian Marcellina worshipped images of Jesus and Paul together with Homer and Pythagoras (*De haeresibus*, 7.9). This no more suggests that Jesus looked like Homer than that he resembled Paul. Sauer also referred to the description by Eusebius (*EH*, 7.18) of a bronze statue said to be of Christ and the woman with an issue of blood. Eusebius does not describe the facial type but Sauer noted later references that could be to this sculpture ascribing it a pagan origin, perhaps an emperor or Asclepius, from which he inferred that it, too, must have been bearded. Sauer is cited and his conclusion approved by Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 301, with no additional analysis or further sources.

12 The female figure is variously identified as the woman with the issue of blood, the Canaanite woman or even Mary Magdalene (references in the *Repertorium* entry). On this same relief, Peter drawing water from a rock is clean-shaven, but his head has been restored. Several bearded Christ figures in narrative scenes may also be set aside as the result of erroneous restorations. In the Raising of Lazarus on the Jonah Sarcophagus (Rep. I.35, ill. 4), for example, Christ has a closely cropped beard in the *Repertorium* photograph but this has since been corrected (as appears in my illustration) following a seventeenth-century drawing. Several miracle scenes on Rep. I.44 are also incorrect. (These were remarked by Sauer, “Aufkommen,” 316.) Another example is Rep. II.30 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on which several bearded figures of Christ were added in the nineteenth century: Helen Evans, “An Early Christian Sarcophagus from Rome Lost and found,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 28 (1993): 77–84.

13 Zanker, *Mask of Socrates*, 292–296, 300–304, argued the case for the philosopher-Christ image in such scenes as if the examples were far more numerous than they actually are. He cited two sarcophagi—the sarcophagus of Concordius (Rep. III.65, ill. 67) and a seated, bearded Christ with a codex on a strigilated front in Santa Agnese fori le mura (Rep. I.729). One could add the fragmentary Rep. III.66 in Arles. But almost all the many other renditions of this type of scene adopt the youthful form. See, for example, Rep. I.30, 51, 52, 53, 72, 123, Rep. II.132 (the well-known “statue” of Christ in the Museo Nazionale Romano), and Rep.III.61, 63.
jewelled cross on the triumphalist sarcophagus of Probus (Rep. I.678, ill. 98). The bearded Christ on Rep. I.189 in the Cimitero di San Sebastiano (ill. 102) may be derivative from the *traditio legis*: a standing figure with the same right-hand gesture.

Another potential lapidary bearded Christ appears on the “Dogmatic Sarcophagus” in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Rep. I.43, ill. 103), so named for the traditional although not universally accepted interpretation of the scene at the left of the upper register as the creation of Eve in the presence of the three Persons of the Trinity. On this reading of the image, Christ must be the bearded figure standing to the right (as seen by the viewer) of the seated Father, with the Holy Spirit on the other side. The Trinitarian interpretation is open to challenge on a number of grounds, including the improbable placement of Christ at the left hand of God and his reappearance in the very next scene standing, now unbearded, between Adam and Eve. One could read the three identical figures as representing God in a continuous narrative of creation. A similar scene appears in the same location on a sarcophagus in Arles (Rep. III.38, ill. 104), but in this case the putative Christ figure is a beardless young man. In sum, the bearded figure with his hand on Eve’s head on the Dogmatic Sarcophagus is at best an anomaly, and quite possibly not Christ at all.

There are, then, very few secure representations of a mature, bearded Christ on fourth-century sarcophagi. Unless the extant sample is improbably unrepresentative, it is unlikely that a first-time beholder of the *traditio legis* had previously encountered this form of

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291, 292. Rep. I.582 is a small fragment with the bust of a bearded figure that could be Christ; indeed it could be a *traditio legis*. Rep. III.219 is another small fragment. A seated, bearded figure is accompanied by others who are standing. The scene has been interpreted as a *missio apostolorum*, in which case the bearded one is Christ. It is adjacent to an Ascension and perhaps should therefore be regarded as an unusual form of the appearance of the risen Christ to his apostles.


15 Jensen, *Face to Face*, 127–128, speculates that the appearance of Christ under both guises on the same monument could reflect an attempt to express different moments or aspects.
representation of Christ in this medium. Nor would it have been commonly met in any other. Christ is invariably young — except in the *traditio legis* — on the many gold-glasses depicting him.\textsuperscript{16} This is also the preferred form in funerary painting, although there are some exceptions, notably representations of the bearded Christ seated between Peter and Paul in the catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter and Via Latina, and the famous bust on the vault in the Cubiculum Leonis of the catacomb of Commodilla.\textsuperscript{17} Domestic or secular decoration is poorly preserved and what does subsist is difficult to interpret. The two most suggestive examples are a British floor mosaic and an opus sectile panel from Ostia. The face is clean-shaven on the former and bearded on the latter, and in both cases there is controversy whether the figure is Christ.\textsuperscript{18}

Two monumental mosaics with the bearded Christ should be remarked. The first is the *traditio clavium* in the apse of Santa Costanza (ill. 90), directly opposite the *traditio legis*. Like the beardless face on that pendant, Christ’s physiognomy here is the result of modern

\textsuperscript{16} Charles Rufus Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library with Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1959), remains the most complete catalogue. It includes dozens of depictions of Christ in a variety of miracle scenes, with Peter and Paul, or accompanying and often crowning other saints. In every case where his face is preserved (unfortunately it is lost on the Vatican *traditio legis*, chapter 6, note 40 above) it is youthful and without facial hair. The mature, bearded Christ is found on the Toledo *traditio legis* gold-glass (chapter 6, note 40).

\textsuperscript{17} On the teaching scene in the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter and the Via Latina fresco, see chapter 6, note 35 above. On the Commodilla bust, see Maria Andaloro (ed.), *L’orizzonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini*: 312–468 (Milan: Jaca, 2006), 172–173 (cat. 19, entry by Proverbio); Johannes Georg Deckers, Gabriele Mietke and Albrecht Weiland (eds.), *Die Katakomben "Commodilla": Repertorium der Malereien* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1994), 102–104, where it is dated late- or post-Damasus. Josef Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Freiburg: Herder, 1903), 103, remarked the rarity of the bearded Christ. He cited one example in the catacomb of Domitilla (his taf. 40.2), dated by him to the first half of the third century. This standing figure holds a book in his left hand, probably a folded scroll, with his right in a *traditio legis* type gesture. Wilpert indicated that he was aware of only three later bearded examples.

\textsuperscript{18} On the floor at Hinton St Mary, Dorset, see Susan Pearce, “The Hinton St Mary Mosaic Pavement: Christ Or Emperor?” *Britannia* 39 (2008): 193–218, for a careful and recent review of the controversy over the identification of the figure, concluding that it is more likely in imperial portrait than Christ. It is generally dated near the middle of the fourth century. On the opus sectile work from Ostia, dated 385–393, see Andaloro, *L’orizzonte tardoantico*, 276–285 (cat. 39, entry by Leardi); Rainer Warland, *Das Brustbild Christi: Studien zur spätantiken und frühbyzantinischen Bildgeschichte* (Rome: Herder, 1986), 195–196 (cat. A3). Zanker, *Mask of Socrates*, 316, among others, has argued that this figure represents a philosopher, not Christ. These debates appear to be lost on other commentators who assert without discussion that both these figures are Christ. See, for example, Jensen, *Face to Face*, 31–32.
restoration. In any event, this building was an imperial mausoleum, not a publicly accessible place of worship. More important is the apse decoration of Santa Pudenziana, produced somewhat later than most traditio legis sarcophagi. It, too, has been the object of considerable restoration over the centuries but the bearded face of Christ appears to be original. There could have been other apse mosaics potentially visible to members of the Roman Christian élite and sub-élite that portrayed a bearded Christ outside the context of the traditio legis, but this must remain conjectural.

Finally, there is a small group of objects on which the bearded Christ does appear to be the preferred form of representation. These present images of the crucifixion, rarely depicted before the fifth century. The earliest public expression that has survived is a carved wooden panel of the doors of Santa Sabina, Rome (second quarter of the fifth century) where Christ is bearded, as he is on two earlier carved stones of uncertain date and probably of eastern manufacture. The sample is too small to permit any inferences about either the

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19 Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 114–115. The accounts for work in 1843 refer to restoration of “la testa del Salvatore” (115n107). The restoration of Peter as an implausibly youthful figure on the same mosaic is additional reason for caution.


21 Warland, *Das Brustbild Christi*, 31–41, presents an argument that does not convince this author in favour of a pantocrator-style Christ above a cross and below a dove in the apse of San Giovanni in Laterano, similar to the thirteenth-century mosaic that now fills this space. A more tentative conclusion in the same sense was expressed by Hugo Brandenburg, *Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century: The Dawn of Christian Architecture in the West* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 26. If there was a representation that even vaguely resembles the later work, for which there is no evidence, it could just as easily have depicted a youthful Christ, revised in the subsequent mosaic.

22 See Jeffrey Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (Fort Worth: The Kimbell Art Museum, 2007), 227–229. Both of the stones are conserved in the British Museum (MME 1986.05.01.1 and MME 1895.11–13.1) and included in Spier’s catalogue (cat. 55, 56). On the Santa Sabina doors, see also Gisela Jeremias, *Die Holztür der Basilika S. Sabina in Rom* (Tübingen : Ernst Wasmuth, 1980).
association of a bearded Christ with his crucifixion or the potential dissemination of the bearded image in Rome through the medium of gem stones.

In sum, the experience of fourth-century Roman Christians was mainly restricted to the depiction of Christ as a beardless young man with curly locks. The bearded figure with long, thick, wavy hair they encountered on a traditio legis sarcophagus was not an entirely new invention but its appearance must have been a case of first impression for most viewers. There are hints on a few objects, although not sarcophagi, that the middle figure was, indeed, meant to be Christ. The Obernburg plate identifies him as SALBATOR (ill. 82), although this is a particularly unhelpful example, since inconsistent with the standard traditio legis, it reproduces the youthful facial type. The Chi-rho, a form of Jesus’s monogram, appears on this and other incised glasses but is not repeated in other media. An inscription on the Vatican gold-glass (ill. 79) names geographical markers that point to Christ — the River Jordan, Jerusalem and Bethlehem — but it is found only on this one object. Given the lack of identifying text on the vast majority of traditio legis monuments, or on any other representations of the mature, bearded figure we recognize as Christ, viewers must be assumed to have made their own determination without such assistance.

That determination was dictated by basic visual indicators, position and size. The central of the three figures would be expected to have an even higher status than his fellows, the princes of the apostles. Apart from Christ, that leaves few possibilities. Frederick W. Schlatter proposed that the similar figural type enthroned at the centre of the apse mosaic in Santa Pudenziana (ill. 94) was a depiction of God the Father. Might this be the case for the traditio legis, or even for a significant part of its viewing public? There are several reasons to think not. First, Schlatter’s interpretation of Santa Pudenziana has not found traction among scholars. Second, his rationale was based on a purported close connection

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24 While his articles are cited for other aspects of the analysis, this theory regarding the identification of the central figure seems to have no follower and is almost never mentioned. Dulaey, “*Dominus conservator ecclesiae Pudentianae*,” 224, opined that the figure is “obviously Christ,” and at 224n8 she expressly rejects Schlatter’s opinion to the contrary: “Il faut beaucoup d’acrobaties pour faire de la mosaïque une
between specific elements of that monumental mosaic (interior architecture, cityscape, four living creatures) and Jerome’s commentary on Ezekiel. None of these appear on the *traditio legis*. Instead, the additional attributes on this form of representation provide further clues for the identification of the central figure as Christ, notably symbols of resurrection (palms, phoenix) and sacrifice (lambs).

It is, therefore, safe to accept the conventional identification of the three male figures in the ternary image. However the unusual depiction of Christ, as well as its potential connection with God the Father, will return in the course of the discussion in this chapter.

2. **The Lord’s right**

The portion of the representation under consideration here is not defined by a vertical line drawn through the centre of Christ; it is, rather, the image shorn of what is going on at its right (Christ's left). The viewer encounters the dominant figure of the Lord gesturing with his right hand and Paul accompanying him, ignoring for the moment Peter and the unfurled bookroll on the other side.

a) **Paul**

Paul is depicted in full or three-quarters profile, erect, turned towards Christ. His right arm is bent, lifting the forearm above the horizontal, his hand extended and flat.²⁵ He usually

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²⁵ Given the propensity of carved stone limbs to break at the ends, a number of otherwise relatively complete monuments do not retain all of Paul's right arm. Of the Roman *traditio legis* sarcophagi, fourteen are sufficiently well preserved (physically or in engravings) to justify this description of Paul's gesture. They are not, however, identical. On *Rep.* I.200 (ill. 45), for example, the gesture is restrained. On *Rep.* I.28 (ill. 43), Paul points with his index finger rather than holding his hand open (although this part of the sarcophagus is known only from Bosio’s drawing and one cannot be certain whether he saw or interpolated). The open-handed gesture also dominates the monuments other than sarcophagi, with one exception. On the Nea Herakleia casket (ill. 77) Paul’s right hand is closed, the index and middle fingers extended.
holds a rolled-up scroll in his left hand, although sometimes that hand is invisible under or is seen grasping his gathered pallium.\textsuperscript{26}

Davis-Weyer paid unusually close attention to Paul's left hand, primarily for its potential value in elucidating the genealogy of the image. The most common version, in which the apostle holds a rolled-up scroll, repeats the widely-recognized “teacher” or “philosopher” type, and Davis-Weyer was concerned with how this conventional representation was integrated into the iconography of the traditio legis.\textsuperscript{27} Evolution of the form does not exhaust the implications of Paul's scroll. For example it could be cited as evidence for his participation in the mission alongside Peter, the concordia apostolorum. The initial impact on a viewer, however, was likely more straightforward. The clasped volumen was a common apostolic attribute and facilitated a functional recognition of the figure. Compare, for example, the several apostles with bookrolls on the Concordius sarcophagus in Arles (Rep. III.65, ill. 67). The physiognomy then identified this as Paul, not just any apostle.

Paul's right hand is visually dominant over his left. The right arm crosses in front of his body, interrupting the monotony of drapery folds. This part of his anatomy is thereby both highlighted and advanced towards the viewer. The right hand may be further emphasized by a careful sculptural articulation of the fingers and the opposed thumb and by its disproportionate size. The hand always has a special compositional relationship to Christ. Paul is not symmetrically anchored to the ground line; his weight is borne by the left foot, resulting in a slight to strong contrapposto and perhaps some suggestion of forward movement. However, the right hand remains the only truly dynamic element. It is engaged in an active gesture that attracts the viewer's attention.

This gesture is commonly associated with a standing, robed apostle. Indeed, Paul's attitude is more or less repeated by others on a number of the traditio legis monuments. The

\textsuperscript{26} The partly exposed bookroll appears on Rep. I.675 (ill. 46). The hidden left hand is found on Rep. I.200 (ill. 45), 676 (ill. 47), Rep. III.499 (ill. 58). On Rep. III.642 (ill. 59), Paul's left hand grasps his robe and holds no bookroll.

limiting case is a sarcophagus in Aix-en-Provence (Rep. III.25, ill. 54) where Paul is one of eleven apostles depicted in this very pose. Only Peter, who catches the scroll held by Christ, is an exception. Another monument, in San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome (Rep. I.724, ill. 61), groups Paul with five other similarly depicted apostles on the left and two on the right (one figure is missing), Peter and at least two other apostles being shown in a different posture. In many other cases, one or more apostles join Paul in pose and gesture.\(^{28}\)

The standing apostle with an open right hand extended towards Christ is treated in the literature as a Christianization of the Roman imperial *acclamatio*. Many viewers would have seen and participated in the crowds acclaming an imperial *adventus*, triumph or speech from the Rostra, as represented reductively by a few individuals on the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki (ill. 95).\(^{29}\) The élite also saluted their emperor in the Senate, although there is no visual or textual evidence confirming how they held their hands.\(^{30}\)

The reference to an imperial model is misleadingly narrow since the same gesture was also deployed for victorious generals and statesmen. More important, a flattened right hand held up facing towards another figure was not associated exclusively or even primarily with *acclamatio*. In other contexts it might represent salutation. Of particular relevance for the *traditio legis* is evidence of the same hand position employed as a sign of veneration towards a god.\(^{31}\) The gesture made by Paul, and often by others in the composition similarly facing towards Christ, is one of several aspects of the *traditio legis* in respect of which Thomas Mathews’s caution about the “emperor mystique” is pertinent.\(^{32}\)

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\(^{28}\) Ranks of apostles gesturing in this way towards Christ also appear on a number of sarcophagi outside the *traditio legis* group. See, for example, Rep. I.933, Rep. II.143.

\(^{29}\) See Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage* (New Haven: The Academy, 1963), 177.

\(^{30}\) This is the model asserted, without reference or example, by Schumacher, *Dominus legem dat*, 6.


gesture as evocative of the imperial acclamatio is not inaccurate, but it is incomplete. Sarcophagus viewers would have understood his appearance on the traditio legis as a signal of recognition, a salutation and an act of veneration the sense of which was determined by the funerary context and the figure of Christ to which it was directed.

b) Christ

Like Paul, Christ is not notably in motion. Sometimes he is squarely planted on two feet, but more often his weight is channelled to his left, raising the left hip. His body may be turned slightly towards Peter but his face is presented frontally, or even angled towards Paul. The action is concentrated in his hands.

i) Gesture

The right is held up, fingers and thumb extended, perhaps splayed, the flat palm facing the viewer. Sometimes this hand is proportionately over-sized. The standard traditio legis sarcophagi are roughly equally divided between examples in which the right arm is bent slightly at the elbow and those where it is straight. The seated, hybrid version (Rep. I.677, ill. 66) is entirely different: his right arm is held across the chest. Christ’s right-hand gesture on the traditio legis has been variously interpreted as judgment, blessing, speech, and victory.

33 The state of preservation causes the sample to be slightly different from that for which Paul’s gesture can be determined. There are twelve adequate examples, eight with Christ’s arm bent (Rep. I.28, 58, 676, 1008, Rep. II.126, 131, 152, Rep. III.25) and four on which it is essentially straight (Rep. I.675, 679, 724, Rep. III.53). In most cases, the Repertorium entries describe the physical gesture without adding any interpretation. Exceptions include Rep. I.58 (Lehrgestus), Rep. III.25 (imperial Hoheitgestus), and Rep. III.53 (imperial Grußgestus). Scholars tend to be rather loose in their language. Arbeiter, “Eine christlichen Schlifglasschale,”


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Few modern observers explicitly characterize it as a sign of judgment but some apocalyptic interpretations of the scene may imply such a reading, particularly where the link is premised on a resemblance with the angel of Apocalypse 10:1-6 who holds an open book in his left hand and raises his right to swear that the end is near. Eschatological and apocalyptic interpretations of the *traditio legis* will be revisited in the final section of this chapter. Regarding the right-hand gesture, suffice it to remark here that the angel is not cast as a judge. His raised hand may underscore an annunciation, or perhaps it reflects the then-prevailing form of oath, but there is no judgment. In Roman tribunal scenes the central figure is invariably seated and he normally makes a different gesture, although some version of the flat palm may exceptionally be found. Explicit depictions of the descending angel of Apocalypse 10:1 seem to appear only in the eleventh century, and even then they are rare.

We do not know what blessings looked like in the fourth century. Franz Joseph Dölger proposed that the sign of the cross, made on the forehead or over the beneficiary, was

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11–12, refers to the right-hand gesture of Christ as a *Redegeste* and *adlocutio-Gestus* with no further discussion as to the meaning of either.

35 Apocalypse 10:5 in the Vulgate translation does not specify which hand the angel raises, but it is identified as the right in some Vetus Latina texts. Christ’s gesture is specifically cited as evidence of the eschatological function of the image on this basis by Berger, “Ursprung,” 121; Geissler, *Traditio legis*, 66. Berger remarked that like the angel, early Christians invoked the pending final judgment with an oath, although he did not refer to any particular hand gesture. Christe, *Apocalypse de Jean*, 64, also assimilated Christ on the *traditio legis* with the angel of Apocalypse 10:1–6 but specifically rejected the interpretation of the image (and, presumably, the gesture) as representing judgment.

36 Hanns Gabelmann, *Antike Audienz- und Tribunalszenen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), catalogues many hieratic representations characterized as images of audience, tribunals, judgments or clemency, not one of which shows the main figure standing. While this could result from his definition, what he considered to be a judgment scene, that is unlikely. Gabelmann remarked that the seated Roman emperor was emblematic (106). As for gesture, the position of the judge’s or emperor’s right hand varies. In many cases, the arm is extended at an angle below the horizontal (e.g., the Palazzo Sacchetti relief of Septimius Severus, 178 [his cat. 83, fig. 25]).

37 The protagonist of the Great Ludovisi Sarcophagus, whose victorious gesture on the front is discussed below, appears again, this time seated, on the left side of the lid (conserved in Mainz; Gabelmann, *Antike Audienzszene*, 186–188 [cat. 88]) offering clemency to the barbarians he is shown defeating on the front. The similarity of gesture, with the arm slightly lowered, connects the two representations (ill. 97 presents both lid and front). Henning Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophage Roms: der Beitrag des Senatorendandes zur römischen Kunst der hohen und späten Kaiserzeit* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2001), 25, also regards both figures as representing the same individual, and describes the gesture of the seated general as “eine Art Heilsgestus.” The Christian examples concern Jesus before Pilate. See, for example, *Rep.* I.679 (ill. 48) and *Rep.* III.53 (ill. 55).

38 See Christe, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 106–108, 118. He provides a few examples, some of which are ambiguous.
applied to this purpose.\textsuperscript{39} The familiar medieval iconography of blessing, generally regarded as a gloss on the antique representation of speech, could reflect this practice, although it might also be a separate, sui generis gesture.\textsuperscript{40} Whether any early Christian representations usually regarded as indicating speech are really blessings — consider the right hand of Christ on the Nea Herakleia casket (ill. 77) — is speculative.\textsuperscript{41} There are no examples with sufficient context to make that determination. And in any event, none of the potential antique blessings depict a flat, frontal palm.

Far more common than judgment or blessing is the characterization of the raised right hand as an evocation of imperial \textit{adlocutio}. The Latin term appears explicitly on what appears to be the earliest surviving visual record of this action, the reverse of a medal minted under Caligula (ill. 108).\textsuperscript{42} It shows a togate figure standing on a podium in front of a field stool, evidently the emperor identified on the obverse, holding up his right arm and with his open hand directed towards a group of men in military dress. The legend confirms the subject: \textit{ADLOCVT(IO) COH(ORTIUM)}, the address to or exhortation of the troops. Over the succeeding centuries, this form of representation appears repeatedly on coins and public monuments but it is not static. Michael Sommer related formal developments to a

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\textsuperscript{39} Franz Joseph Dölger, “Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuzeszeichens VIII,” \textit{Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum} 8/9 (1965/1966): 7–13. This paper was part of a nine-part survey of the sign of the cross in early Christian practice, both visual and manual, published in the \textit{Jahrbuch} between 1958 and 1967. Dölger found evidence that it was used in catechism, baptism, liturgy and other settings. There is very little evidence of what the sign actually entailed in terms of gesture, apart from references to making a cross on one’s forehead.


\textsuperscript{41} Jensen, \textit{Face to Face}, 124–125, considers that God’s gesture before the offerings of Cain and Abel on Rep. I.25 is a blessing. It could just as well be speech, and this seems the be the case on some other depictions of the same scene (see note 81 below). In either case, it bears no resemblance to Christ’s right hand on the \textit{traditio legis}.

corresponding evolution in military, political, and social structures and institutions. By the third century, the original meaning was lost. The emperor no longer faces assembled troops or crowds but turns towards the viewer, his message addressed to the citizenry. Finally, Sommer suggests an iconographical “paradigm shift” when the image is appropriated to Christian use.

Yet even before that shift there is a legitimate question of what precise action is implied by the adlocutio. The usual assumption is that the emperor is speaking, but there are cogent arguments in favour of distinguishing the flat, raised hand from a rather different group of depictions in which the fingers are held in a variety of positions that correspond more closely with literary depictions of oratorical or rhetorical gesture. The flat hand associated with some early instances of adlocutio is better understood as a preliminary sign of recognition to the assembled audience and a command for their silence, the inauguration rather than the prosecution of discourse.

The distinction between a raised flat palm and more complex speaking gestures is even clearer in fourth-century Christian art than in any imperial precedents. Pointed fingers or other hand formations commonly denote speech by the “teaching” or “philosopher” Christ. Among the many lapidary examples of these pedagogical or learned gestures are the “transitional” traditio legis (Rep. I.677, ill. 66), the Concordius sarcophagus in Arles (Rep. III.65, ill. 67), and the polychrome fragments in the Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome (Rep.

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44 The traditional view is articulated by Brilliant, Gesture and Rank, 165–170, although he also refers to depictions of the orator’s hand performing more complex gestures in which the fingers are used to convey or support some thought, most commonly in this period by the extension of the index and ring fingers. See also L’Orange, Iconography of Cosmic Kingship, 171–197. Many early scholars described the raised, flattened right hand of Christ as a gesture of speech without regarding the matter as demanding further consideration. See, for example, Wilpert, Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms, 406.
46 Raeck, “Doctorissimus Imperator,” proposed that the speaking gesture was an indicium of education and learning specifically associated with certain members of the imperial family whose claims in that regard would otherwise be doubtful. His argument is intriguing but limited by the paucity of examples, restricted to three monuments depicting two young Theodosians, Honorius and Arcadius. It is, however, a reasonable element in the interpretation of many images of Christ teaching or declaiming to his disciples.
I.773, ill. 96). On all the standard \textit{traditio legis} sarcophagi, however, they yield to the flattened hand displayed frontally to or thrust towards the viewer. The same applies in other media with the notable exception of the Nea Herakleia casket (ill. 77), already noted above.\textsuperscript{47} The contrast between these hand gestures is most remarkably presented on the front and back of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus (\textit{Rep.} II.150, ill. 52).\textsuperscript{48}

On the \textit{traditio legis}, the elevated flat palm — frontal, often disproportionately large, sometimes projected forward by overlapping a pillar or column — would not strike the viewer primarily or immediately as a gesture of speech. Nor does its \textit{adlocutio} interpretation as a sign made preliminary to formal address seem compelling. In a narrative context the Lord might greet his listeners or command silence before he speaks. But those activities seem out of place in the hieratic image of the \textit{traditio legis}.

One additional facet of the imperial \textit{adlocutio}, of any imperial gesture really, is power. Like the \textit{acclamatio} being derivative of an older and broader gesture of salutation or veneration, the emperor’s raised hand held out towards his soldiers or subjects — or viewers — engages a deeper meaning. In 1935, Hans Peter L’Orange observed that a number of Roman objects and monuments, including images on Constantine’s coinage and his eponymous Arch, depict the victorious sun god making just this gesture. In later work, L’Orange elaborated the genealogy and expanded the application, remarking both a range of eastern deities that employed the open right hand and also its adoption by Roman emperors as a sign of their power and invincibility.\textsuperscript{49} Richard Brilliant carried the discussion further. By the third and especially the fourth century, he observed, “the great right hand, raised calmly

\textsuperscript{47} In this case Paul makes a similar gesture, suggesting both have been speaking. A conflated gesture with facing palm and two fingers outstretched appears on the Anagni grave plaque (ill. 88).

\textsuperscript{48} This is not to say that a flat palm never signified speech. In a slightly modified form – not quite so fully frontal or upward-facing – this gesture is occasionally associated with a declaiming Christ (as on \textit{Rep.} I.26, ill. 73; see also \textit{Rep.} I.189, \textit{Rep.} III.61.). One also finds representations of a figure, usually female, holding up her right hand with a scroll in the left on Christian sarcophagi (e.g., \textit{Rep.} I.151, \textit{Rep.} II.74, 101) as well as non-Christian ones. See, for example, Carola Reinsberg, \textit{Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben: Vita romana}, ASR I.3 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2006), cat. 11, fig. 89.1 (a sarcophagus in Córdoba dated to around 270); cat. 141, fig. 80.4 (an earlier example in the Vatican Museo Pio Clementino). If this form does denotes speech it is probably a prayer, making the figure a kind of half-orant.


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and erectly to the open gaze of the beholder” had become a symbol of control, triumph, power, majesty, and status, a fusion of imperial and solar iconography.\(^{50}\)

The interpretation of visual representations of gesture depends on context. The right hand of a praying orant, a seated Pilate, or a victorious general do not convey the same meaning, and viewers would have little difficulty drawing the appropriate distinctions.\(^{51}\) On military monuments like the Grand Ludovisi Sarcophagus (ill. 97),\(^{52}\) the raised right hand with a flat palm facing the viewer unmistakably conveyed victory and a confident sense of invincibility, and this is how it would have been generally understood when appropriated by Christ. No solar connection is required,\(^{53}\) nor was the viewer’s association especially imperial (the military figure on the Ludovisi sarcophagus was not, after all, an emperor). The essential impact of this gesture was to signify a stunning and decisive victory. Who had achieved it and what was its object were determined by context — on the Ludovisi Sarcophagus, a general over a foreign army; on the Arch of Galerius, an emperor over a nation. On the funerary traditio legis, Christ’s gesture signified to the viewer the Lord’s triumph over death. The raised and open right hand evoked both invictus and adventus, not specifically...
linked to pagan gods or emperors, but as an expression of Christian resurrection and theophany.  

**ii) Posture and dress**

The distinction between standing and sitting arises most often in discussions of the action on the Lord’s left, the claimed inconsistency of the erect stance with gift-giving. There are also, however, implications for the impression conveyed by the other side of the representation. Christ, literally, “is risen.” The standing position is adopted in other, related images that also suggest resurrection, like the sarcophagus of Probus in St Peter’s (Rep. I.678, ill. 98) where he holds a jewelled cross. This is not to say Christ is never standing in other circumstances. He sometimes appears in this posture when declaiming and commonly does so in narrative healing or passion scenes where the story so requires.

On the traditio legis, Christ’s bearing is compositionally emphasized by his size (frequently larger than the figures around him) and height (enhanced by the mound). His figure juts upwards through the framing architectural elements and outward from the picture plane towards the viewer, often physically and always in appearance by reason of his pose and action. The erect human form can be regarded as a personification or incarnation of the crux invicta, the “standing” wreathed cross flanked by apostles or tomb guards found on a number of sarcophagi (see, for example, Rep. I.49, ill. 100; Rep. III.49, ill. 101).

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54 Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 23–53, takes great pains to argue that the representation of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem is unconnected with the imperial ceremonial adventus. The claim here is not intended to argue otherwise. It is merely that the appearance of Christ on the traditio legis may be associated with the notion of adventus as a generic, not explicitly imperial, event. Adventus, after all, translated the Greek parousia (as in Matthew 24:3).


56 Other examples are Rep. I.208, 667, Rep. III.49. The crux invicta is often cited as part of the genealogy of the traditio legis. See, for example, Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 19–25; Schumacher, "Dominus legem dat," 16–17. The visual relationship is, however, independent of questions of lineage. Geissler, "Traditio legis," 74–75, correctly remarked that the visual congruence is imperfect: the crux invicta is not perched atop a mound with four rivers. Not to deny the importance of this attribute, it is still reasonable to suppose that a viewer who had seen the inanimate motif could connect it with the human analogy of a standing Christ.
Christ’s dress is remarkably consistent on the standard *traditio legis* sarcophagi. He is shod with sandals, never shoes, and wears a tunic and pallium. The wide right sleeve hangs below his elevated arm, baring all or part of his forearm. This dignified but simple dress contrasts with the aristocratic costume of a high-ranking office-holder, presumably the deceased, depicted on the side of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus, wearing shoes and a tight-sleeved tunic, his robe held by a disc-shaped fibula from which hang pearl cords. The similarity of Christ’s clothing with that of his apostles could, however, be misleading. Polychromy might have had the effect on sarcophagi we see on the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana (ill. 94), where his glorious gilded garments set him apart.

**iii) Figural type**

By the definition chosen here, Christ on the standard *traditio legis* is a mature, bearded man. His hair is usually shoulder-length and wavy, the facial expression serious, often severe. Only on the seated “transitional” example (*Rep.* I.677, Ill. 66) is he youthful and clean-shaven, his long hair falling in curly locks. The young Christ does appear occasionally in other media. He is youthful on the Nea Herakleia casket (ill. 77), the Valencia and Obernburg glass plates (ill. 81 and 82) and also, due to erroneous restoration as previously remarked, on the Santa Costanza mosaic (ill. 89).

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57 It is often difficult to make out Christ’s footwear, and in several cases this part of the image has been repaired. He is barefoot on the Nea Herakleia casket (ill. 77).

58 See Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophage Roms*, 88–89.


60 This facial type and hair style is shared by the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (*Rep.* I.680, ill. 68) and a similar example in the Museo Pio Cristiano (*Rep.* I.26, ill. 73). One caveat concerning the claim that all the standard *traditio legis* sarcophagi have a bearded Christ is that this part of the relief is missing on *Rep.* I.724 (ill. 61) and may be the result of restoration in a few other cases (e.g., *Rep.* I.200, ill. 45).

61 The Nea Herakleia casket is an outlier in other respects, lacking the usual additional attributes discussed below and uniquely depicting a speech gesture by Christ, as remarked above. The two glass plates are fragmentary but do seem to present an unbearded Christ without shoulder-length hair. The Obernburg glass, it will be recalled, reverses Peter and Paul.

62 The only preserved catacomb painting, at Grottaferrata (ill. 74), depicts the bearded Christ; he is clean-shaven in Wilpert’s sketch of the mostly destroyed example in the catacomb of Priscilla. The condition of the latter fresco at the time Wilpert saw it is unknown, and one should not discount the possibility that he drew it to resemble the apse mosaic in Santa Costanza.
The problematic of the faces of Christ has long occupied scholars. It is tempting to align the young and old versions with a distinction between different aspects of the second person of the Trinity: the historical Jesus of Galilee and the incarnation of God. However the clean-shaven facial type was clearly used in contexts that reflect Christ’s divinity and not merely his talents as a magician or participant in his own Passion. After reviewing the visual evidence from the fourth to the seventh century, André Grabar concluded that no consistent and meaningful theological inference could be drawn from the formal choice of physiognomy. If the use of the young and mature forms in particular images reflects some underlying doctrinal discourse, it is no longer apparent. “One could equally well acknowledge that the image-makers were preoccupied with this problem... or that they were not.”

Of Grabar’s alternatives, “preoccupation” is not attractive to art historians unless they can better his confessed inability to determine how it was manifested, so they may prefer indifference. A claim that the two figural forms were interchangeable might be asserted.


64 Grabar, Christian Iconography, 119–121. He observed that older authorities trained as theologians (singling out Wilpert, Wulff and von Sybel) read the images as expressions of doctrine. “This method should be discarded, because it tends to make the monuments say what we want them to say.” Later attempts to refine the typology by subdividing the young face into two distinct forms are equally unconvincing. Jeremias, Die Holztür, 79, referring to panels on the wooden doors of Santa Sabina, claimed to recognize one type of young face used for miracles and narratives and another reserved for a “timeless ideal of the risen Lord.” This theory of three distinguishable and semantically differentiated faces of Christ was cited with approval by Mikael Bagh Rasmussen, “Traditio legis?” Cahiers archéologiques fin de l’antiquité et du moyen âge 47 (1999): 7. At least within the modest sample of fourth-century images, the distinction seems apologetic. It attracts the same critique that Grabar applied to the early-twentieth-century literature.

65 Grabar, Christian Iconography, 120.

66 Yves Christe, “Jean-Michel Spieser – Autour de la Traditio legis,” Cahiers de civilisation médiévale 51 (2008): 294, criticized the “longue digression sur l’aspect physique du Christ, barbu ou imbarbu” by Spieser, Autour de la Traditio Legis, 17–20, because the two types were “pratiquement interchangeable à Rome et en général en Occident dans la seconde moitié du IVe s.”
under the aegis of divine polymorphism, the view that since Christ’s divinity may appear in many guises, variations in his depiction are only to be expected, a theory with some modest support in patristic literature. But while polymorphism could theoretically imply or lead to viewer indifference, it is equally consistent with preoccupation. Nor are these alternatives either mutually exclusive or collectively exhaustive, particularly if applied to reception instead of production. Looking at several centuries of late antiquity across the sweep of the Roman Empire and to a variety of monuments in all media, the faces of Christ may seem fungible at first, inexorably sliding towards the ultimate triumph of the “Pantocrator” type. Within the far narrower chronological, geographical and iconographical scope of the traditio legis sarcophagi, the importance of the Lord’s appearance is impossible to ignore.

Fourth-century viewers did not know that their descendents would settle on the mature, bearded Christ. The figure appearing on the traditio legis may be unremarkable today but it must have startled most of the original viewers who were accustomed to the young Christ, so numerically dominant during the relevant period, as noted above. Because of that dominance, the “faces of Christ” analysis, a division of figural types into two categories as if the they were of equivalent stature, is misleading.

iv) The Lord omnipotent

The image designated as the Lord’s right exhibits both power of expression and an expression of power. Gesture, posture and physiognomy coalesce into a forceful and remarkable representation of a mature and invincible Christ. On most sarcophagi, he is a young magician, teacher or doctor, gifted and learned beyond his years. Sometimes he is a

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67 See the references in note 63 above, in particular Dagron, “Holy Images,” 28.
68 See pages 328-332. Sauer, “Aufkommen,” deserves credit for having underscored the importance of the chronology. He concluded that the bearded type was rare in the fourth century and that its common adoption on the traditio legis (defined somewhat differently) suggested it must have had some connection to that particular form of representation (318). Sauer did not focus on viewers or remark the effect this mode of representing Christ would have had on them. More recent literature has not ignored the appearance of the bearded form on the traditio legis but without sufficiently appreciating or examining its impact. See Bøgh Rasmussen, “Traditio legis – Bedeutung und Context,” 6–7; David Knipp, ‘Christus Medicus’ in der frühchristlichen Sarkophagskulptur: ikonographische Studien zur Sepulkralkunst des späten vierten Jahrhunderts (New York: Brill, 1998), 32; Schumacher, “Dominus legem dat,” 5; Spieser, Autour de la Traditio Legis, 17–20.
victim due to his doctrines and prophecies. The *traditio legis* representation stresses omnipotence over omniscience or sacrifice. In the contemplative space of the tomb, viewers must have reflected on the character of this divine potency.

It was not imperial power. The important differences between the Lord’s right and the *adlocutio* have already been noted. One might add that fourth-century emperors, at least in their public self-representations, did not favour beards or shoulder-length hair.  

Mathews’s comments regarding the “un-imperial” character of the Santa Pudenziana Christ apply with at least equal force to the *traditio legis*. However his claim that such representations were actually anti-imperial is less convincing, at least for the type under consideration here. It is unlikely that the élite and sub-élite of the late-fourth-century Roman sarcophagus population would be especially drawn to subversive imagery or inclined to interpret the *traditio legis* in this way. They had no reason to feel insecure in their positions among the upper reaches of Roman society and imperial administration (see chapter 2). The brief reign of the last (or hopefully so, from the Christians’ perspective) pagan emperor was receding into the past. Like the purportedly anti-pagan Political Jonah discussed in chapter 5, an anti-imperial characterization of the *traditio legis* is excessively adversarial and unduly binary, too coloured by fourth-century polemics and modern politics. For the grieving relatives or commemorating friends of the deceased in the private

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69 Linda Safran, “What Constantine Saw. Reflections on the Capitoline Colossus, Visuality, and Early Christian Studies,” *Millenium. Jahrbuch zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.* 3 (2006): 48–49, proposed that the ultimate model for Constantine’s famous self-representative, colossal acrolith (the fragments now conserved in the Capitoline Museum, Rome) was a Phidean statue of Zeus, and that the head was a recarved portrait of Hadrian. But unlike Zeus and Hadrian, Constantine has no beard. Theodosius I appears similarly clean-shaven (with short hair and a diadem) on his Missorium, often cited as an imperial pendant for the *traditio legis*. Indeed only Julian among Constantine’s fourth-century successors is depicted with a beard, and as the only pagan, he provided an unlikely model for Christ. The victorious general on the Grand Ludovisi Sarcophagus (ill. 97), whose gesture was assimilated above to the Lord’s right, is also clean-shaven. This distinction between imperial facial hair and hairstyle compared to the bearded Christ is remarked by Dulaey, “*Dominus conseruator ecclesiae Pudentianae,*” 227.

70 Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 98–114, remarked his god-like rather than imperial appearance (although surprisingly without commenting on the capillary distinction in the preceding footnote), including clothing and especially the seating apparatus (104–108). He argued that Christ’s throne is unlike the emperor’s *sella curulis*, a claim that has engendered some debate: see Kinney’s and Brown’s reviews of *Clash of Gods* and Mathews’s reply to Brown (note 32 above). This debate has no bearing, of course, on the standing Christ of the *traditio legis*. Compare as an expression of the mainstream “imperial” view Martin Kemp’s description of the *traditio legis* as “a Christ figure of often openly imperial type,” cited by Stephen Andrew Cooper, *Marius Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55.
space of the tomb, a positive and spiritual reaction to the startling image is more likely than a negative and political one.

Instead of emperors, the bearded face of Christ is more comfortably associated with philosophers and gods. Zanker preferred the former, but in a particular lineage that emphasized the “holy man” rather than the speculative thinker.\textsuperscript{71} When he is seated, holding a scroll or codex and gesturing in speech to his collected disciples (as in Santa Pudenziana, ill. 94, or the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter, ill. 75) such an association may be attractive, although the over-sized and luxuriously depicted figure in the apse mosaic might still suggest something more grandiose.\textsuperscript{72} The standing Christ of the \textit{traditio legis} with his shoulder-length hair and gesturing with a raised, open right hand is even more difficult to assimilate to a seated, stately, Roman philosopher contemplating a book. The connection to non-Christian divinities is more plausible. It is unnecessary to posit any god in particular, although there were several models available. Scholars have variously invoked Asclepius, Neptune and Jupiter; bearded and sometimes standing figures of pagan gods, especially Jupiter Dolichenus, are not uncommon.\textsuperscript{73}

Of course Christ’s divinity was always evoked by his image, whether sitting, standing, gesturing in triumph or in speech, bearded or clean-shaven. But this anodyne observation does not do justice to the impact of the especially arresting and novel form of representation that is the \textit{traditio legis}. Its peculiarity warrants further consideration of


\textsuperscript{72} Mathews, \textit{Clash of Gods}, 126, labelled the effect “Larger than Life.” He also remarked that while both wear their hair long, Christ’s is quite unlike the typical philosopher’s.

\textsuperscript{73} See, for example, the bust of Sarapis in the Musée royal de Mariemont, a bronze statuette of Jupiter Dolichenus in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, and an ivory diptych with Asclepius in the Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool: Bol, \textit{Spätantike}, 521 (cat. 128), 548–9 (cat. 153) and 563–4 (cat. 167), respectively. Mathews, \textit{Clash of Gods}, 126, compared the mosaic in Santa Pudenziana to Jupiter or Asclepius;Grabar, \textit{Christian Iconography}, 34–35, invoked Jupiter, Neptune or Pluto. Although emperors and judges tend to be depicted seated, some pagan divinities were commonly shown standing (as the Jupiter Dolichenus on a bull in the example above, cat. 153). See also Schumacher, “\textit{Dominus legem dat},” 5; Spieser, \textit{Autour de la Traditio legis}, 19n64.
those facets of his godliness that are emphasized on these particular monuments (still limiting ourselves, so far as possible, to the Lord’s right).

Grabar described the mature face of Christ as “adult, even old, but virile.” Virility connotes masculine strength, vigour, and sexual energy. To the modern observer the epithet seems apt for a man depicted with a full beard and a flowing, almost wild head of hair, standing aggressively in the centre of an image, gesturing in triumph. It is not a quality naturally associated with the young, attractive, curly-haired Christ.

One must be wary of anachronism in assuming that fourth-century viewers shared Grabar’s characterization or the range of connotations that he may or may not have intended. For example, it has already been remarked that the beard was connected with learning and divinity in late Roman sculpture. However this does not exclude its evocation of virility, depending on the context. Facial hair is a male attribute, and it continued to be associated with heroic muscle-men and lusty satyrs. Jupiter’s beard projected his prowess, which he demonstrated in a variety of spheres, including the amorous. This last does not seem a likely association with the properly dressed Christ on the traditio legis. He is no more erotic than any powerfully represented male figure, which is not to say one should entirely ignore the sexual energy exuded by such a figure. Probably more important, however, are other aspects of his “virility.” This Christ has been aged from his more common appearance, perhaps beyond his earthly years, without compromising the outward signs of mortal (and male) vitality and strength. He stands straight, towering over the other figures, with a fuller head of hair that than any of his apostles. The slight contrapposto expresses a certain physical self-assuredness. His right forearm is bared, the hand confident and large. Since Christ is depicted, as he must be, in his incarnate condition, his omnipotence is suggested

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74 Grabar, Christian Iconography, 119. His French text used the cognate “viril.”
75 For those of us who have difficulty estimating the age of real people, guessing the apparent age to its original viewers of the figure in a fourth-century relief carving is indeed challenging. This is especially so where the face of Christ is not carved to the standards of sculptural portraiture. The beard distinguishes the figure from the adolescent form but does not, in and of itself, connote great age. To the extent that the sculptural finish permits such a judgment, however, the traditio legis Christ seems generally to be a man past his 30s. Such conventions as lines on the forehead, heavy brows and indentations under the eyes are suggestive. The age differential is clear on the front and back of the Sant’Ambrogio Sarcophagus (Rep. II.150, ill. 52), where the sculptors used their skills to express the differential figural forms.
by traits that elevate mortals — kings, emperors, and fathers — above the norm, traits that may fairly be labelled as virile.

Before leaving this facet of male power, a diametrically opposed suggestion by Mathews should be noted. He argued that the depiction of Christ often appears feminine, notably due to the outline of breasts beneath his pallium. His evidence was not focussed on the *traditio legis* but two of these sarcophagi were cited. Nothing in principle precludes the figure of Christ from evoking simultaneous or alternating sentiments of male strength and female nourishment. Indeed, Mathews’s claim was that young, old, male and female viewers would find affinities with their own state in the image of Christ. The more fundamental question is whether there really is anything feminine about Christ’s chest. Kinney pointed out that a smooth fullness under the pallium was not the conventional way to suggest female breasts, although she accepted, on other grounds, that many images of Christ are androgynous. However for the *traditio legis*, where the figure is fully clothed, mature and bearded, the thoracic bulge is the only potential hint of femininity, and it is implausible. Where this pectoral feature is discernible, as on a few of these sarcophagi, it could evoke Christ’s athleticism and prowess. It is most unlikely that fourth-century viewers perceived anything feminine in the figure of Christ on the *traditio legis*.

Christ’s power is supernatural; his virility is godly. The theophanic quality of his appearance on the *traditio legis* is not in dispute. What is less clear is whether one may infer more finely...
grained theological implications. One possibility would be to insert this image into fourth-century doctrinal controversies as a visual expression of anti-Arian sentiment. That proposition must be situated within a broader art historical debate regarding the sectarian function of various early Christian images, a question re-examined in the Conclusion. Suffice to remark here that the *traditio legis* is not inherently partisan. Type-casting it as anti-Arian is too restrictive.

At the same time, the Lord’s right does emphasize the divinity of Christ in a particular way that is different from most other contemporaneous examples. It highlights the bookends of the Christian story: the Incarnation, through the very human and manly figure of Christ, and the Resurrection, by his gesture of victory and erect posture and through the surrounding symbolic attributes considered below. Compared to the youthful miracle-worker or teacher, the forbidding figure on the *traditio legis* is aggressively god-like. All early Christians viewed him as divine. As David M. Gwynn put it: “The question at stake was not whether Christ was divine, which every Christian of the 4th c. believed, but how that divinity should be defined and expressed...”

One possible aspect of the *traditio legis* version of divinity might be pressure upon viewers to conflate the first and second persons of the Trinity. This may sound Nicaean or anti-Arian, but it can more simply be regarded as pro-Christ.

This compression would depend on viewers having some preconception of the appearance of God the Father. His later medieval depictions do, indeed, recall the mature, bearded Christ of the *traditio legis* but there are not many fourth-century comparanda. The most common anthropomorphic rendering of the Father at this time limited his visible anatomy to a hand reaching down from heaven, as in the scenes of Moses receiving the law (a clear example appears at the left end of *Rep. III.*499, ill. 58). There are a few more fully executed examples. God is depicted as an older, bearded man receiving the offerings of Abel and Cain

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79 Beat Brenk made this suggestion in a private communication to Achim Arbeiter, reported in *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 147n393. See also Spieser, *Autour de la Traditio legis*, 13. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 52–53, argued the anti-Arian character of many fourth-century depictions of Christ, not specifically mentioning the *traditio legis*, although he would undoubtedly include it.

on a number of sarcophagi (e.g., Rep. II.152, left short side, ill. 53; Rep. I.25, ill. 105). We have already encountered his appearance at the creation of Eve on the Dogmatic Sarcophagus (Rep. I.43, ill. 103). He might appear in other cases where modern interpreters identify the figure differently. For example, the scene of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise on Rep. I.23 (ill. 116) includes a standing bearded figure next to the fallen couple. It has been regarded as Christ (as Logos, standing in for God) or an angel but it could, in a more literal translation of Genesis 3:23, be the Father. Schlatter’s theory that the magisterial seated figure in the Santa Pudenziana mosaic was not the Son but the Father was noted above, and while that identification may be questionable, his observations regarding the depiction of the first person of the Trinity as an elderly man are nonetheless pertinent.

The representation of Christ on the traditio legis does not mimic images of God. The hairstyles, for example, are different. Nor should it be assumed that most viewers had been exposed to the relatively uncommon depictions of the Father. And to the extent that such a visual connection between Father and Son was remarked, it is better regarded, at least in most cases, as a signal of Christ’s identity as God rather than a visual expression of a specific doctrinal position. Even without invoking any conscious association between the traditio legis and actual or imagined pictures of the Father, Christ’s appearance on these funerary monuments was sufficient to elicit contemplation of his potency, power, and prowess.

81 Additional examples are Rep. I.25, 61, 215, 360, 902, 965, 1010, and Rep. II.224. Still others are missing the critical head of the Father (e.g., Rep. I.188).
82 See also Rep. II.101, and the pendant to the Dogmatic Sarcophagus in Arles (Rep. III.38, ill. 104), discussed above (page 330).
83 Jensen, Face to Face, 127, calls it Christ. The Repertorium entry identifies it an angel. On Rep. I.188, the expeller is depicted in a youthful form and similarly situated vis-à-vis Adam and the entry identifies him as Christ-Logos, which seems reasonable. This could mean that Jensen is correct in treating both the old and young forms as representations of Christ or that the two monuments tell the same story but with different iconography. The identity of the figure on the left is not the only discrepancy between them.
3. The Lord’s left

On his other side, something quite different is happening. Christ holds a *volumen* as Peter advances towards him and it with covered hands. There are three participants: the Lord, the apostle, and the object that connects them, a dangling bookroll.

a) Christ

With his left hand, Christ grasps the rolled up part of a scroll (a “convolute”), usually by placing four fingers beneath and his thumb on top, allowing an unravelling portion to extend below.\(^85\) A central tenet of the investiture theory is that Christ is handing the scroll to Peter.\(^86\) This evidently requires a consideration of Peter’s action, discussed below, but it is also dependent on the depiction of Christ.

The visual presentation of bookrolls was first (and, perhaps, last) considered in depth by Theodor Birt in 1907.\(^87\) One category of his taxonomy, called “interrupted reading,” consists of representations where partial exposure of the writing surface suggests that the viewer is

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\(^85\) As previously remarked, there is some variation in the depiction of the *volumen*. In a few cases it is quite short. On columnar sarcophagi, the end may traverse a column rather than falling towards the ground as gravity would demand. The basic form of a convolute held in the left hand is, however, consistent on the metropolitan sarcophagi (where the state of preservation permits the evaluation) and is generally respected in other media, subject to technical constraints on small objects. On one of the Vatican incised glass pieces (see note 42), a schematic rendition of the bookroll provides a flat, rectangular surface. The most important variation in the presentation of the *volumen*, which seems to have escaped scholarly comment, is on the Santa Costanza apse mosaic (ill. 89). Here Christ holds not a convolute but a flat portion of parchment or papyrus with the end flapping behind. Indeed, neither end of this “scroll” is rolled up. Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 114 and 116, concluded that no part of the book is original. The earliest representation, by Ciampini in 1693 (reproduced on his plate 94), already presents it this way and earlier descriptions provide no further information. The object is more like a medieval speech banner than a partially unravelled *volumen* and one explanation could be, precisely, a medieval or later restoration. Just as the restorer seems to have misread *legem* as *pacem*, he could also have misunderstood the character of the bookroll.

\(^86\) Berger, “Ursprung,” 106, criticized other scholars, notably Schumacher, for failing to recognize the obvious: that Christ is handing the law to Peter. Others who also see this part of the representation in this way include Franke, “Traditio legis und Petrusprimat”; Sotomayor, “Petrus und Paulus,” 206–208; Richard Krautheimer, “A Note on the Inscription in the Apse of Old St. Peter’s,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 318. Less analytically focussed presentations of the *traditio legis* iconography often assume that the representation depicts the handing over of the law. See, for example, Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 100, 107; Bisconti, *Temi*, 288 (entry by Spera).

\(^87\) Theodor Birt, *Die Buchrolle in der Kunst: archäologisch-antiquarische Untersuchungen zum antiken Buchwesen* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907), in particular 181–196 (Motiv VII, “interrupted reading”), and 322–333 (the *traditio legis*). Birt’s work has been widely cited in the *traditio legis* literature.
witness to an interlude in its reading. The clearest cases are where the *volumen* is held in one hand, since unlike a codex, a scroll can be read only with both hands engaged. Birt distinguished two principal forms. In the first, a figure holds both convolutes in one hand with some of the intermediate surface loose between them. An example appears on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (*Rep.* I.680, ill. 68). The other type corresponds with the usual *traditio legis*, where Christ holds only one convolute.

Neither form of interrupted reading suggests that the person holding the book is about to hand it to someone else, although nothing in the first type would prevent it. However where the scroll is held by a single convolute, the representation militates against such an interpretation. As Birt observed, it is very difficult to take hold of the unfurled end of a *volumen*. He therefore preferred to construe the action as Christ holding up the book he has been but is no longer reading in order to exhibit it to Peter and the viewers. Birt’s argument is persuasive and is often cited in the literature. One does not hand over a ball of twine by dangling an unravelling bit from the end towards the intended recipient. Of course a symbolic investiture, as distinct from a manual *traditio*, remains possible, whether to the apostles in general, to Peter and Paul, or even to Peter alone. But such an interpretation would be formulated by a viewer despite rather than because of the form of representation.

Birt raised other objections to the claim that Christ is engaged in a physical transmission or gift, in particularly remarking that a figure engaged in such an action should sit, not stand, and hand the object to the right, not the left. The latter problem is linked with the action on Christ’s right and will be examined in the concluding “Synthesis” section of this chapter. As for posture, while standing is not only natural but necessary for the declaration of triumph on the other side of the image, it has proved problematic and controversial on the

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88 Birt, *Die Buchrolle*, 323–324, noted that some sarcophagi in Ravenna of local manufacture have Christ holding a closed roll (as *Rep.* II.390, ill. 72) and suggested that this would be a more appropriate way to depict an actual *traditio*.

Emperors and generals sit when distributing largesse or granting clemency and in audience or judgment scenes. They stand to address the troops or the citizens. At first blush, there appears to be a similarly sharp distinction between two groups of Christian representations, the standing *traditio legis* and the more common seated “teaching” or “philosopher” scenes. Following the Roman precedent, the former should not, it is argued, include the act of *traditio*.

One response to this reasoning is the provocative suggestion by John Huskinson that the difference may be overrated:

> The distinction between Christ the teacher and Christ the law giver, a symbol for authority, is perhaps better understood by modern scholars than it was by the *marmorarii* who made these sarcophagi, or by the devotees of Peter and Paul who commissioned them.

While Huskinson was correct to warn against imputing modern scholarly preoccupations to fourth-century Christians, his focus on a comparative understanding of images is more appropriate to producers than consumers. A few viewers faced with the *traditio legis* on the sarcophagus of a deceased relative might be competent to draw a mental contrast with a previously encountered seated Christ as teacher or philosopher. Many had never seen either before. In any case, the immediate question is not whether they compared this image with another but how they understood the less than transparent action taking place at Christ’s left, which had no counterpart in the “teaching” scenes.

Standing and sitting positions were rigid markers in stock Roman representations, and traditional scholarship is correct to assume that viewer reactions would be conditioned by what they were accustomed to seeing elsewhere. One should neither exaggerate nor under-estimate the exposure of fourth-century Romans to secular or imperial images. An imperial gift like the Missorium of Theodosius I (ill. 110), often cited in this connection, is perhaps better understood by modern scholars than it was by the *marmorarii* who made these sarcophagi, or by the devotees of Peter and Paul who commissioned them.

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90 Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 118.
91 On the Missorium, see J. M. Blázquez, “El Missorium de Teodosio,” in *El Gabinete de Antigüedades de la Real Academia de la Historia*, ed. Martín Almagro-Gorbea (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1999), 175–200; Ruth E. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the*
was accessible to few of the Roman sarcophagus population. On the other hand, standing and sitting figures could be seen on many triumphal arches and other public monuments. They represented a variety of stereotypical actions (sitting = clemency, judgment, audience, largitio; standing = allocution, adventus, concord, sacrifice, triumph). Since these actions differed in fundamental and visible ways from the traditio legis, the Roman scenes provided the viewer with ambiguous clues. These secular forms might have furnished inspiration and models to workshops in designing the traditio legis, but this does not eliminate or elide the important differences between the Christian and non-Christian images.

As an addendum to this discussion, it is instructive to compare the slightly later and probably derivative form of representation on a panel of the wooden doors of Santa Sabina in Rome. It depicts a beardless Christ in a traditio legis pose, his apostles having been replaced by the Apocalyptic letters A and ω (ill. 109). Christ is not giving the unfurled scroll to anyone but using it to announce his presence, and the inscription is not dominus legem dat but the familiar and by this time ancient acrostic IXΩYC, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour” (albeit with the letters scrambled).

On balance, it is reasonable to cite Christ’s standing posture as a counter-indicator, although not definitive, to the reception of this part of the image as a physical transmission of the volumen, but it is less telling evidence than the mechanical difficulty of handing an unfurled scroll. Indeed, there is little evidence of the Lord ever being shown handing a book.

_Fourth to Seventh Centuries_ (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 11–59; Raeck, “Doctissimus Imperator,” 509, bibliography in 509n2. The conventional dating of 388 and consequent identification of the central figure as Theodosius I was challenged by Jutta Meischner who proposed circa 421, making the emperor Theodosius II. The 388 date is convincingly defended by Blázquez (196–200) and Raeck in (520–522). On this basis, the Missorium itself is of too late a date to have served as a model for the development of the traditio legis; however, some prototype used for the production of this and presumably other imperial luxury objects appears often in this role in the literature. See, for example, Huskinson, _Concordia Apostolorum_, 114

92 See Jeremias, _Die Holztür_, 80–88. She refers to this panel as “parousia.” The Apocalyptic references are notable: the letters A and ω on either side and the four living creatures just outside the roundel. Jeremias draws a connection with the traditio legis while at the same time noting the many distinctions (including a youthful face). The doors are probably datable to the second quarter of the fifth century.

93 The same observation is made by Schumacher, “Dominus legem dat,” 13.

94 On the history of the acrostic, the classical study remains Franz Joseph Dölger, _Ichthys_ (Oberhausen: P.W. Metzler Verlag, 1999 [originally published 1922–1928, 1943]).
to an apostle, regardless of his posture. But for Peter’s appearance, the Lord’s action at his left side would not likely be construed as a physical transmission of the *volumen*. Yet, as we shall see, the depiction of the apostle may tell a different story.

b) Peter

In some cases Peter’s posture is similar to Paul’s. Both may stand relatively upright (e.g., *Rep.* I.58, ill. 44; I.679, ill. 48) or lean in towards Christ (e.g., *Rep.* II.149, ill. 51). Normally, Peter is more active, the only one of the ternary group in motion. He steps towards Christ, his right knee bent more acutely than his left in a pose of slight to marked proskynesis (e.g., *Rep.* I.676, 724, 1008, *Rep.* III.25, 53, 499, 642; ill. 47, 61, 60, 54, 55, 58, 59). This motion is concentrated in the relation between the figure and the unfurled portion of the scroll. That relation varies from one sarcophagus to another, but the general tendency is similar.

On most *traditio legis* representations — all but three or four of the metropolitan sarcophagi — Peter carries a cross with his left hand or under his left arm, precariously supported against his left shoulder. This attribute has been regarded in the literature as a sign of either Christ’s triumph or Peter’s martyrdom. The latter is unlikely. Although not

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95 The iconographical tradition does not prevent a seated Christ from handing a book to his apostle but examples are rare. The “transitional” *traditio legis* sarcophagus (*Rep.* I.677, ill. 66) could be mentioned, although it raises the same issues regarding the actio as the standard *traditio legis*. A wall painting that may be similar in this respect to *Rep.* I.677 is the partially obscured representation in a lunette of the Via Latina catacomb. See note 35 above. The “gift” is clearer on a Ravennate sarcophagus (*Rep.* II.390, ill. 72) where the seated Christ hands a rolled-up scroll to Paul, standing at his right. A probably later fabric fragment in Berlin depicts Peter receiving a Psalter from, it would seem, an enthroned Christ. See note 71 above.

96 There is no cross on *Rep.* I.58 (ill. 44), *Rep.* II.127 (ill. 49) or 131 (ill. 50), nor on the Roman-style sarcophagus from Ravenna (*Rep.* II.379, ill. 71). This part of the image is missing on *Rep.* I.28 (ill. 43). The cross appears on all the standard *traditio legis* representations in other media, with three exceptions: the Ravenna casket (ill. 78), the Trier mould (ill. 87) and the Santa Costanza mosaic (ill. 89). In the last case, Peter holds an ambiguous staff or rod. Geir Hellemo, *Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in 4th-Century Apses and Catecheses* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 84, suggested it might originally have been a cross but a sixteenth-century drawing still shows only the stub (*Arbeiter, Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 112).

always easily visible on photographs, the cross is usually gemmed.\textsuperscript{98} This suggests not the simple instrument of saintly sacrifice, but Christ triumphant. That would also be a proper inference where the head of the cross is bent into the staurogram, a Christological combination of the Greek letters \textit{tau} and \textit{rho}, although this form is rare and not found among the Roman metropolitan monuments.\textsuperscript{99} Finally, while scenes from the life of Peter were common on fourth-century sarcophagi, including a “trilogy” consisting of the denial, the arrest and the water miracle, they are not associated with the \textit{traditio legis}.\textsuperscript{100}

The cross, then, supports the triumphal reading of the Lord’s right. The interpretive focus particular to the portion of the representation designated as the Lord’s left concerns the scroll. For those who see the scene as Christ handing it to Peter, the apostle’s action is clear. He receives that which is given. A commonly accepted alternative view is that Peter protects the falling end of the \textit{volumen} from being profaned by touching the ground.\textsuperscript{101} A third possibility is that Peter is helping Christ to display the scroll and its text to the viewer.\textsuperscript{102}

The formation of a cavity in his pallium is assimilated in the literature to the antique (and, for that matter, modern) practice of covering the hands in the proximity of a revered or

\textsuperscript{98} Among the metropolitan sarcophagi, on \textit{Rep.} I.676, 679, 724, 1008, \textit{Rep.} II.149, 150, \textit{Rep.} III.25, 53, 428, 462, 499. The indication of jewels may be eroded in some cases. Even where the surface of the cross is smooth, paint might have been applied. Gemmed cross appears on other triumphal representations, like the sarcophagus of Probus (\textit{Rep.} I.678, ill. 98).

\textsuperscript{99} According to Larry W. Hurtado, \textit{The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 135–154, the staurogram was not merely a sign of the cross (the conventional view, as in Jensen, \textit{Understanding Early Christian Art}, 138) but a visual reference to the crucified Christ. Pace Hellemo, \textit{Adventus Domini}, 84, the tau-rho form found in the apse at San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples (ill. 91) is not a “monogram,” nor is this the usual shape of Peter’s cross on the \textit{traditio legis}. Apart from the Naples mosaic the only other examples are \textit{Rep.} III.120 (Saint-Trophime, Arles, of local manufacture) and the Nea Herakleia casket (ill. 77), considered by most scholars to be of Ravennate or eastern production (see note 38 above), and in any event, atypical. Many crosses on \textit{traditio legis} sarcophagi are, admittedly, broken at the top.


\textsuperscript{101} Birt, \textit{Die Buchrolle}, 185, 323; Schumacher, “Dominus legem dat,” 9; Engemann, \textit{Deutung und Bedeutung}, 77.

\textsuperscript{102} Geissler, \textit{Traditio Legis}, 61, reflecting a position suggested by Birt, \textit{Die Buchrolle}, 323.
holy object. The *locus classicus* on this subject is a 1911 essay by Albrecht Dieterich.\(^{103}\) Dieterich remarked a Roman courtly practice, reflected in such representations as the Missorium of Theodosius I (ill. 110), of covering the hands when receiving something from, giving something to, or merely approaching an emperor or other high-status individual. Ammianus Marcellinus provided this acerbic description of an event at the imperial court in 356.\(^{104}\)

> When the agents had been summoned by his order on a festal day to his council chamber, to receive their gold with the rest, one of their company took it, not (as the custom is) in a fold of his mantle, but in both his open hands. Whereupon the emperor said: “It is seizing, not accepting, that agents understand.”

The Roman etiquette was a particularization of earlier eastern traditions prescribing the deference due to holy persons and things. One such practice, not noted by Dieterich, was mentioned in a passing footnote comment by Stephen Andrew Cooper. He referred to a Jewish rabbinical commentary that distinguished canonical scriptures from other religious texts, saying of the former that they “soil the hands.”\(^{105}\) After reviewing a number of unsatisfactory explanations previously proposed for this perplexing and counter-intuitive expression, Timothy H. Lim concluded that it had a cultic origin. Like the Ark of the Covenant, canonical scriptures were powerful, even lethal, spreading a “sacred contagion” to any except sanctified priests who dared touch them.\(^{106}\) The clerical exception could explain why Moses receives the Law with his bare hands (as at the left on *Rep.* III.499, ill. 58) although on a parity of reasoning Peter, presumably presented on the *traditio legis* in his “priestly” character, should not be required to cover his hands either. The cultic sense of the admonition appears either to have been forgotten or rejected.\(^{107}\)


\(^{104}\) Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.5.11 (translated by John Carew Rolfe), referred to by Dieterich, “Der Ritus der verhüllten Hände,” 445–446. Although the text refers to the “emperor,” the context indicates that the critic of the inappropriate behaviour was Julian, then Caesar.

\(^{105}\) Cooper, *Marius Victorinus’ Commentary*, 72n143. The reference is Mishnah Yadayim, 3:5.


\(^{107}\) This question was raised, but not resolved, in private communication between the author and Timothy Lim.
Whatever its origin, the topos of covered hands reflected in late Roman texts and images is not consistently applied in early Christian art. There are only a few examples where an object is unquestionably being received from or brought to the Lord, as on some fifth-century Ravennate sarcophagi. In these cases the hands are, indeed, covered (e.g., Paul receiving the scroll on *Rep.* II.390, ill. 72). Yet the three kings do not cover their hands when they bear their gifts before the Virgin and Child (as on the lower register of the Dogmatic Sarcophagus, *Rep.* I.43, ill. 103), and the contrast between Paul and Peter on the *traditio legis* itself indicates that mere proximity to Christ did not demand it. To be precise, Peter’s hands are not always fully covered either: his left, holding the cross, may be either exposed or wrapped in his garment (compare *Rep.* I.116, ill. 63 with *Rep.* I.288, ill. 62). Nonetheless, the average viewer must have appreciated the ostentatious depiction of the cavity in his pallium as an expression of reverence reflecting ancient religious customs, imperial etiquette or both, evoking a particular relationship between Peter and Christ centred on the *volumen*.

Returning to the fundamental question of the action at the Lord’s left, there is a conundrum. It is difficult to see Christ as making a gift or hand-off, and yet in most cases Peter does seem to be receiving the *volumen*. Admittedly this part of the relief, fully preserved on sixteen of the standard Roman *traditio legis* sarcophagi, is not entirely uniform. Often Peter’s covered hands appear to touch the scroll, especially where it extends to the side rather than downward (e.g., *Rep.* I.200, 676, 679, *Rep.* II.127; ill. 45, 47, 48, 49). In other depictions, Peter’s garment supports the trailing end of the scroll (as on *Rep.* I.58, *Rep.* II.149, 150, 152, *Rep.* III.428; ill. 44, 51, 52, 53 and 56). In all cases, Peter reaches for, holds, or at the very least supports the scroll. The protagonists’ perspectives may be different. What Christ merely displays, Peter receives. Certainly his special connection to this object is a fundamental aspect of the *traditio legis*.

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108 Other examples are Peter and Paul or other figures carrying crowns or wreaths to Christ (*Rep.* II.389, 382).
109 It is a common scene. Over 60 examples are noted in *Rep.* I alone by Ulrike Lange, *Ikonographisches Register für das Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage, Bd. 1 (Rom und Ostia)* (Dettelbach: J.H. Röll, 1996), 33–34, none of which have covered hands (this detail is not preserved or legible in all cases). There are rare counter-examples. Compare *Rep.* II.251 (Vicenza, SS Felice e Fortunato) and *Rep.* III.304 (Marseilles, Saint-Victor, known only from a drawing), neither likely metropolitan.
c) The book

Although the traditio legis is described as a ternary composition, it might better be called quaternary. To the one divine and two saintly protagonists must be added the book. Viewing the image as a whole, the scroll is smaller than the figures and off to one side, but within the partial composition of the Lord's left side it is prominent and central, providing the material and thematic link between Peter and Christ. The inscription dominus legem dat has received considerable scholarly attention, but not the bookroll itself or the relationship between the text and its imaged support.

i) Why a scroll?

Well before the development and dissemination of the traditio legis, the parchment codex had largely replaced the papyrus bookroll or volumen in the Latin West as the preferred medium for the canonical scriptures, patristic or Christian texts, laws, and high-quality secular literature.\(^{110}\) Codices were the principal depositary for both divine and human law. But, as Hans Reinhard Seeliger remarked, iconography lagged behind book production. Artisans and sculptors were slower to adopt the codex than scribes and readers. He attributed this to an inclination to follow convention, particularly in the funerary space. Eventually, the iconography caught up and the innovation Christians had adopted for texts appeared in visual form as well.\(^{111}\)

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\(^{111}\) Seeliger, "Buchrolle, Codex, Kanon," 557–561. The problematic of the appearance of the codex in visual culture is not limited to Christian representations. Codices seem to be even more rare in pre- or non-Christian Roman art. Ewald, Der Philosoph als Leitbild, catalogued over 200 "philosopher" images, many or most of which include scrolls, but there are no codices. On the so-called Sappho fresco from Pompeii, now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples, the pensive figure holds a folded, four-tablet polyptych.
From the middle of the fourth century, scroll and codex shared the burden of representing the book on Christian sarcophagi and other media. The codex was the visual translation of choice for the book held with the left hand by a seated Christ (as on the back of Rep. II.150, ill. 52; Rep. III.65, ill. 67; the apse mosaic in Santa Pudenziana, ill. 94; the *traditio clavium* in Santa Costanza, ill. 90), although he can also be found enthroned holding a bookroll (as on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, Rep. I.680, ill. 68). Christ stands in triumph with a *volumen* on the sarcophagus of Probus (Rep. I.678, ill. 98), and often holds a rolled-up scroll in his left hand while performing miracles with his right (as on Rep. II.138, ill. 99), or when being arrested (as on Rep. I.189, ill. 102). Apostles also carry scrolls even where, as on the sarcophagus of Concordius, Christ holds a codex (Rep. III.65, ill. 67). On one fifth-century Ravennate sarcophagus, he holds one of each (Rep. II.390, ill. 72).

As a generalization, by the latter part of the fourth century sarcophagi usually show Christ holding a codex when he is reading or declaiming while the scroll is preferred in “historical” or narrative scenes; however the solution adopted in any particular case is unpredictable. In some cases, it could have been a function of the lineage of particular forms of representation or workshop tradition, with no iconographical intent. Yet our difficulty in discerning a pattern does not justify an assumption of indifference on the part of producers, or especially consumers. The asynchronous adoption of the codex in book production and relief sculpture was meaningful. Christ held a scroll instead of the codex high-status Christians normally saw in their churches and their homes.

To the viewer accustomed to a codex, the depicted *volumen* evoked antiquity, authority and status. Jews, whether Old Testament prophets or contemporary Romans, used

112 To be more precise, Christ has a *volumen* in his left hand and a diptych, rather than a parchment codex, in his right. This identification was perceptively made by Seeliger, "Buchrolle, Codex, Kanon," 550. Diptychs as distinct from codices can be made out on other sarcophagi, for example Rep. II.20 in Syracuse. Henri-Irénée Marrou, MOYCIKOS ANHR: Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1964), 45–147, provides many additional examples of scrolls and codices in reading scenes on funerary monuments, lapidary and painted, Christian and non-Christian.

113 Compare Christe, “Spieser – Autour de la Traditio Legis,” 295, who makes just this judgment of indifference regarding the visual choice of the form of the book.

114 Although not, it would seem, imperial status. Emperors were disinclined to associate themselves with books in public displays. Exceptionally, Marcus Aurelius was depicted at least three times holding a scroll on
scrolls for their sacred scriptures. The seals on the book referred to in Apocalypse 5:2 presumably reflect the ancient practice of sealed bookrolls. Old scrolls could be seen and consulted in private and public libraries. They were associated with learning, whence the common depiction of the “philosopher” type in both non-Christian and Christian settings (as on the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus, Rep. I.747, ill. 22).

Apart from its historical and intellectual associations, the volumen on the traditio legis also had a practical function. On a monumental painting or mosaic, a codex may conveniently be inscribed with legible text (as at Santa Pudenziana, ill. 94). The more constrained space of a carved relief on a sarcophagus made this more difficult although certainly not impossible, as demonstrated by the sarcophagus of Concordius, Rep. III.65, ill. 67). John Huskinson remarked that the sculptors of the traditio legis lengthened, or in effect unravelled, the bookroll. “Why they should have done this,” he wondered, “is a matter for conjecture.”

An answer to his question might be: to write on it. An extended, flat surface seems destined to hold text, either actual or implied. The form of the scroll on many traditio legis

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115 The biblical text itself is reticent in identifying the format of the book. The Latin versions almost always used the neutral term liber; however, there are some references that clearly point to a scroll. Jeremiah 36:2 speaks of a volumen libri, a book in the form of a roll used to record the words of God; Ezekiel 2:9 explicitly describes a liber involutus, a rolled up book recording lamentations of the Lord; Luke 4:17 refers to the unravelling of the book of Isaiah. In some cases, the Vulgate specifies a volumen where the earlier Latin translations do not: e.g., Exodus 24:7 (volumen foederis for the book of the covenant in the Vulgate but generally just liber in the Vetus Latina); 4 Kings 22:8 (volumen referring to the liber legis, with the Vetus Latina using liber or, in one case, papyrus).

116 Most of the examples, including this one, were produced long before the era of the traditio legis. Although extensive access to such funerary monuments should not be assumed among late fourth-century viewers, the topos of the seated philosopher with a scroll was so widespread as to be almost a cliché and was presumably known by most in the Christian sarcophagus population. A few Christian sarcophagi after the middle of the fourth century that depict the philosopher and his scroll can be found, including Rep. III.23 and the lid of Rep. III.304.

117 Andaloro, L’orizzonte tardoantica. 116, explicitly remarked the legibility of this text to the viewer below.

118 Huskinson, Concordia Apostolorum, 115.
sarcophagi provides an elongated and almost horizontal space ideal for this purpose (Rep. I.28 (=II.158), 200, 676, 679, Rep. II.127, Rep. III.53; ill. 43, 45, 47, 48, 49, 55). In other cases the scrolls are vertical, but still adequate in length (Rep. II.150, 152, Rep. III.428, 642; ill. 52, 53, 56, 59). On a few of the monuments, only a reduced space, less amenable to inscription, is available (Rep. I.675, Rep. II.149, Rep. III.499; ill. 46, 51, 58), although as the Concordius sarcophagus or the gold-glasses demonstrate, even modest space was not an absolute bar.

ii) The inscription

The inscription dominus legem dat or some bastardization or abbreviation thereof appears on the largest and the smallest traditio legis images. ¹¹⁹ These three words are found on the Naples cupola mosaic (ill. 91) and the Grottaferrata wall painting (ill. 74), perhaps not original in the latter case, and they can be ascribed with some assurance to the Santa Costanza apse mosaic (ill. 89), where the replacement of legem by pacem is presumably a restoration error. Subject to a missing “m,” the full phrase is found on one gold-glass (ill. 80) and an abbreviation appears on the other (ill. 79). Lex domini is on the scroll of the only one of the incised glass plates on which this element can be seen (ill. 83). Yet no such inscription is found on any of the traditio legis sarcophagi.

Some scholars remark this epigraphic disparity between the sarcophagi and other traditio legis monuments without offering an explanation or conjecture. ¹²⁰ Others disingenuously imply that the problem does not exist, indicating that “many” or even “most” traditio legis representations do include the textual formula. ¹²¹ Cooper is forthright in pointing out the anomaly, but his briefly formulated solution is unconvincing, and in a sense self-fulfilling: the fact that depictions without text far outnumber those with it indicates “their creators'
confidence in the lucidity of the image by itself.” 122 Given the complex and novel iconography of the traditio legis this is an over-generous assessment of viewer competence.

Another, more plausible, theory holds that sarcophagus viewers already knew the traditio legis and its motto, most likely from monumental forms, even if the surviving examples are not helpful. San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples is too late and in the wrong place. Santa Costanza is in Rome and may have been early enough, but it was an imperial mausoleum. Individual catacomb paintings were in private spaces not seen by large numbers of viewers. The Grottaferrata catacomb fresco was also outside of town and its inscription may not be original anyway. The only Roman example, in the catacomb of Priscilla, is poorly preserved, but there is no suggestion of any text. If the apse of Old St Peter’s housed an early traditio legis representation complete with dominus legem dat on the bookroll, that could be a potential source of wider exposure; however, as discussed above, this assumption is insecure. 123 The Renaissance drawings do not show a standard traditio legis, and while they do include various inscriptions, there is no dominus legem dat (ill. 93). There may well have been other monumental depictions, perhaps in San Sebastiano, but if so, they have left no trace. Nonetheless, it is not impossible that church painting or mosaic could have provided both the model and the basis for viewer familiarity with dominus legem dat. At the other end of the scale, smaller objects with some version of the formula, notably gold-glasses and incised plates or bowls, could also have been encountered.

The argument in favour of earlier, more widely-encountered instances of the formula dominus legem dat finds some support in two intriguing monuments that suggest this

122 Cooper, Marius Victorinus’ Commentary, 73. To the same effect, see Huskinson, Concordia Apostolorum, 116. An entirely different, post-modern approach might deny that there is anything to explain. The blank space of the volumen could be valorized as intentional and meaningful. Peter Goodrich, “The Iconography of Nothing: Blank Spaces and the Representation of Law in Edward VI and the Pope,” in Law and the Image: The Authority of Art and the Aesthetics of Law, ed. Costas Douzinas and Lynda Nead (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 89–114, contends that blank tablets or panels may powerfully represent something by its absence. His analysis of empty spaces in Reformation pictures does not easily transfer to the late Roman traditio legis sarcophagi for a number of reasons, including the contemporary practice of inscription and the appearance of text in just this position on the same form of representation in other media.

123 The suggested precedent in Old St Peter’s (see note 60 above) is normally cited in connection with production and genealogy rather than reception.
motto had sufficient currency in fourth-century Rome to detach itself from the *traditio legis*. The first is the previously noted sarcophagus of Concordius in Arles (Rep. III.65, ill. 67), where this same sentence appears on the open codex held by Christ seated among his apostles. He is engaged here in an act of apostolic transmission or instruction to the future bearers of his message, a form of representation different from but not entirely foreign to the *traditio legis*.

The second example is a bronze lamp in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, also dated to the late fourth century (ill. 111). It is in the form of a boat with one figure seated at the rudder and another standing in the bow, identifiable by their figural types as Paul and Peter respectively. A *tabula ansata* attached to the mast above the unfurled sail bears the inscription: *dominus legem dat valerio severo evtropi vivas*. This text adds to the usual formula not only a hortatory *vivas* but also an indirect object, a certain Valerius Severus Eutropius. Attempts to interpret the representation as an allegorized *traditio legis* are

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124 Regarding the Concordius sarcophagus see, in addition to the *Repertorium* entry, Jean Guyon and Marc Heijmans (eds.), *D'un monde à l'autre: Naissance d'une Chrétienté en Provence IVe – VIe siècle: Catalogue de l'exposition 15 septembre 2001 – 6 janvier 2002*, 2nd ed. (Arles: Musée de l'Arles antique, 2002), 100–101 and 208 (cat. 26, entry by Charlet, Guyon, Heijmans). Another inscription on a tabula dedicates the sarcophagus to a certain Concordius, probably the city’s first bishop and a participant at the Council of Valencia in 374, which would put in within the proper chronological context. On the inscription, see Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “Tod und Jenseits in antiken christlichen Grabinschriften,” in *Himmel–Paradies–Schalom: Tod und Jenseits in christlichen und jüdischen Grabinschriften der Antike*, ed. Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Andreas Angerstörfer and Andreas Merkt (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012), 172–174. Unlike its appearance on the *traditio legis* scroll and many other inscribed books, the text carved on Christ’s open codex faces the reader rather than the viewer. Additional inscriptions that identify the books held by the Evangelist-apostles are also “upside down” from the viewer’s perspective. This makes problematic the suggestion that Christ’s codex was rendered this way to mark him as a reader and teacher (Arbeiter, *Das Mausoleum der Constantina*, 142). Geissler, *Traditio Legis*, 63, questioned whether the inscription is actually original. There is no archaeological evidence to suggest the contrary, and Geissler himself remarked the relationship between the *dominus legem dat* on the codex and the dedicatory inscription on the *tabula*.

strained.\textsuperscript{126} Beat Brenk considered it rather to be a take-off on that form of representation, the “law” having become the “rule” of the church that Valerius is to follow.\textsuperscript{127}

It would be an extraordinary coincidence if the expression \textit{dominus legem dat} had been adopted independently on these monuments and the \textit{traditio legis}. Its use suggests, therefore, that at least some late fourth-century artisans, and presumably viewers, were familiar with this formula. If so, visitors to the tomb could project it from memory onto the blank surface of the \textit{traditio legis} scroll, presuming that they understood its original or primary usage to be associated with this particular form of representation.

Even if one supposes that at least some viewers did know the motto and associated it spontaneously with the funerary \textit{traditio legis}, its consistent inclusion in full or abbreviated form in monumental and miniature media and its stubborn absence from the lapidary examples remains puzzling.\textsuperscript{128} An alternative explanation is that the marble \textit{volumina} were not in fact blank but, space permitting, painted with the missing phrase. On mosaics and gold-glasses the writing is permanent, but on sarcophagi the original lettering could have eroded to invisibility, along with any original polychromy.\textsuperscript{129} Red pigment was commonly used in Roman lapidary inscriptions, most often to enhance the legibility of incised letters.

\textsuperscript{126} In addition to the references in note 125, the argument for such an allegorical reading is made by Huskinson, \textit{Concordia Apostolorum}, 58; Binsfeld, “Dominus legem dat,” 37.


\textsuperscript{128} Like sarcophagi the other marble objects – the Ravenna casket (see note 39 above, ill. 78) and the Anagni slab (note 50, ill. 88) – also lack inscriptions on the scroll.

\textsuperscript{129} Although this might seem an obvious conjecture, it rarely appears in the literature. An exception is Utro, \textit{San Paolo in Vaticano}, 124–125 (cat. 11, Rep. I.724, entry by della Giovampaolo). A different and implausible explanation was offered by Geissler, \textit{Traditio legis}, 71, 78, 93. He proposed that \textit{traditio legis} initially appeared in the funerary realm without text and that the formula \textit{dominus legem dat} was added later when the image was recycled in the baptismal context. The Florence boat lamp and Concordius sarcophagus, on his interpretation, are precursors of the legend that is then applied to the mosaics and gold-glasses, rather than the reverse. This theory is not reflected in other literature on the \textit{traditio legis} and relies on questionable chronology and analysis. For example, the Santa Costanza mosaic can be accommodated only if it is ascribed a later date than is customary (as Geissler admits) and its funerary function ignored. Geissler’s theory also fails to account for the likely use of many gold-glasses in the funerary space. In principle, the suggestion that the \textit{traditio legis} may have acquired different or additional meanings when deployed in various contexts is not unreasonable; however, the rigid distinction between a baptismal usage with \textit{dominus legem dat} and a sepulchral usage without is untenable.
but also applied directly to the smooth surface of stone or marble. No evidence of painted text on the scroll of a *traditio legis* sarcophagus has been cited in the literature, although suggestive traces of red pigment are discernible with the naked eye on a sarcophagus in Arles (*Rep. III.53*, ill. 55, not visible on this reproduction).

Whether or not the missing *dominus legem dat* might have been painted on the blank scroll, it is surprising that, where the space was adequate, these words were not incised. The total expense of material and workmanship belies any economic rationale. Indeed, at least two of these sarcophagi have other incised text: a dedication on *Rep. II.149* in Ancona (ill. 51), and small panels along the upper edge of the unusual monument in Lamta, Tunisia (*Rep. III.642*, ill. 59) inscribed with the names of the mortal and non-saintly individuals depicted (although its tabula is blank). It is likely that others bore inscriptions on their now-missing lids. Why pigment would be applied in preference to what might seem, at least to modern observers, the more solemn, weighty and luxurious incised inscription, is unclear. Perhaps a "written" text was regarded as more appropriate (naturalistic? respectful?), closer to the experience of a real *volumen*.

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130 Arthur Ernest Gordon, *Illustrated Introduction to Latin Epigraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 5–7; Ivan Di Stefano Manzella, *Mestiere di epigrafista: Guida alla schedatura del materiale epigrafico lapideo* (Rome: Quasar, 1987), 142-143, 158-159. Di Stefano Manzella considered that purely painted inscriptions would rarely be used because of their susceptibility to erosion. He did, however, remark a few that have survived (142n343), including one Christian example (Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. 31641). Another Christian example is found in Tomb Z of the Vatican Necropoles: see Paolo Liverani and Giandomenico Spinola, *The Vatican Necropoles: Rome's City of the Dead*, trans. Saskia Stevens and Victoria Noel-Johnson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 89. Given their tendency to disappear, the survival of even these few examples seems significant. Pliny, *NH*, 33.122 (cited by both Gordon and Di Stefano Manzella) observed that *minium* (cinnabar-red) was used for writing in books and also for tomb inscriptions because of its legibility on surfaces like marble: "minium in voluminum quoque scriptura usurpatur clariores que litteras vel in muro vel in marmore, etiam in sepolchris, facit." Di Stefano Manzella (158) regarded this citation as directed at the practice of highlighting incised inscriptions, but the text does not justify that restrictive reading. On painted tabula inscriptions on sarcophagi, see also Jutta Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen des 4.–6. Jahrhunderts im Westen des römischen Reiches* (Rome: Herder, 2003), 20.

131 Noted by the author. The curators of the Musée départemental Arles antique confirmed in a private communication that the pigment was remarked by restorers in 1994 but no tests have been performed to determine its age or composition.
iii) *Dominus, legem and dat*

Associating a standard text with a stereotyped image enhances our understanding of the latter only if the former is clear. *Dominus legem dat* presents significant interpretive challenges. Cooper observed: "It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that everything about that short sentence has been disputed except that *dominus* means Christ!"\(^{132}\)

Indeed, even the first word demands some examination. Although no scholar interprets it otherwise than Cooper suggests, the contemporary usage was not lexically rigorous. In early Latin biblical translations, *dominus* could refer to either the Father or the Son. It always meant the former in the Old Testament and usually the latter in the New. The distinction was clear is some passages referencing both God and Christ, as in I Corinthians 6:14: God (*deus*) has raised up the Lord (*dominus*). Yet the Father was still often named by the composite *dominus deus* and both words might be used for Christ, as in Thomas’s outburst: *dominus meus et deus meus* (John 20:28). Subject to these exceptions, context would generally govern in a relatively mechanical way. The reader or viewer was reasonably safe in assuming that in the Old Testament, *dominus* meant the God of the Hebrews, the Father, while in a New Testament setting, it probably meant Christ; however, this was not absolutely necessary. Each of *deus* and *dominus* could sound in both hypostatic registers.

Thus when Schlatter interpreted the majestic seated figure on the Santa Pudenziana apse mosaic as the first person of the Trinity rather than the second, he was not embarrassed by the words *dominus conservator* inscribed in the open codex.\(^{133}\) Without accepting his iconographical supposition, the argument does illustrate how *dominus* was susceptible of taking either divine referent. Had *dominus legem dat* been inscribed on the tablet or scroll received by Moses from the hand of God depicted on a Christian sarcophagus, the designated legislator would clearly be the Father, although *deus legem dat* might have been clearer and could serve as well (and actually did in one text, remarked below). On the traditio legis, the word *dominus* is inscribed on Christ’s bookroll and exhibited in the

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presence of his apostles. In the circumstances, the conventional reading is reasonable, but the potential colouration of reference to the Father should not be forgotten.

The verb is the most contentious word in the sentence because it feeds into the larger interpretive issue. Investiture proponents ascribe *dat* its everyday meaning of giving or bestowing. Others claim it refers to annunciation or pronouncement. Schumacher invoked contemporary usage to support the latter position, citing Roman legal texts and the Vulgate translations of Psalm 24:8 and Hebrews 8:10. The legal usage, not surprisingly, emphasizes promulgation or pronouncement, but reliance on these sources presupposes that the viewer of the religious monument associated the image with secular legislation and its usage of *dare*, which is, after all, the matter in dispute. Nor is that verb the only one used with respect to imperial edicts. The biblical passages, although sparing, are more pertinent and convincing. The Psalm verse (Douay-Rheims translation and Vulgate Latin) is: “The Lord is sweet and righteous: therefore he will give a law to sinners in the way” (*Dulcis et rectus Dominus; propter hoc legem dabit delinquentibus in via*). The English “give” is either misleading or being used here in a conceptual way. The Latin phrase *legem dabit*, as Schumacher correctly points out, reflects a sign or demonstration of holy commandments, not a gift or transmission. This interpretation is supported by the Vetus Latina texts, which alternate between *legem dabit* and *legem statuit* or *statuet* (he establishes or will establish the law). The other passage, in Hebrews — “I will give my laws into their mind” (*dando leges meas in mentem eorum*) — is inconsistent with *dare* as gift-giving.

Another roughly contemporary example has escaped detection in these scholarly discussions. It is especially significant because it has a literary rather than an official or scriptural source, a better indicator of popular (but literate) usage at the time. The Apocalypse of Paul employs a form of *legem dare* in relation not to Christ but Moses. On his apocalyptic adventure to heaven, Paul meets a figure identified by his angel guide as

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135 Compare a passage by Ambrose, Ep. 75.9 (not cited by Schumacher). Writing to the Emperor Valentinian, the bishop refers twice in the same paragraph to imperial law-giving, employing two different verbs: *declarare* (referring here not to *lex* but *iudicium*) and *dare*. One suspects that a more extensive research program would uncover other examples of variable usage.
follows: “Hic est Mosyses legis dator, cui deus legem dedit” (This is Moses the lawgiver, to whom God gave the law). The author plays with grammatical forms of dare to make Moses both a giver and receiver. Dator evidently refers to promulgation; Moses is not handing a book of laws to anyone. Dedit is more subtle. God (called deus under the New Testament practice remarked above) “gave” the law to Moses in both senses. He announced it, as related in the Old Testament (Exodus 34), and while the event is not described in the biblical account as a physical handing-off, it was so depicted in early Christian art, including on dozens of sarcophagi (as on Rep. III.499, ill. 58). The use of the phrase deus legem dedit in the Apocalypse of Paul suggests that modern scholars may be too rigorously partisan in choosing between overlapping connotations of a common word.

The characteristics as well as the meaning of the verb are of interest. No attention is paid in the literature to its person (third singular) or tense (present indicative), but each may have some heuristic value. Compare, for example, the inscription on Christ’s codex in the Santa Pudenziana mosaic: dominus conservator ecclesiae pudentianae. Both these characteristics of the absent esse are left to the inference of the reader. Since the ecclesia, the community of the faithful (or, less likely, the building), is patently in existence — indeed its preservation is the point of the text — the missing verb should be in the present tense, but simultaneously including an element of the future to suggest continuation under the aegis of the Lord. The person of the verb is uncertain. Grammatically, it could be first or third. Scholars are not of one mind on the point and express no concern with the implications.

136 Apocalypse of Paul (Visio Pauli), 48. The Latin text is from Montague Rhodes James, Apocrypha Anecdota: A Collection of Thirteen Apocryphal Books and Fragments (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892), 39; the English translation is from Schneemelcher, New Testament Apocrypha, 2.791. The earliest Latin recension opens with a consular reference to the year 388 and presumably derives from a text written relatively shortly thereafter. Regardless of the date of the original source document, this makes the Latin text a reasonable indicator of late fourth- or early fifth-century usage.

In the case of *dominus legem dat*, person and tense are explicit. While Christ could talk about himself in the third person, reciting that he, the Lord, announces, promulgates or transmits the law, this is not the natural reading. In the gospels, Jesus generally speaks in the first person, sometimes with emphasis (*ego sum lux mundi*). So while *dat* could suggest that the legend on the scroll captures Christ’s words to his apostles and viewers, it was more likely regarded as an impersonal statement about the Lord's action. In Martine Dulaey's formulation, it reflects a revelation of what he means for humankind. As for the present indicative tense, this confirms that the statement is not about something that once happened (compare *deus legem dedit* in the Apocalypse of Paul). It could refer to a current event (the Lord does or is doing something now), or as with the implied verb in Santa Pudenziana, combine present and future. One might refer to this as the ever-present tense, analogous to a modern rule of legislative construction according to which “the law is always speaking,” meaning that its present tense implies indefinite repetition of the rule in its ongoing application. *Dominus legem dat*, like many scriptural passages, does not refer to an action occurring at the moment it is enunciated or read but one that is eternally repeated, just as Christ's sculpted theophany recurs upon each viewing.

Before turning to the remaining word in the sentence, the direct object *lex*, one part of speech that is *not* present should be remarked. There is no indirect object. If the formula refers to giving or physical transmission, a dative would be usual, although not strictly necessary. An indirect object is possible, although not required, if the meaning is annunciation, and superfluous for proclamation or promulgation. The importance of the

commentators consider the semantic implications of their grammatical choices. It might also be remarked that the mood of the verb, although always assumed to be indicative, could be subjunctive: “may the Lord be the preserver of the church of Pudentiana.”

Dulaey, "*Dominus conserverator ecclesiae Pudentianae,*" 226, suggests that this is the usual sense of text on monumental scrolls or codices held by Christ, citing as examples the Santa Pudenziana mosaic, the phrase *dominus legem dat*, the Santa Sabina wooden door panel, and the apse mosaic in the Blessed David, Thessaloniki.

The ever-present is a common effect of images. In a rather different context, recall the nightly visitations of Selena to Endymion discussed in chapter 5.

The point was first noted by P. Styger, “Neue Untersuchungen über die altchristlichen Petrusdarstellungen,” *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 27 (1913): 66, and has been cited with approval since, as by Bøgh Rasmussen, “Traditio Legis?” 9.
missing dative on the *tradtio legis* is underscored by its surprising insertion by Josef Wilpert, a prominent investiture proponent, who restated the formula: *dominus legem dat Petro*.\(^{141}\)

The object of the Lord’s transmission, annunciation or promulgation is the (or a) law. In the Old Testament, *lex* naturally refers to the Mosaic law and this is also the normal meaning of the word in the gospels (occasionally it refers to secular laws). As noted above, the usual but not invariable meaning of *dominus* was Christ, rather than the Father. Since Christ does not give, announce or promulgate the Mosaic law, an early Christian reader of the phrase *dominus legem dat* had to find some way to reconcile the words. One solution was to read *dominus* as the Father; the other was to conceive of a different content for *lex*. The former was possible but the context, a scroll held by the triumphant, risen Christ, suggested that *dominus* retained its more common meaning, the Son. Therefore, *lex* had to refer to something other than Mosaic law. Modern scholars read it as a new “law of Christ” that supersedes the old law, comprising the doctrines and practices of the Christian religion as expressed by the teachings, parables and actions of Jesus recorded in the gospels.\(^{142}\)

Contextually, this feels right, but the challenge to the viewer should not be underestimated. Evidence for this meaning of *lex* is not as robust as one might like or its promoters suggest.

The expression *lex Christi* seems to appear only once in the New Testament (I Corinthians 9:20), although Mikael Bøgh Rasmussen cites a few other suggestive, if ambiguous passages


\(^{142}\) The most extended recent discussion is by Bøgh Rasmussen, “*Traditio legis?*” 11–13. See also Cooper, *Marius Victorinus’ Commentary*, 79; Spieser, *Autour de la Traditio legis*, 9. An interesting patristic example is remarked by Berger, “Ursprung,” 120 (see note 155 below). One way to understand the fictive Hebrew text under the Latin formula on the Naples mosaic (note 58 above) would be to consider that *lex* means both, but a more likely interpretation of that particular example is that the doubled text was viewed as the bilingual rendition of a single message, perhaps reflecting the historical situation of the human Jesus of Galilee on the one hand and the announcement of Christ’s law to fifth-century southern Italians on the other. This curiosity is found only on the Naples *tradtio legis*. 

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and a modest quantity of patristic literature to support the interpretation. He particularly relies on Ambrose, although more on the bishop’s theological intent or reasoning than his language. Ambrose may well have theorized about a new law, but this was not much reflected in his choice of words, which is of particular importance for this investigation. A complete lexical inventory is beyond the scope of this study; however, it should be noted that almost none of the many appearances of the word *lex* in his writings (probably in the hundreds) contemplate any “new law.” Where *lex* does not refer to civic law, laws of the mind or laws of the flesh, it almost always means the old law of the Hebrew Bible, either explicitly or by implication. The occasional use of the word to denote anything resembling a *lex Christi* arises only by indirect citation of scripture.  

To summarize: *dominus legem dat* is a complex and opaque sentence. Although a reader could associate *dominus* with God the Father, it probably refers to Christ on the basis of both dominant contemporary usage and visual context. This would support *lex* as *lex Christi*, even though that meaning has a less than firm philological basis. As for *dat*, instead of opting among its possible meanings — in particular choosing between give/bestow/transmit or announce/pronounce/promulgate — a more liberal, relaxed and realistic approach is to accept this polysemy. Taking into account usage and the sentence structure, it could strike viewers/readers in any of these ways. They would not necessarily feel forced to decide, the alternative meanings taking their interpretations of the image in different directions.

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143 The instances of *lex* used to designate the law of Moses in Ambrose’s oeuvre are far too numerous to recite. Obvious examples include an express reference to the Hebrew prophet, like “Moses who wrote the ten words of the law” (*De fide*, 5.prol.12). Indirect but equally clear examples use *lex* in conjunction with Old Testament citations. *Lex domini* is expressly the old law in *De officiis*, 2.11.58 and 3.3.20. The “law” is the opposite of Christ, who is “above” it (*De officiis*, 3.9.100, *De fide* 3.9.62). It is contrasted with the gospels (*De officiis*, 2.48.239; *De excessu fratri Satyri*, 2.109) and with grace (as the two breasts of law and grace in *De fide* 2.2.32). Christ represents its fulfillment (*Explanatio psalmorum* xii.11.1, 47.1, 61.1). Against these and many other examples of *lex* as the old law is a rare reference to a “renewed” law, by way of a question concerning Christ’s virgin birth: “Vnde leges nouatae partus?” (*De fide*, 1.12.77). Ambrose does remark more than once the “law” of the spirit of Christ as liberating from the “law” of sin and death (as in *De officiis*, 3.1.6, 3.4.57, and 3.8.78), but this is a citation of Romans 8:2, not an original usage.
iv) Which book?

Christ’s volumen could be no book in particular. Ranks of apostles with scrolls in their left hands recall Roman “philosopher” representations; their books are generic attributes of learning, perhaps referring to Christian scripture or literature in general. In other cases, however, a specific book is depicted. On the Concordius sarcophagus in Arles (Rep. III.65, ill. 67) most of the apostles hold anonymous scrolls, but the four evangelists have open books (two scrolls and two codices) inscribed with their names. The volumen held before the viewer on the traditio legis invites speculation as to its content.

Two specific suggestions arise from the association of the traditio legis with the Apocalypse of John, a matter that will be dealt with at greater length in the “Synthesis” section below. Hermann Otto Geissler proposed that Christ could be holding the book of life (Apocalypse 20:12-15). The Johannine text describes an enthroned God surrounded by unsealed books, resurrected bodies and indications of judgment. Even if one relates those concepts to the risen Christ of the traditio legis, the images are entirely different. And if, as suggested above, the legend dominus legem dat can be supposed to have been written on the scroll, or understood to have been so written, it would be out of place in or as a reference to the liber qui est vitae described by John.

The second Apocalyptic analysis, by Yves Christe, takes a circuitous path and arrives at a different destination, knitting together several passages from the third-century commentary by the Styrian bishop Victorinus of Pettau. Victorinus identified the angel who stands upon the sea and the earth as a figure of Christ (Apocalypse 10:1-6; Comm. 10.1.10). Christe remarks that the angel’s open book, which he equates with the unfurled scroll in the traditio legis, may be associated with the book of the Lamb sealed by seven seals (Apocalypse 5:1), and according to Victorinus (Comm. 5.1.1-3), that other book signifies the Old Testament. Ergo the Lord standing in the traditio legis is regarded having

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144 Geissler, Traditio legis, 69. This suggestion has not been echoed by other scholars.
145 Christe, Apocalypse de Jean, 64. See also his earlier, lengthier consideration, Yves Christe, “Apocalypse et ‘Traditio Legis’,” Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte 71 (1976): 42-55. Source references are to Victorinus Poetovionensis, Commentarii in Apocalypsim Iohannis.
unsealed the old law and revealed its contents after accomplishing its hidden prophecies. Peter, in his role as representative of the church of the circumcised, ceremoniously receives the end of the scroll holding the Mosaic law, now fulfilled by Christ’s Passion and Resurrection. Meanwhile Paul, apostle of the Gentiles, “contains himself with acclaiming the establishment of the tempora novissima.”

This is an eccentric supposition and difficult to support. Victorinus himself would not likely have agreed: he thought the book held by the angel in Apocalypse 10:5 was John’s revelation and specifically remarks that the Old Testament was left sealed. The analysis sits uncomfortably with the inscription, which refers to announcement, proclamation or transmission, not fulfillment. Lay viewers of the traditio legis were not listening to a sermon or reading a theological tract; they were visiting a private tomb. It is difficult to credit the suggestion that they regarded Christ’s principal attribute on the face of the coffin as the superseded testament.

Aside from these Apocalyptic proposals, scholars rarely consider the question of the identity of Christ’s book, or whether it has one. A corollary question, also ignored, is the semiotic status of the inscription: is it experienced as text in a book or something about the book? does it point to Christ immediate or indirectly, as speaker or author, as subject or object? The approach to such issues would be facilitated, if not resolved, were the volumen a fully naturalistic representation. The content would then declare the identity of its container. To find such explicit and legible scriptural texts, however, one must look to later

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147 A less convoluted approach to Victorinus seems, at least to this author, to suggest the contrary of Christe’s thesis: the angel’s book in Apocalypse 10 is John’s very revelation (Comm. 10.1.8), and John was to write that which remained obscure in the Old Testament but leave it sealed (Comm. 10.2.3–7): “Sed quia dicit se scripturum fuisse, quanta tonitrua locuta fuissent, id est, quaecumque in ueteri testamento erant obscure praedicata, uetatur scribere, sed relinquire et signare....” In any event, the identification of the angel’s book as the Old Testament is difficult to pin on Victorinus.
works. In the sixth-century, examples begin to appear in a variety of media. A common version is the open book with a gospel text, generally held by Christ or the evangelist.

A different approach was to include a schematic rendition of the text, squiggles or unreadable marks that suggested letters. The surviving examples are not numerous, but they do indicate an accepted practice. In several fourth-century catacomb paintings, Christ is seen holding an open scroll or codex with his left hand, exhibited towards the viewer and bearing such pseudo-text. The mosaic on the counter-façade of the church of Santa Sabina, Rome, dated to the second quarter of the fifth century, depicts a female.

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148 One exception, or near-exception are books held by the evangelists on the sarcophagus of Concordius on which one-word names or labels are inscribed (Rep. Ill.65, ill. 67; see note 124 above). These could be regarded as minimalist citations of text from the relevant gospel, but they are probably better treated as tituli. A true counter-example would be the open codex held by Paul on the Santa Pudenziana mosaic, if it were original. It reads: liber generationis I.X ("the book of the generation of Jesus Christ"), the opening words of Matthew’s Gospel. However, this inscription does not appear in a sixteenth-century drawing of the mosaic and is generally regarded as a modern replacement. The original probably related something about the founding of the church. See Schlatter, “Text in Santa Pudenziana,” 156; Andaloro, L’orizzonte tardoantico, 116.

149 Examples are discussed by Krause, “Heilige Schrift,” 42–43, 65–74, and a number of others could be cited. Christ holds an open codex with a partial text from John 14:6 on a mosaic in the Cappella Arcivescovile, Ravenna. See Centro Internazionale di Documentazione sul Mosaico, Mosaiicoravenna.it: i mosaici dei monumenti Unesco di Ravenna e Parenzo (Ravenna: Museo d’arte della città di Ravenna, 2007), 139–140. An interesting case is the apse mosaic in the church of the Blessed David, Thessaloniki. The unfurled end of a scroll held by a youthful Christ seated on a rainbow presents a slightly abbreviated version of a passage from Isaiah 25:9–10. The Greek text, French translation and brief commentary are provided by Denis Feissel, Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine du Ille au Vie siècle (Athens: École française d’Athènes, 1983), 99.

personification labelled ec[c]lesia ex gentibus who holds an open codex with similar fictive “text.” Her pendant, identified as ec[c]lesia ex circumcisione, also has a codex, in this case with blocky forms presumably meant to suggest Hebrew.\textsuperscript{151} A Jewish precedent appears on the west wall of the Dura-Europos synagogue, where a prophet holds a broad, open scroll with illegible writing filling the expanse of parchment.\textsuperscript{152}

A third class of pictured books comprises those with extrinsic or extraneous text, not linked to a specific book or class of books. Reference has already been made to the wooden door panel at Santa Sabina, Rome, where a standing Christ holds a scroll with a scrambled version of the acrostic IXOYC (ill. 109), and to Christ’s codex on the apse mosaic in Santa Pudenziana, bearing the inscription dominus conservator ecclesiae pudentianae (ill. 94). A fresco in the lunette of an arcosolium in the catacomb of the Giordani depicts a man holding an open codex on which appear the words [d]ormitio / silvestre, the letters running cross-wise on the pages to facilitate reading by the viewer.\textsuperscript{153} In all of these examples, the text represents not what was actually written in the depicted book but rather an announcement, directed both visually and intentionally towards the spectators, rendered in relief, paint or tesserae as if it were in a book. The semiotic implications of this technique are complex in regard to both the semantic content of the pictured words and their relationship with agents within and without the image.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{151} On the mosaics, see Andaloro, \textit{L’orizzonte tardoantico}, 292–297 (cat. 40a, entry by Geraldine Leardi). The language suggestions are my own.

\textsuperscript{152} Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, \textit{The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art} (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990), 130; Krause, “Heilige Schrift,” 75–76. The prophet was identified by Weitzmann and Kessler as Jeremiah based on the adjacent Ark of the Covenant; Others have suggested Moses or Ezra. The representation is problematic because the convolutes face the prophet, putting the fictive writing on the outside of the scroll. It could be rolled in reverse or an opistograph (a parchment written on both sides); or perhaps the viewer is magically privileged to see through the parchment. Both Weitzmann and Krause compare the image to a sixth-century mosaic on the north wall of the presbyterium of San Vitale, Ravenna. There, the artisan cleverly depicts the prophet holding his scroll the “right way” but twisted so that its text is partly visible to the viewer. The Dura painter might have intended the same result but failed to find a proper means to achieve it.

\textsuperscript{153} Seeliger, “Buchrolle, Codex, Kanon,” 559 (his fig. 8). The first letter is actually an “R” rather than a “D,” an orthographic error he attributes to the mediocre level of education of the painter and the patron. The inscription is ICUR 9.24489.

\textsuperscript{154} Mieczysław Walisz, “Inscriptions in Paintings,” in \textit{Arts and Signs}, trans. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Publications, 1975), 59–72, proposed that inscriptions in medieval paintings functioned
After considerable scholarly effort, no patristic, legal or other textual source for the motto *dominus legem dat* has been found. Thus, to the extent that viewers ascribed this text to the unfurled scroll on *traditio legis* sarcophagi, these would seem to belong to the same “as if” category, the surface of Christ’s *volumen* serving as the support for and enhancing the impact and meaning of an imported text, rather than the depiction of a particular book.

It is also possible that Christ’s scroll, without actually picturing an identifiable book, nonetheless alluded to one. Some light may be shed on the question by considering the physical mechanics of the bookroll. To read a text written left to right, one holds the scroll in the right hand and unrolls it with the left, progressively exhausting the right convolute as a new one forms on the other side. When the entire text has been read, the *volumen* will look as it did at the beginning, but now coiled in the left hand. To be read again the scroll must be rewound, like a reel-to-reel film. On the *traditio legis*, Christ holds a convolute in his left hand. Unless he has stopped reading and transferred the roll from his right hand to his left — not impossible but nothing in the image suggests it — the rolled-up portion must represent what has already been read. This is consistent with the appearance of the inscription: in every case, it runs from top to bottom, that is to say from left to right on the

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155 Schumacher, “Dominus legem dat,” 11–12, canvassed many possibilities. The closest match may be a phrase from the writings of the pseudo-Clemens Romanus (Recognitiones 1.60.4) cited by Berger, “Ursprung,” 120. The Greek text might be early enough to precede the sarcophagi (before 381), although the Latin translation by Rufinus dates from 406. It would be strange to suggest that the viewer thought the Lord had just completed reading this theological tract and Berger cites it only as an example of usage, not as a means of identifying the book. The context of the phrase is foreign to the *traditio legis* – it appears in a passage contrasting Jesus, who is Christ, and John the Baptist, a prophet. The former is the one to whom the law was given, the latter one by whom it was preserved.

156 See Cavallo, “Between volumen and Codex,” 71. The reading of a scroll in Hebrew, of course, proceeds in reverse fashion. This discussion presupposes that the text appears lengthwise on the scroll, imitating a vertical column. Writing across the width of the scroll was rare, occasionally found in official proclamations, but this is the form adopted in some fifth-century and later visual depictions. We have already encountered two: the letters IXΘYC on the Santa Sabina door panel (ill. 109; see note 22) and the citation from Isaiah on the apse mosaic of the church of the Blessed David, Thessaloniki (see note 149).
scroll, forming a single, stylized column (ill. 74, 79, 80, 89, 91). The exposed surface should, therefore, reflect the final words of the book.

Most viewers who thought the scroll was meant to evoke a real book would likely have been inclined towards the gospels, texts of divine inspiration that contained Christ’s actual teachings and commandments and the proper source for a lex Christi. These had long before congealed into a canonical four-fold compendium that was not too voluminous for a codex but more than a volumen could hold. The scroll might, however, be conceived as an implicit condensation of the four books. Western Christians were receptive to the unitary presentation of the gospels in the form of “canons,” tabular presentations that correlated the corresponding passages or ideas. Their popularity is reflected in the several early Latin translations of the Eusebian system and its continuation and revision by Jerome circa 383. Just as these canons presented a four-in-one format, so Christ’s scroll on the traditio legis might be perceived as a pictorial compression of the gospels into a single book.

Dominus legem dat is not, of course, the final sentence of any of the gospels, but it could suggest an abstract summary of their conclusion. Matthew 28:19-20, in particular, ends as Jesus instructs his disciples to go out and to teach “all things whatsoever I have commanded (or taught) you.” On the traditio legis, the instruction has become an announcement or transmission, the teachings or commandments a “law.” The connection is more tenuous with the other gospels, yet the transmission or promulgation of Christ’s new law is

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157 This “column” is quite different from an actual bookroll. The length is within the range common in volumina measured in letters (15–30), but it only two lines long instead of the usual 25–45 (only one line when the space available is severely constrained, as on gold-glasses). The proportions and resulting synecdochy are a result of the exigencies of visual depiction. The same applies to “real” texts, scriptural extracts that are inevitably far shorter than that which would appear in the opening of an actual book or the exposed surface of a volumen.

158 Christe, Apocalypse de Jean, 64, remarked in his argument concerning the identification of the book as the Old Testament that the portion extended towards Peter represents “l’extrémité de la Loi dévoilée,” perhaps the only example of a scholar noting that we are regarding the end of a text.

159 Eusebius’s reconciliation of the four gospels is described in his letter to Carpianus, translated and discussed by Harold H. Oliver, “The Epistle of Eusebius to Carpianus,” Novum Testamentum 3 (1959): 138–145. Oliver also discusses (140–141) the western receptions and Jerome’s Praefatio in Evangelio.

160 The Vulgate reads: “docentes eos servare omnia quaecumque mandavi vobis.” Most versions of the Vetus Latina are similar, sometimes substituting observare for servare, on rare occasions praecipi for mandavi.
inherently something that would be associated with his final acts on earth, the end of a critical chapter in Christian history.\textsuperscript{161}

4. “Scenery” and context

The actions at the Lord’s left and right in the traditio legis do not occur in a vacuum, at least not on the Roman sarcophagi. The central scene is surrounded and supported by additional elements and usually placed in an architectural setting, with other figures or scenes on either side. This visual context is not oriented towards left or right. On the contrary, it is generally either centred (the mound on which Christ stands) or symmetric (palms, apostles). The additional decoration does not, therefore, “take sides” but provides a background for the synthesis of the composite image.

a) Surroundings

In most cases, an architectural structure extends across the front of the sarcophagus. Some of the monuments rely on classical columns or pilasters supporting an architrave or arches (pedimented or curved) to establish a series of five or seven niches. The “city-gate” group depicts piercings in what looks like a city wall. These are not rigidly separated types. On city-gate sarcophagi the central space in which Christ stands is not a doorway but an arch or architrave on columns. A few sarcophagi include bits of urban architecture mixed with columns. Trees may exceptionally be used in place of architecture to establish the spaces.\textsuperscript{162} These formal devices are not peculiar to the traditio legis sarcophagi. The columnar style has a long history in Roman sarcophagus production and was widely adapted to Christian use. The city-gate form is dominated by traditio legis examples, but it is not restricted to

\textsuperscript{161} Christ’s leave-taking is transposed to or fixed at the Ascension by Acts 1:2–11, where he gives his commandments to his apostles just before ascending to heaven.

\textsuperscript{162} Fully columnar examples are Rep. I.58 (ill. 44), 200 (ill. 45), 676 (ill. 47), 679 (ill. 48), I.724 (ill. 61), Rep. II.127 (ill. 49), II.131 (ill. 50) and Rep. III.53 (ill. 55). The most complete city-gate examples are Rep. II.149 (ill. 51), II.150 (ill. 52), Rep. III.25 (ill. 54) and III.428 (ill. 56). Rep. II.152 (ill. 53) presents four gate structures and three areas defined by columns. Rep. I.1008 (ill. 60), Rep. III.465 (ill. 57) and 499 (ill. 58) include a single piece of city wall to the right of centre. The much damaged Rep. I.28 (ill. 43) suggests two city-gate structures. Trees are employed on Rep. I.675 (ill. 46), with columns around Christ. Palms rather than columns enframe Christ on Rep. I.28 (II.8), Rep. III.465, 499 and it seems, the fragment Rep. I.288 (ill. 62).
them.\textsuperscript{163} Even if these approaches to architectonic framing were not exclusive to this form of representation, they did have implications for its appearance.

For example, the columns framing the standing figure of Christ presented a compositional challenge, or opportunity, for the depiction and interpretation of the action on the Lord’s left. While in one case Peter and Paul are both compressed into the central space and become disconcertingly small in consequence (Rep. I.58, ill. 44), the other columnar examples place them in separate niches. This emphasizes the unfurled scroll, which must now cross the architectural boundary in order to extend from Christ to Peter while being simultaneously forced outward from the plane of the image towards the viewer. With respect to the city-gate monuments, some scholars regard the impact of the architecture on the viewer as more semantic than formal. The walled city invites interpretation as an allusion to the Apocalyptic heavenly Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{164} Yet the depiction does not correspond to the vision (Apocalypse 21:12-21), neither in the number of gates (there should be twelve) nor their appearance (there are no precious stones or pearls). Nor is the correspondence easily made with the vision(s) of Ezechiel, as attempted by Schlatter with respect to the more amenable city-scape in the apse mosaic at Santa Pudenziana (ill. 94).\textsuperscript{165} Indeed, the city-gates on the \textit{traditio legis} sarcophagi serve as a backdrop for the figures or scenes to either side but not for the other-worldly theophany in the centre. The heavenly Jerusalem interpretation is especially challenged by the appearance of other biblical scenes — like the Samaritan woman or especially the kiss of Judas — in front of the gates (Rep. II.152, ill. 53).


\textsuperscript{165} Schlatter, “Interpreting Santa Pudenziana,” 282-283.
The walls and portals could allude to holy rather than heavenly Jerusalem, or perhaps even Rome. The joint appearance of Peter and Paul, and the legend of their joint martyrdom in the city promoted by Pope Damasus, might well suggest a metropolitan setting. For most viewers, depicted gates would immediately evoke those of the Aurelian walls, without necessarily excluding additional associations.

The serial niches on columnar sarcophagi are ideal for presenting distinct scenes, figures or events, epitomized by the “picture gallery” on the face of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Rep. I.680, ill. 68). The same application is found, less dramatically and extensively, on a number of traditio legis sarcophagi. Often the spaces are used to permit the addition of other apostles next to Paul and Peter. The city-gate group employs a different visual strategy. Each portal could have been treated like an inter-columnal arcade, but this is not how these monuments are constructed. Instead, the architecture is deployed as scenic background. Figures are not inserted into it but lined up in front. In the most complete city-gate examples, the entire face is filled with a row of apostles (twelve or ten). The monuments that include only some bits of urban architecture are organized more like the columnar examples and include other Christian scenes.

Fabrizio Bisconti regarded Peter and Paul on the traditio legis as representing the full apostolic college. He described the appearance of only the two princes of the apostles as a “reductio figurativa,” although it could be the reverse, the examples with multiple apostles representing an expansio, the addition of the full apostolic college in what is primarily an image of Peter and Paul. In either case, whether reduction or expansion, this might suggest that the broader apostolic context was (or at least was intended to be) understood by viewers. However Roman viewers did not engage in the comparative study

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167 Bisconti, “Variazione sul tema,” 266–267. To the contrary, Berger, “Ursprung,” 112–118, produced a detailed argument regarding the importance of there being two messengers or witnesses, based on Jewish literary traditions, Christian apocryphal texts and other sources. If the appearance of precisely two apostles is of such importance, one should not quickly assume them to function as representatives of the full college.
of sarcophagi. Those who saw only the ternary image were not affected by collegial
depictions on other sarcophagi, many of which were deposited in other cities (Ancona,
Milan, Aix-en-Provence). If there was a synecdochic implication, some viewers of
monuments with only a few apostles undoubtedly failed to grasp it.

Apart from apostles, most of the standard traditio legis sarcophagi also present biblical or
Christian scenes of the type found on other sarcophagi of the period; the ones that do not
are generally incomplete, lacking sides, lids, or parts of the front. No single narrative
program emerges, although it may be remarked that while Old Testament scenes appear on
sides and lids, narrative representations on the fronts are almost entirely restricted to the
New Testament or the life of Christ or Peter. Of these accompanying scenes, two merit
further attention: Moses receiving the law, and the judgment before Pilate.

The event on Mount Sinai represents the exception to the absence of Old Testament scenes
on the face of traditio legis sarcophagi, appearing on two of them (Rep. III.465, 499; ill. 57,
58), albeit both of questionable metropolitan provenance.\(^{168}\) It is also found on the side
panels (Rep. I.675, II.149, 150) or lid (Rep. II.152, ill. 53) of four others in the city-gate group.
A typological relationship between Peter and Moses is regarded by many scholars as
beyond reasonable doubt ("patent" for Herbert L. Kessler; "evidente" for Fabrizio Bisconti)
and has been explicated at length by Galit Noga-Banai.\(^{169}\) The evidence is partly literary, but
so far as concerns fourth-century Rome, it is mainly iconographical because the textual

\(^{168}\) They are classified as metropolitan in the Repertorium but as local works by Koch, Frühchristliche
Sarkophage, 488-489. The “transitional” example, Rep. I.677 (ill. 66), presents the sacrifice of Isaac in the far
left niche.

\(^{169}\) Herbert L. Kessler, Old St. Peter’s and Church Decoration in Medieval Italy (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi
sull’alto Medioevo, 2002), 190; Bisconti, Temi, 45; Galit Noga-Banai, “Visual Prototype Versus Biblical Text:
Moses Receiving the Law in Rome,” in Sarcofagi tardantichi, Paleocristiani e altomedievali: Atti della giornata
tematica dei Seminari di archeologia cristiana, École française de Rome — 8 maggio 2002, ed. Fabrizio Bisconti
typology is widely but not unanimously accepted. Compare the more tentative and balanced conclusion
Huskinson, Concordia Apostolorum, 114–115.
sources are mostly eastern, not always convincing, and generally later.\textsuperscript{170} The monuments most often cited to prove the point are, precisely, these *traditio legis* sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{171}

Curiously, some scholars who accept the Moses typology in this form of representation have equated the Hebrew prophet with Jesus rather than Peter, suggesting an entirely different understanding and experience of the image.\textsuperscript{172} Literary sources could support the connection between Jesus and the Hebrew prophet, notably John 1:17 and derivative patristic texts ("the law was given by Moses").\textsuperscript{173} But where Moses receiving the law appears on a *traditio legis* monument, the two images are more consistent with the other analogy — Peter is to Christ as Moses was to Yahweh. In the two cases noted above where both images appear on the front (Rep. III.465, 499; ill. 57, 58), the parallel is not only conceptual but also compositional: Moses replicates Peter’s position, receiving the Law from his right rather than the more common arrangement with the prophet turned to his left towards the hand of God.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{170} On the patristic texts, see Dresken-Weiland, *Bild, Grab und Wort*, 123 and references; Sotomayor, *S. Pedro*, 149–152.

\textsuperscript{171} Noga-Banai "Visual Prototype," constructed her argument with reference to the Nea Herakleia casket and the lids and sides of city-gate *traditio legis* sarcophagi in Ancona (Rep. II.149, ill. 51), Milan (Rep. II.150, ill. 52), and Verona (the lid of Rep. II.152, ill. 53). She also cited an incomplete monument in Mantua (Rep. II.151) that has been excluded from the catalogue here (see note 28 above). She did not refer to Rep. III.465 or 499. Noga-Banai also speculated (at 177) that the apse mosaic in Santa Costanza commonly regarded as a *traditio clavium* might be an atypical rendition of Moses receiving the law, conceding that it would differ dramatically from all other known examples. Although questions have been raised about this mosaic (particularly the suggested reconstruction by Schumacher – see note 56 above) her conjecture is novel, implausible, and not repeated by other scholars.

\textsuperscript{172} See, for example, Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 107. Kessler in Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue*, 170, is cited for this view by Noga-Banai, "Visual Prototype," 176. His position was either misstated in that book or changed in his later work.

\textsuperscript{173} Confusingly, Binsfeld, "Traditio legis und Kirchenväter," 224–225, refers to these texts as justification for a "gift of the law to Moses" ('*Datio legis* an Moses'). But John refers to the law given or announced by not to Moses: *lex per Moysen data est*, and then underscores a parallel between Moses and Christ: *gratia et veritas per Jesum Christum facta est*.

\textsuperscript{174} In all cases Moses receives the tablet or scroll with his right hand, but in the great majority of cases his right arm crosses his body towards the hand of God descending from heaven at his left. This is the form adopted on the other *traditio legis* monuments where Moses receiving the Law is on the side or lid (Rep. I. 675, Rep. II.149, 150, 152) and on a host of other sarcophagi, including Rep. I.39, 40, 42, 45, 52, 111, 145, 188, 242, 623, 625, 674, 689, 694, 771, 772, 807, Rep. II. 20, 151, 415 (from Constantinople), Rep. III. 22, 40, 41 and 428. The reverse position of Moses as found on Rep. III.465 and 499 is not, however, restricted to those two sarcophagi. It also appears on Rep. I.279 (very fragmentary), 680 (the lamb allegory on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus), Rep. II.33, Rep. III.84 and 305.
There are formal similarities between the two images — Peter, like Moses, even places his right foot on a rock in some cases — but there are also important differences. Peter does not resemble the usually young, clean-shaven Moses. Christ is even less like Yahweh, who appears as a disembodied right hand reaching down from heaven, reflecting either a lingering discomfort with or vestigial habit regarding the depiction of the Father. Moses receives the Law with bare hands, a proper reflection of the ancient Jewish practice discussed above since because of his priestly role, even this holiest of holies would not “soil his hands.” The form was probably borrowed from other models without understanding the source, and it is unlikely that the sculptors intended to draw a distinction between the two images in this respect, but it is nonetheless interesting to speculate how the distinction might have struck viewers. Finally, although Noga-Banai emphasized that Moses sometimes receives the Law in the form of a scroll, an admittedly unexpected and interesting parallel with the traditio legis, she conceded that the Mosaic book is more often square — a tablet, diptych, or codex.

These formal differences would not have prevented a viewer from associating the two representations if otherwise so inclined. However the majority of traditio legis sarcophagi do not include a depiction of Moses receiving the law, and vice versa. Nor is Moses found on the monuments in other media (the exception, yet again, being the Nea Herakleia casket). There is also an alternative reading of the significance of Moses as he appears on the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus and the related Borghese sarcophagus in Paris (Rep. II.150, III.428; ill. 52, 56). In these cases Moses receives the law on the short side accompanied by Elias ascending to heaven. This iconography recalls the appearance of the two Old Testament prophets to Christ at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:3).

The second biblical narrative that may be noted as having possible significance for some viewers is the scene of Christ before Pilate, which is preserved on the face of three traditio

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175 The fragmentary state of most surviving sarcophagi prevents firm statistical conclusions, but of the 24 – 26 sarcophagi characterized here as traditio legis examples, only seven present Moses receiving the law on Mount Sinai. Conversely Lange, Ikonographisches Register, 71–72, lists 22 examples of the Moses scene on sarcophagi in Rep. I only one of which (Rep. I.675) includes the traditio legis. Of 13 examples in the iconographical index in Rep. III, three include the traditio legis.
*legis* sarcophagi (*Rep.* I.58, 679, *Rep.* III.53; ill. 44, 48, 55), as well as the “transitional” *Rep.* I.677 (ill. 66). In each case the governor’s right hand gesture is reminiscent of Christ’s, although the arm is not raised as high. Both the relationship between these gestures and the rendering of Pilate are similar to the two appearances of the military figure on the lid and front of the Grand Ludovisi Sarcophagus (ill. 97) but the meaning is entirely different. The main figure on the Christian examples is not the judge but the person being judged.

Moses receiving the law and the judgment before Pilate appear on a minority of *traditio legis* sarcophagi. It would, therefore, be imprudent to claim either as a fundamental aspect of the viewers’ experience of the *traditio legis*. They could have been meaningful for some viewers, where they were present. In both cases, their potential significance relates to the historicity of the central image. Moses receiving the law was an earlier moment in sacred history that paralleled in some respects the transmission or announcement of the *lex Christi* to Peter, the action on the Lord’s left; Christ’s appearance before Pilate was one of the events culminating in his crucifixion and resurrection.

**b) Diminutive figures**

On six of the nineteen standard metropolitan *traditio legis* sarcophagi small figures appear on either side of Christ, usually kneeling in mirror postures of deep proskynesis. They touch or reach out to his feet or the hem of his robe, sometimes with covered hands but usually not. Where dress or hair style permits gender identification, the figure on Christ’s right can be seen to be male and the one on his left female. None of the *traditio legis* representations other than sarcophagi include such depictions. These figures could be generic allusions to faithful Christians, but the sepulchral context supports the inference that they represented — directly or allegorically — the deceased and his or her spouse, or a buried couple where both inhabited the same coffin. Unlike many later medieval “donor”

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176 *Rep.* I.675, 679, *Rep.* II.149, 150, *Rep.* III.25, 428; ill. 46, 48, 51, 52, 54, 56. On *Rep.* III.428 the two figures are positioned somewhat differently, the one on the right on one knee, the one on the left bending forward. On *Rep.* I.679, they are almost erect, the knees only slightly bent.

177 On the motif of the diminutive “patron” figures on *traditio legis* and other sarcophagi, see Johannes G. Deckers, “Vom Denker zum Diener: Bemerkungen zu den Folgen der konstantinischen Wende im Spiegel der
images, the sarcophagus representations are not accompanied by any saintly presentation or intercession. The three figures of the *traditio legis* ignore them, as do any surrounding apostles. Their proximity to Christ, Peter and Paul is nonetheless an expression of status.\(^{178}\)

Apart from these diminutive figures, most *traditio legis* sarcophagi, or at least the preserved elements of them, include no family or self-representation. A particularly remarkable exception is the sarcophagus in Lamta, Tunisia (*Rep.* III.642, ill. 59) with several aristocratic figures carved and labelled on the front. One of them fills the central arch, the *traditio legis* being offset to the right. Most are engaged in pursuits relating to the hunt. Only one seems to pay any attention to the presence of the Lord, raising a hand in recognition, acclamation or veneration. Another example of self-representation is a two-figure clipeus on the lid of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus (*Rep.* II.150, ill. 52). Togate figures also appear on the short side. A couple displaying the handshake motif appears on the back of the *traditio legis* sarcophagus in Ancona (*Rep.* II.149). Only the diminutive figures (and the lone figure in Lamta) are at all integrated with the *traditio legis* representation.

There is no reason to reject the interpretation of these small figures that naturally suggests itself, namely, that the spouses are venerating Christ in the specific context of the act that he and his apostles are accomplishing above them. Their insertion into the scheme of his resurrection and relationship with Peter and Paul was presumably regarded by contemporary viewers as expressing the couple’s prospective salvation. One might have thought that the mere appearance of the *traditio legis* on a sarcophagus — as opposed to in the apse of a church or on the face of a reliquary — would have conveyed a similar message without the necessity of including these diminutive figures, but they made that communication more explicit. One suspects that some workshops, designers or patrons felt the need to clarify or emphasize this aspect of the funerary symbolism because of the complexity or opacity of the *traditio legis* form of representation and its ambiguous connection with the death of the individual.

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\(^{178}\) Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophage Roms*, 90, 95.
c) Symbols

On all the metropolitan, standard *traditio legis* sarcophagi, and most examples in other media, Christ stands on a mound, generally with four rivers flowing from it. The rivers would naturally have been understood to be the four heads into which the river flowing from paradise divided (Genesis 2:10-14). However, as will be noted shortly, some scholars who press an Apocalyptic interpretation argue a conflation with Mount Sion (Apocalypse 14:1). The mound could also generically bundle Eden, Jerusalem, Sion, Golgotha and even an atavistic reference to the centre of creation. Sometimes, Christ is larger than Peter or Paul but even where he is not, the mound raises him above them. Compositively, this enables his right arm to pass over Paul's head (as on Rep. I.675, Rep. II.152; ill. 46, 53). More important, the elevation provided by the mound tends to push Christ through the top of the architectural frame and project him forward, in front of the arch or architrave, advancing his figure into the viewer's space (e.g., Rep. I.679, Rep. II.149, Rep. III.53; ill. 48, 51, 55).

Other attributes are commonly distributed around the ternary representation. Framing palm trees are found on the great majority of metropolitan *traditio legis* sarcophagi and most of the representations in other media. Lambs often appear on either side of Christ, occasionally below him. Less common, but not unusual, are the lamb with a cross on its forehead, the Lamb of God, and the phoenix, a long-standing figure of regeneration borrowed from pre-Christian imagery. The simplified examples on which none of these elements appear — in particular the Nea Herakleia and Ravenna caskets (ill. 77, 78) — were unlikely to have been seen by Roman sarcophagus viewers.

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179 The statement about sarcophagi must be qualified to recognize that in a few cases the mound is not preserved and must be inferred from the height of the figure of Christ. See Bas Snelders, “The *Traditio Legis* on Early Christian Sarcophagi,” *Antiquité Tardive* 13 (2005): 327n22. A globe appears instead of a mound on the Neapolitan baptistery mosaic (ill. 91), and according to Wilpert’s sketch, on the wall painting in the catacomb of Priscilla (see chapter 6, note 34). No support appears on the Nea Herakleia and Ravenna caskets (ill. 77, 78).

180 These attributes are conveniently charted by Snelders, “*Traditio legis*,” 325, Table 1. Some entries are uncertain due to the fragmentary state of the monuments. His central conclusion regarding the prevalence of these elements, however, is robust.

181 Although Noga-Banai argued a Roman provenance for the Nea Herakleia casket (see note 38 above), most commentators consider it an eastern or Ravennate production. The latter would be consistent with the
Like the mound, palms and lambs were not merely decorative motifs but well-understood if polyvalent symbols that could hardly have escaped notice.\textsuperscript{182}

- **Palm**: The leaf is a sign of martyrdom and the tree may evoke Christ's entry into Jerusalem or the family's flight to Egypt. While the latter narrative allusions might serve as indirect omens of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, in the funerary context the palm is better regarded as a figure of regeneration and resurrection. In Ezekiel 40:16, the prophet's vision of a house in the heavenly city has pictures of palms on its door posts. Apocalyptic interpretations sometimes assimilate the palms to the tree of life (Apocalypse 22:2), although unlike the other associations, this one requires the addition of the species as a gloss to the text, which refers merely to \textit{lignum}.

- **Lambs**: Particularly when several are depicted they may refer to apostles or to the faithful in general as Christ's flock. The lamb also appears repeatedly in the Old Testament as an emblem of sacrifice, an association taken up in John's ``Lamb of God'' (John 1:29, 36) and made explicit in scriptural pericopes like Acts 8:32 and 1 Peter 1:19. For this reason the lamb, in particular the occasional appearance of the animal bearing a nimbus or a cross mounted on its forehead, evoked Christ's passion and by implication, his resurrection. The lamb has a special place in John's Apocalypse, although the one seen on the \textit{traditio legis} is not fitted out with seven horns and seven eyes (Apocalypse 5:6); nor is it either on or associated with a throne (Apocalypse 5:6-14, 7:9-17).

The appearance of this symbolic scenery on the *traditio legis* could evoke multiple associations; nor is its appearance consistent on all the monuments. Quite apart from the unusual minimalist, non-metropolitan examples, the variations are marked. The massive palms that frame Christ on *Rep. I.28* (ill. 43) compare to the single waist high plant on *Rep. III.428* (ill. 56). They are entirely absent on several other sarcophagi. The remarkable apostolic lambs and their elevated leader across the bottom register of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus (*Rep. II.150*, ill. 52) have no (extant) counterpart. The four naturalistic animals at Christ’s feet on *Rep. III.53* (ill. 55) recall the ones on *Rep. I.200* (ill. 45), often considered among the earliest of these monuments, but lack its striking frontal animal with a cross planted on the forehead. The phoenix appears on only half a dozen sarcophagi. Snelders called all these attributes “eschatological” or “paradisiacal.” Deferring such judgmental qualifications to the discussion below, it is nonetheless reasonable to infer that this scenery underscored a message relating to resurrection.\(^\text{183}\)

5. Synthesis

Reimagining the original reception experiences of early Christian monuments is challenging even when the images reflect, or are at least inspired by, an identifiable text. Without that anchor the *traditio legis* seems adrift, its interpretation at the whim of modern scholars. At the opening of this chapter, the diversity of representations and viewers was invoked as a reason to reject singular, hierarchic or even composite (the one-size-fits-all variety) approaches to these images. The ensuing laborious excursion through the component parts of the *traditio legis* provided two further reasons to approach this form of representation with caution, namely, its novelty and complexity.

\(^{183}\) Snelders’s article, “Traditio legis,” was intended as a response to the claim by Bøgh Rasmussen, “Traditio legis?” and “Traditio legis – Bedeutung und Context,” that the simplified form on the Nea Herakleia casket is archetypal. A similar but abbreviated rebuttal is made by Spieser, *Autour de la Traditio Legis*, 7. Snelders focused on the symbolic attributes to make his point that this object was an outlier rather than a model. Other aspects of the casket are also atypical, including Christ’s unusual gesture, bare feet and beardless face. The Nea Herakleia box is more likely a later reduction in the fulsome iconography of almost all the other monuments than the reverse.
The *traditio legis* must have a lineage that connects it with earlier forms, and it is entirely possible that with better information regarding dates and workshop practice some master phylogeny might be constructed to encompass teaching scenes, "Maiestas," *traditio legis,* and other forms of representation. But for most visitors to the tomb, the experience of this image was a first encounter. Not only the complete form but individual aspects were unfamiliar. The complexity of the *traditio legis* arises, and arose, from both the originality of its elements and their compression into a single image. The modern debates over "the meaning" of the *traditio legis* reflect similar conflicts that must have arisen both within and between original viewers.

This heading of this final section, "Synthesis," does not mean conflation. The parts — a bearded Christ, an open bookroll, symbolic attributes, *dominus legem dat* — did not lose their identity even as they coalesced into a single image, or perhaps more accurately, were squeezed into a defined space. Although it is common to understand antique and medieval images as combination scenes, modern viewers (and scholars) often fail to give the notion its full force and effect. Condensation does not entail confusion; the presentation in a single image of actions separated by time or space in the related text or story was not meant or experienced as a rejection of their distinctness. An example encountered in chapter 5 is Jonah depicted at rest under the cucurbita with the ketos lurking nearby, or even still grasping at his leg. To explain such an image by advancing the rest scene to the moment of Jonah’s disgorgement from the monster is to reject the point (and effect) of the artistic technique. The viewer was perfectly capable of recognizing two distinct events separated in time and space that were pressed together for reasons of sculptural economy and perhaps semantic suggestion.

The same technique applies to ideas as well as events. While some viewers might have forced the pieces of the *traditio legis* into a single overriding message, most probably
experienced a simultaneous and even contradictory congeries of associations. A form of representation so unexpected and abstruse invites this kind of “open” reception.  

Organizationally, this section does not rely on the scholarly dichotomy between investiture and eschatology, although that debate is embedded within the issues addressed. The first sub-section concerns the horizontal orientation of the image, the placement of figures on the left or right of Christ. The next part considers the historical and other-worldly aspects of the *traditio legis*. The latter are generally regarded as dominant, if not even exclusive, ignoring the importance of the interplay or tension between this world and the next. There follows a consideration of the tangled meanings of “eschatology” applied to the *traditio legis*.

a) **Left and right**

The left and right sides of the Lord were initially separated in this chapter partly for heuristic reasons and partly on the supposition that contemporary beholders would also approach the puzzling *traditio legis* analytically, even if only fleetingly or unconsciously. Standing back and looking now at the left-right orientation, two questions are posed below, one narrow (the relevance of placement for the investiture theory), the other broad (the relative status of Peter and Paul).

i) **Hand-offs to the left**

From the imperial *liberalitas* on public monuments to the Missorium of Theodosius I, emperors are depicted giving objects to their subjects with the right hand. So, it has been argued, Christ could not have been meant or perceived to be handing something to Peter with his left.  

As already remarked, a more persuasive reason to reject manual transfer of the *volumen* is the mechanical challenge of handing someone an unfurled scroll by its

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184 Charles Pietri, *Roma christiana: recherches sur l’Église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311–440)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1976), 2.1413–1442, is one of the few scholars who accepts the complexity of the image and the relative autonomy of its two sides.

dangling end. The appearance of the scroll in Christ’s left hand is not, in fact, so significant for the interpretation of the action at Lord’s left.

First, Roman artistic convention commonly placed a fully rolled-up scroll in the left hand as a signal that it had been read. The same logic applies to Christ’s volumen: all but the unravelled portion containing the final words of the book has already been read, or perhaps relates past events. A second factor is compositional. On the traditio legis Christ’s right hand is occupied with a gesture of triumph, leaving the sculptor no choice but to place the scroll in his left. The same decision was made when Christ gestured in speech, as is apparent on the many “teaching” scenes where he holds a scroll or codex on his left knee. Ideally, a book of holy law should be held in the right hand, as it was by God before Moses (Deuteronomy 33:2). This is how the angel of Apocalypse 5:1 holds his, but when he simultaneously makes a gesture that requires the right hand, the book is shifted to the left (Apocalypse 10:2, 5). The same reasoning is applicable to the right and left hands of the Lord on the traditio legis.

The resolution of the compositional conflict is premised on the assumption that the handedness of a gesture of speech or triumph was more rigidly enforced than the holding of a book, or even its manual transmission to someone. Christ can be depicted with only one right hand; it cannot be used both to convey a gift and to signal in triumph. The same resolution of this conflict can be found in later medieval art, when the left-right conventions remained the same. A thirteenth-century fresco in the Church of the SS Quattro Coronati, Rome, for example, shows Pope Sylvester gesturing in speech with his right hand while conveying the secular crown with his left to Constantine, inclined before him (ill. 112).

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186 Ewald, Der Philosoph als Leitbild, 123n694.
187 An entry in Anastasia Lazaridou (ed.), Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd–7th Century AD (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA), 2011), 86 (cat. 13, A. Antonaras), might appear at first blush to be a counter-example. The object, an eighth-century mould depicting Christ between Andrew and Paul, is described in the catalogue entry as Christ “blessing with his left hand” and holding a codex with his right. This, however, is a description of the negative image. The impression made with this mould has the blessing made with the right hand and the codex held by the left. If further proof were needed, the text on the mould is reversed as well.
188 On the Vetus Latina clarification of which hand is raised, see note 35 above.
ii) **Locational etiquette**

The more interesting issue regarding the handedness of the *traditio legis* concerns the relative positioning of Peter and Paul. In two-figure compositions, a person is honoured by sitting at the right hand of God, like Peter receiving the keys to heaven from the enthroned Christ in Santa Costanza (ill. 90). While this format puts the Lord at the apostle's left hand there is no inconsistency, because God has no “location.” Even with only two figures, he constitutes the centre and honours the person at his right.

When two mortals are depicted, even saintly ones, their priority should be expressed by their relative placement. With respect to binary representations of Peter and Paul, the archaeological record, while not entirely uniform and admitting important exceptions, is broadly consistent with this expectation: Peter is at Paul’s right (as in ill. 106). It is important to keep the directional vocabulary straight. Modern viewers privilege their perspective over the pictured protagonists' and would therefore describe this arrangement as putting Peter on Paul’s left, i.e., on the left side of the image as we see it. But that elevation of the beholder is a later prejudice; fourth-century viewers understood that Peter, not Paul, is “on the right,” occupying the position of higher status.

By far the largest sample of these binary representations consists of gold-glasses. Peter inevitably appears in the place of honour on the left side of the object, whether the apostles are alone or separated by an attribute or symbol, often a Chi-rho monogram or crown, or by Christ himself. The same left-right orientation is found in other media, like a marble grave plaque for the six-year-old Asellus and a bronze medallion, both from the

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189 Morey, *Gold-Glass Collection*, catalogued about two dozen objects with Peter and Paul, some with additional symbols or Christ. All of them put Peter on the viewer’s left except the single *traditio legis* (his cat. 78). There is one doubtful case on which the figures could be but most likely are not the two apostles (his cat. 76; see the discussion in Donati, *Pietro e Paolo*, 224 [cat. 92, entry by Vattuone]). Subsequent finds do not appear to have changed this result. See, for example, a Peter and Paul gold-glass found in 2011 in Emilia-Romagna: http://www.archeobo.arlt.beniculturali.it/varie/vetro_deodata.htm. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 55–58, pointed out that these objects, being transparent, were susceptible of being viewed from either side, which could reverse the placement of Peter and Paul. He conceded that this is not the case where there are inscriptions. In fact, every gold-glass in Morey's catalogue with a representation of Peter and Paul, with or without Christ, does have an inscription, and often an equally irreversible Chi-rho monogram.
The exceptions do not suggest an obvious pattern. Examples of the reverse orientation include a bronze medallion in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the dating of which has been disputed, an engraved gem in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, probably of eastern origin, and perhaps a painting in the arcosolium of Celerina in the catacomb of Praetextatus. One reversal that could have a rational explanation is an early fifth-century ivory plaque, likely a belt buckle, depicting the meeting of Peter and Paul in Rome. Its probable prototype was in a church dedicated to St Paul, and the orientation might reflect a Pauline preference. Indeed, an earlier depiction of the same scene in the catacomb "ex Vigna Chiaraviglio" presents Peter in his accustomed position on the left of the image.

These two-figure representations of Peter and Paul could reflect either an appreciation of or indifference to their relative status (recalling Grabar’s similar observation about the bearded and beardless Christ), or perhaps we are being too subtle attempting to divine priority in a mirror image that would have been confusing to viewers. Representations with

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190 The plaque is in Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 246 (cat. 68); Donati, *Pietro e Paolo*, 233–234 (cat. 112, entry by Silvan). The medallion is in Donai, *Pietro e Paolo*, 214 (cat. 61, entry by Goffredo).
191 Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 114, calls the lack of uniformity “confused.” The only extensive attempt to catalogue the contradictory examples in all media is 250 years old and woefully out of date. See Tomasso Maria Mamachi, *Origines et Antiquitates Christianae*, ed. Petro Matranga, 2nd ed. (Rome: Salviucci, 1850), 5.403–442.
192 The medallion is remarked by Cooper, *Marius Victorinus’ Commentary*, 51n40. It was illustrated by Mamachi, *Origines et Antiquitates Christianae*, 5.408 (Tab. IV). Another medallion with the apostles in the same orientation is in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin: Donati, *Pietro e Paolo*, 234 (cat. 114, entry by Mietke). The function of these objects is uncertain. It is not impossible that they were used to make impressions, which would replace Peter and Paul in their accustomed positions. The gem and a watercolour of the Praetextatus fresco are in Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 247 (cat. 69) and 267 (cat. 79). The latter is discussed by Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 9. While it seems logical to identify the figure on the right as Peter, this is uncertain given the damaged condition of this part of the fresco. Fabrizio Bisconti, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane: restauri e interpretazioni* (Todi, Italy: Tau, 2011), 280–282, provides good images (fig. 15 and 16) and is more guarded in his identification.
193 The ivory buckle, conserved in the Museo degli Scavi Archeologici di Castellammare di Stabia, is in Spier, *Picturing the Bible*, 247 (cat. 247, entry by Kessler); Donati, *Pietro e Paolo*, 211 (cat. 55, entry by Liverani, identified as part of a casket, fibula or liturgical comb). The proposed prototype from San Paolo fuori le mura and the Pauline resonance is remarked in that catalogue entry and elaborated by Herbert L. Kessler, “The Meeting of Peter and Paul in Rome: An Emblematic Narrative of Spiritual Brotherhood,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 41 (1987): 266, 273–274. The catacomb painting is reported by Bisconti, *Le Piture*, 262–267, and a seventeenth-century watercolour is reproduced in Donati, *Pietro e Paolo*, 211–212 (cat. 56, entry by Utro). It is also mentioned in Kessler’s catalogue entry (although not in his article, as it was found later), but the different orientation of the figures is not remarked by any of the commentators.
more than two figures distributed around a central image of Christ are conceptually simpler and pose the issue of status more directly: the preferred figure(s) should be placed on his right, the lesser on his left. This is where the proverbial sheep and goats of Matthew 25:33 were located and this is how they appear on an early sarcophagus lid in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Rep. II.162, ill. 107). The saved and the damned commonly depicted in later medieval representations are similarly situated. These are not very difficult examples of relative ranking, but the etiquette of location can also be seen to be preserved in three-figure compositions where both flanking figures are meritorious. For example, it is generally believed that the seated figure on the emperor’s left (our right) on the Missorium of Theodosius I (ill. 110) is his son Arcadius and the other the more senior augustus, Valentinian II. This identification is buttressed by the sceptre held by the higher status figure. It is also consistent with their left-right orientation around the emperor.

In the case of a ternary grouping of Christ with Peter and Paul, viewers could not fail to notice who was where. The gold-glass evidence is, once again, consistent and highlights the novelty of the traditio legis: Peter always occupies the place of honour at the right hand of Christ save on the Vatican and Toledo traditio legis pieces (ill. 79, 80). Catacomb art is more mixed. John Huskinson thought he could organize it chronologically, finding Peter on Christ’s right in earlier examples (as on two frescos and a mosaic from the catacomb of Domitilla, dated after 350) and then shifted to his left later on. These supposedly later examples include the Grottaferrata traditio legis (ill. 74) and two paintings already encountered, one on a vault in the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter (ill. 75) and the other in a lunette in the Via Latina. The pattern is not so neat as Huskinson suggests, and it is based on less than robust dating and a very incomplete archaeological record. Furthermore, these considerations concern only the practice of producers. Traditio legis sarcophagi

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194 See also the reconstructed apse at Fundi (ill. 117; note 234 below).
196 The Vatican gold-glass is Morey, Gold-Glass Collection: cat 78. Compare a non-traditio legis ternary composition of the same figures, with Peter now on the Lord’s right (cat. 70). The Toledo gold-glass, not known to Morey, is in Spier, Picturing the Bible, 243 (cat. 93).
197 Huskinson, Concordia Apostolorum, 5–13.
198 On these two latter two frescos, see note 35 above.
viewers had only limited access to these representations and obviously would not have known the chronology. The catacomb pictures do, however, suggest a broader trend or practice regarding the ternary representation of Peter, Paul and Christ during the second half of the fourth century. The two cases that are not of the traditio legis type on which Peter is also displaced to Christ’s left side (interestingly, both with a bearded Christ) complement the emerging and more numerous examples of the traditio legis itself, mainly in other media.

These ternary catacomb representations on which Peter appears on Christ’s left also differ in another way from the others: the apostles are standing rather than sitting. On sarcophagi, however, Peter is generally in the place of honour at the Lord’s right regardless of his posture (except, of course, on the traditio legis), although the sample is modest. He appears in his “correct” place at the right hand of a seated Christ in a “teaching” scene on a sarcophagus in the Musée du Louvre (Rep. III.429, ill. 113) and the particularly demonstrative reverse of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus (Rep. II.150, ill. 52). He is similarly situated on the pastoral missio apostolorum of Rep. I30 (ill. 114), where a young, standing Christ/shepherd is surrounded by his disciples. Although not so identified in the Repertorium notice, the standing figures on his right and left are recognizably Peter and Paul. On the sarcophagus of Probus (Rep. I.678, ill. 98), Christ holds a jewelled cross and stands on a mound between Peter and Paul. This triumphalist declaration recalls certain aspects of the traditio legis, but the two apostles are distributed around Christ in the traditional manner. No monumental mosaics survive from the period that might assist this brief survey (apart from the traditio legis in Santa Costanza), but it may be observed that Peter and Paul are in the “wrong” positions, Peter on the Lord’s left, in Santa Pudenziana, produced several decades later and, pace Huskinson, with seated apostles.

199 See also Rep. III.63 and perhaps III.292.
200 Another, similar Passion sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Rep. I.57) appears to reverse the placement of Peter and Paul but the heads were replaced later, suggesting a restorer’s error.
201 The traditio clavium in Santa Costanza presents only Christ and Peter, at his right, receiving the keys. Schumacher argued that there had once been a third man, Paul, at the Lord’s left, although his theory has not found favour (see note 56). The earliest example of a traditio clavium that includes Paul is a fresco in the catacomb of Domitilla, dated to the sixth century. Peter remains at the left of the image, receiving the keys from Christ’s right hand, and Paul is on the right. Deckers et al, Die Katakombe “Commodilla,” 50–57.
In sum, admitting some inconsistency in the placement of Peter and Paul in the catacombs, the dominant arrangement, found on all the gold-glasses and a few sarcophagi, puts Peter on Christ's right. There is no inconsistency among the _traditio legis_ monuments: the apostles are always reversed. This is not just a self-fulfilling definition. All Roman monuments depicting the standing Christ with his raised right hand and open _volumen_ place Peter on his left (as does the “transitional” seated version in _Rep_. I.677, ill. 66). Handedness turns out to be something like facial hair: just as first-time viewers of the _traditio legis_ would be surprised to encounter the mature, bearded Christ so they would remark the displacement of Peter to the Lord’s left. The placement of Peter is more than a forced, formal device; it is an important element of reception.

For commentators who believe in Petrine pre-eminence (visual or ecclesiastical), the orientation on the _traditio legis_ is perverse and perplexing. It has exercised observers at least since at least the eleventh century, when Peter Damian was consulted on the subject by Desiderius of Montecassino. The question is lost, but the response refers to an ancient visual tradition. Damian purported to solve the puzzle by remarking that Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew for son of the right hand (Genesis 35:18). Furthermore, Paul’s mission among the Gentiles was an extension of God’s right hand, defending and supporting the church and the faithful. A century later Peter Comestor returned to the problem and added a third argument: the left is associated with mortality and the right with immortality. Peter knew Christ in life, but Paul found him only after the Resurrection. Ergo, Paul belongs at the Lord’s right.

These ideas seem quaint and anachronistic, but more importantly they ignore the reverse (i.e., “correct”) orientation on most fourth-century monuments. What the medieval speculations do illustrate is that viewers sensitive to visual handedness saw the apostolic

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202 Petrus Damiani, _Ep_. 159. See page 316 above.
203 In the Vulgate, Jacob tells Rachel that their son should be named Benjamin, “id est, Filius dextrae.” The LXX has no such translation. It merely transliterates “Benjamin” in Greek. The Vetus Latina texts go both ways: some versions just say “Beniamin” while others add, “filius dextrae.”
orientation as something that demanded an explanation. Modern art historical analysis, with the benefit of a broader survey of early Christian monuments, might attribute it to workshop practice or the genealogy of the form, though the adoption of both solutions on the two faces of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus (Rep. II.150, ill. 52) is sobering. Such explanations cannot, in any event, be projected onto fourth-century viewers. The extraordinary attracts attention, and Peter’s sudden appearance at the Lord’s left could only have emphasized his proximity to or even contact with (if only through covered hands) the end of Christ’s bookroll. Some might have found Paul’s appearance next to the victorious side of Christ reminiscent of his own vision and mission, but for most the connection between Peter and the scroll probably left the more lasting impression. In the private, intimate and contemplative space of the tomb, they were less likely to be concerned with the apostolic succession of the institutional church than the post mortem fate of their deceased friend or relative, and their own. Christ may not have been handing the law to Peter, but Peter was, in some sense, receiving or preserving it for the benefit of the faithful. In the words of Manuel Sotomayor, there is a “special relationship” between Peter and the volumen, a relationship that, paradoxically, is underscored rather than undermined by his unexpected displacement to Christ’s left.

b) This world or the next

Viewers saw the left and right sides of the Lord simultaneously or in alternation and constructed a variety of meaningful associations. These did not have to provide a coherent and holistic interpretation. True multivalence breaches the constraints of what Ralph Waldo Emerson called “foolish consistency.” The same is true for the viewer’s perception of temporality, or the lack thereof.

Jesus, Peter and Paul often appear in fourth-century representations that depict, more or less faithfully, events narrated in canonical or apocryphal texts. They are also commonly

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205 Instead of explaining it, like Damian and Comestor, or copying it, as on traditio legis revival paintings at Tivoli and Berzé-la-Ville, an artisan could also “fix” it, as on a tenth-century ivory (see page 417 below).
206 Huskinson, Concordia Apostolorum, 12.
207 Sotomayor, San Pedro, 152: “especial relación.”
seen in contexts that seem to defy those same sources. In particular, Peter and Paul are presented together as the leaders of the apostolic college, each sitting or standing at the head of a cohort on either side of a central figure or symbol of Christ. This formation is found in catacomb paintings, on sarcophagi, and in public exhibition in the Santa Pudenziana mosaic (ill. 94). Cooper referred to the placement of Paul not only among but at the centre of the original disciples as “a nice case of theology trumping both history and Scripture.”

Paul’s visual promotion is certainly remarkable, but its source was probably not, or not primarily, theology. Popular enthusiasm among lay patrons was an important factor as well as the religious geopolitics of the Roman church. More fundamentally, the alleged contradiction between these visual representations and sacred history exists only if the image represents a specific moment. Roman and medieval images often did not operate in this way. The presentation of Peter and Paul as joint leaders of the apostolic college was not contrary to history or scripture for viewers who were prepared to engage in the necessary mental reconstruction. Alternative accounts of the lives of their saintly leaders were part of the religious literary tradition and could be incorporated without undue cognitive dissonance. The same applied to images.

Considering the traditio legis in particular, it is not difficult to imagine discrete historical associations for each of the apostles. For example, the viewer could relate Peter’s physical

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208 It appears on several of the traditio legis monuments plus a number of others that have been remarked above: the rear of Sant’Ambrogio, Rep. II.150, ill. 52; Concordius, Rep. III.65, ill. 67; Probus, Rep. I.678, ill. 98; the pastoral Rep. I30; ill. 114.  
209 Cooper, Marius Victorinus’ Commentary, 57.  
210 See chapter 7, note 166 above.  
211 Another possibility is that one text was trumped by another. For example, the embrace of the two apostles at their apocryphal meeting in Rome (see page 396 above) is inconsistent with canonical texts, at least by implication, but probably had its own textual counterpart. Kessler, “Meeting of Peter and Paul,” 265n3, proposed The Acts of Peter and Paul, suggesting that although the compilation cannot be dated before the second half of the fifth century, it was derived from earlier material. Schneemelcher and de Santos, in Schneemelcher, New Testament Apocrypha, 2.575, considered the Latin version of that text to be a work of the sixth or seventh century and concluded regarding the earlier source document only that “for the present the time of composition cannot be fixed accurately.” Apart from this apocryphal Acts, a number of other literary sources refer to the simultaneous martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome, from which their meeting there might be inferred. See, for example, Eusebius, EH, 2.25.8, referring to a late second-century letter of Dionysius, bishop of Corinth. With respect to the traditio legis, however, there is no similar textual “solution.”
connection to the *volumen* held by Christ with a transmission of authority, as proposed by the investiture theorists. Matthew 16:18-19 refers to Peter’s special mission, and while the passage refers to keys rather than any book or “law,” the image could be a visual gloss on this and similar texts, both canonical and hagiographic. Over on the other side, Paul’s gesture might be seen as not merely a generic acclamation or veneration but the historical moment when he encountered a flash of light from heaven on the road to Damascus, a snapshot of Saul before he falls to the ground and converses with the Lord (Acts 9:2-7). The text describes his vision only as *lux caelo*, but nothing prevented the sculptor from another gloss, here filling in a representation of the risen Christ.

The *traditio legis* not only depicts Peter and Paul together, sometimes as leaders or representatives of the other apostles, but also in the presence of Christ. Texts do not report the three in the same place at the same time, and Paul was not present at the Resurrection. This contradiction has often been taken as an indication that Christ is presented “ahistorically”; the ternary representation must point beyond secular time towards its end. In Bisconti’s words, it “has little to do with a concrete episode of resurrection” or the “earthly itinerary of Christ.” This claim falls on the side of most recent scholarship that prefers the “eschatological” character of the scene. The extent and content of such forward-looking interpretation will be discussed below. Provisionally accepting the importance of its role, however, history is not thereby eliminated, and this for two reasons.

First, the end of time was not necessarily situated outside of secular time. Many or perhaps most sarcophagus viewers harboured the simple and overt apocalyptic expectations associated with popular chiliasm or millenarianism. They would have regarded Christ’s appearance as depicted on the *traditio legis* as occurring within human, historical time even if they associated it with the second Parousia. Second, last things need not displace past ones. The central figure of the risen Christ simultaneously evoked thoughts of his anticipated future *adventus* as well as his past participation in human affairs in the days

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212 Bisconti, "Variazione sul tema," 266.
213 Popular and learned attitudes were not entirely in synch. See the discussion at page 413 below.
following the Crucifixion. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus were still at that time part of "modern" history, events that had occurred within the past few hundred years. They were at once crucial moments in time and also rent its very fabric. The appearance of the risen Christ would, therefore, trigger a historical resonance.

This holy history is reflected on other sarcophagi, albeit with a limited visual vocabulary. Infancy scenes — the Nativity and especially the Adoration of the Magi — are common, and Jesus's later life is represented by the many miracles and other narratives, culminating in scenes of his arrest and judgment. While the Crucifixion was not explicitly represented until the fifth century (see page 332, above), there are depictions of or relating to the events occurring thereafter. The first to appear on sarcophagi is the Resurrection, presented through a combination of symbolism and narrative: two soldiers, either sleeping or looking up, appear below a cross surmounted by a wreathed Christogram. A slightly later moment, when the women come to the empty tomb, is also found on a few monuments. Thereafter the visual record is skimpy. There seems to be only one example of Christ’s subsequent appearance to his apostles (Rep. III.42, premised on a reconstruction) and his ascension to heaven is found twice, in each case represented by his mounting a rock with one foot while the hand of God pulls him upwards (Rep. III.42, 219). Artisans were capable of far richer and more complex renditions of these events. A masterful compression with soldiers, Marys, angel, sepulchre, two apostolic witnesses and the ascension itself is found on a famous ivory plaque dated around 400 and conserved in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, but nothing so fulsome appears on a sarcophagus. Other post-

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215 Rep. I.933, known only from Bosio’s engraving, shows an outline of a tomb structure and a standing figure gesturing at two Marys below the victorious cross. The image is similar on Rep. III.42, where the scene forms part of a Christological frieze along the lower register. Rep. III.20, a small fragment expanded by Wilpert’s drawing, has a seated figure accompanied by three standing Marys. This version is similar to an ivory in Milan which might have served Wilpert as a model (reproduced in Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, 163, fig. 59). The standing figure is presumably an appearance of Christ compressed with the women’s visit to the sepulchre. The seated one could be the angel.

216 The Reiderische Tafel, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. See Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, 162–163; Bisconti, Temi, 128 (entry by Utro; illustrated tav. III.b).
Resurrection events or epiphanies could certainly have been depicted, but they are absent from the lapidary corpus.\textsuperscript{217}

Canonical and apocryphal accounts relate Christ’s continued interaction with mortals after his escape from the sepulchre. From the Christian perspective, these events were historical even though he was no longer incarnate. They occurred within a definite period of time measured in terrestrial units, whether the canonical forty days (Acts 1:3) or some longer interval.\textsuperscript{218} Viewers would understand these depictions as historical images, pictures of what some human beings actually did and saw on a particular day. The appearance of the risen Christ on the \textit{traditio legis} could be accommodated within this chronological scheme under several alternative constructions: he may be appearing immediately after his resurrection, the missing figure above the sepulchre in other representations; or perhaps the depicted moment falls in the interval between Resurrection and Ascension, one of the several presumed epiphanies experienced by the apostles and now, through the medium of artistic voyeurism, by the viewer; or the image may represent Christ’s leave-taking, when he entrusts his precepts to his apostles and ascends to heaven (an association that might be fostered by the inclusion of a full complement of apostles, or if the two were regarded as representing the whole college); or, finally, the representation may reflect the Lord’s arrival in his heavenly abode, just after the earthly event depicted in representations of his ascent up the rocky hill.

Instead of, or in addition to depicting these historical events situated within a relatively brief period in the first century, the \textit{traditio legis} could be regarded as an image in the here and now, a theophany at this very moment late in the fourth century when friends and relatives are clustered around the tomb. There is no inconsistency between such an experience and the representation of the risen Christ. After all, Paul’s theophany also

\textsuperscript{217} For example there are no depictions of Christ’s appearance to Mary Magdalene (the \textit{noli me tangere}) or to his disciples on the road to Emmaus.

occurred in "real time," beyond the living memory of the sarcophagus viewers but not in a mythical past. In sum, Christ's persistence out of time paradoxically permits his figure on the *traditio legis* to be regarded as connected to several moments within time, from the instant after the Resurrection to the contemporary occasion of mourning.

Scholars tend to divorce eschatological from temporal associations, abandoning the latter once the former are established. But conflicts can be resolved by co-existence as well as contest. Fourth-century viewers may have been more attuned to and accepting of polyvalence than their modern descendents, untroubled by the superposition of Christ's timeless theophany with historical moments in the story of his mission or his passion and resurrection. Indeed, grieving family and friends had every reason to retain the historical perspective. Far from contradicting their recognition of the triumphant, eternal figure of Christ in paradise, the simultaneous grounding of the *traditio legis* in history provided them with a necessary foil. Salvation was premised on the ability of Christ, and by implication of all true Christians, to extract themselves from the mundane time in which they were living. An escape from history was more readily imagined by situating the various aspects of resurrection first within and then without this world.

c) *Eschatological, Apocalyptic, apocalyptic*

Terminology can be more impediment than aid in approaching these aspects of the *traditio legis*. Etymologically, "eschatology" refers to last things. This might encompass Christ's second coming, final judgment and the resurrection of the flesh, depending upon the source to which one refers. The use of the term in modern discussions of both patristic writing and early Christian art is inconsistent and often imprecise. "Apocalyptic" is also

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219 So Bisconti, "Variazione sul tema," 266, having concluded that the scene refers to the end of time, maintains that it "deve essere libarata dalle diverse manifestazioni del Cristo dopo la morte e tanto meno può essere referita alla prima apparizione...." See also Bøgh Rasmussen, "Traditio legis?" 13; Geissler, *Traditio legis*, 66–67.

220 On the historiography of "eschatology" and the variety of its meanings, see Jean Carmignac, "Les dangers de l'eschatologie," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1971): 365–390. He notes that the word is a neologism coined in German in 1804 by Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (365) and first employed in English by a certain George Bush in 1845 (367). Carmignac observes the confusing and imprecise usage of the term to mean mysticism, messianism, apocalypticism and sometimes the entire Christian message (378). See also Bernard McGinn,
employed in several ways. Sometimes (to be indicated here by a capital "A"), it alludes specifically to the eponymous final book of the canonical New Testament. The same adjective (now with a small "a") may have a variety of different scriptural points of reference — most often the so-called synoptic apocalypse exemplified by Matthew 24-25, but also other canonical pericopes, a wealth of apocryphal literature and Jewish precedents. Or "apocalyptic" may be employed, incautiously, to describe an atmospheric sense of mysticism or messianism. Theological and lexical precision is impossible to achieve and is not obviously desirable in considering the impressions experienced by fourth-century sarcophagus viewers, but the varied usages are important as they point to alternative readings of the *traditio legis*.

i) **The Apocalypse of John**

The obvious sign that an early Christian form of representation had an Apocalyptic resonance would be visual quotations from that source. These first appear around 350 and become widespread in succeeding centuries. The early manifestations are not, however, univocal or unequivocal. They first appear not as coherent allusions to the text, but in Dale Kinney’s phrase, within a “cadre of motifs,” in synthetic combination with other sorts of images. The most common examples on monumental decoration are the letters A and ω (Apocalypse 10:8, 21:6, 22:13) and the Lamb that figures so prominently in that text, although never conforming to the mystical beast with seven horns and eyes (Apocalypse 5:6). Kinney reasonably and cautiously concluded that these elements could be generically Christological as opposed to, or as well as, Apocalyptic citations. Only with the appearance

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221 Kinney, "Apocalypse in Early Christian Monumental Decoration," 200–216. The most complete survey of Apocalyptic imagery in early Christian art is Christe, *Apocalypse de Jean*, although as will be remarked below, not all of his readings can go without challenge.
of less ambiguous forms, notably the four living creatures (Apocalypse 4, reflecting the precedent in Ezekiel), did properly Apocalyptic symbols invade early Christian art.

*Traditio legis* sarcophagi do not include any explicit and unmistakable references to John’s Apocalypse. There are no living creatures, no A and ω. There are certainly lambs (in the plural), sometimes, although not often, one with a cross or nimbus.222 These lambs are not seated on a throne or standing on the mound and, of course, they are of the ordinary, domestic sort with two eyes. They evidently recall the connection between the sacrificial animal often mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and Christ’s passion (the *agnus dei* of John 1:29, 36); other associations, like the apostles or the faithful, are also possible. Certainly not every allegorical lamb alludes to the Apocalypse. One would be hard pressed to defend such an assertion regarding the agnification of Moses and other figures in the spandrels of the lower register of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, where biblical events are enacted entirely by lambs (a detail on ill. 68 reproduces the relatively well-preserved baptism of Christ).223 The mere apposition of a lamb and the figure of Christ on the *traditio legis* cannot be supposed to have evoked Apocalyptic ruminations among the viewers.

This Apocalyptic reticence of the *traditio legis* sarcophagi contrasts with the modest but unmistakable adoption of Apocalyptic citation on some other, roughly contemporary representations. The previously mentioned “teaching” fresco in the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter (ill. 75) includes the letters A and ω and a lamb standing upon a mound with rivers flowing from it (a better case for conflating Sion with Eden than the *traditio legis*). The Santa Pudenziana mosaic (ill. 94) reveals even more substantial Apocalyptic intrusions, now including the four living creatures. The Apocalyptic letters appear on three *traditio legis* monuments in other media — the Grottaferrata fresco (ill. 74, difficult to see on the reproduction and perhaps added later) and the Valencia and Vatican incised glass fragments (ill. 81, 83).

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222 Rep. I.28 (according to Bosio’s engraving), 200, 675 (according to engraving), 676, 724; Rep. III.499.
A less direct claim for Apocalyptic resonance on the *traditio legis* advanced by several scholars is based on the proposition that Christ repeats the Gestalt of the mighty angel of chapter 10. Both figures are standing, raising their right hands, holding a book in their left. In support of the comparison, reference has been made to the same third-century commentary by Victorinus of Pettau already encountered in connection with the identification of the book. Victorinus obviously wrote without the *traditio legis* in mind, but he did interpret this angel as a figure of Christ: when the prophet says “his face was as the sun,” he refers to the Resurrection, while the “pillars of fire” that are his feet represent the apostles. There is a certain degree of cherry-picking in the citations from Victorinus. Others of his less convenient interpretations are left aside, including emphasis on the rainbow over the angel’s head as a sign of judgment and identification of the book in his hand as this very Apocalypse of John. The *traditio legis*, of course, puts Christ on a mound, unlike the angel with one foot on sea and the other on land. He is clothed in a tunic and pallium, not a cloud.

Readers of the Apocalypse may well have followed the inclination of Victorinus and taken this angel to be a figure of Christ. Whether viewers of the sarcophagi regarded Christ between his apostles as a figure of the angel is another matter. Some might have remembered this passage and recalled the formal similarities. Most, one suspects, did not. And even for those who did, the assumption that this rendered the *traditio legis* “Apocalyptic” is questionable. Jonah may resemble Endymion without triggering associations of divine lust, and if Paul’s gesture before Christ is reminiscent of imperial acclamation, this does not mean viewers thought the apostle regarded Christ as or even in some way analogous to a secular emperor. Here, of course, the purported association is of a different type, not pagan or imperial but within the four corners of the canonical scriptures. It is not, therefore, impossible that some viewers might have been put in mind of the Apocalypse, either the particular scene in chapter 10 or the broader prophecy and vision

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224 Berger, “Ursprung,” 108; Christe, *Apocalypse de Jean*, 64; Geissler, *Traditio legis*, 66. Regarding Victorinus of Pettau and the book, see page 375 and note 145, above. Victorinus is not, of course, the only source cited by these scholars.

hinted at by symbolic attributes. However it is difficult to see this as a paramount aspect of the viewer’s encounter with the *traditio legis.*

**ii) Small “a” apocalypticism**

Textual anchors in other apocalyptic literature are also largely absent from the *traditio legis.* The only direct mark of the synoptic apocalypse is an indication of Christ coming in the clouds of heaven (Matthew 24:30) on the Santa Costanza and Naples mosaics and the Grottaferrata catacomb painting. Nothing similar is visible on any of the sarcophagi, gold-glasses or representations in other media. As for Old Testament references, there are some possible, if distant associations with Ezekiel’s vision (palms and city-gates), but these are paradisiacal, not apocalyptic. There appear to be no associations between the *traditio legis* and prophetic elements in the book of Daniel or borrowings from any apocryphal apocalyptic texts.

This paucity of explicit references explains why proponents of the apocalyptic *traditio legis* — and apocalyptic imagery generally in the fourth century — often rely on a more free-floating, impressionistic connection that does not eschew literary allusions but subsumes them, to use the words of John Hermann and Annewies van den Hoek, in an “atmosphere … permeated with an apocalyptic spirit.” In this wide-angled optic, the dearth and imprecision

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226 There is reason to suppose that members of the Roman sarcophagus population were concerned with apocalypticism (as discussed below) but more difficult to ascertain how conversant and concerned they were with the Johannine Apocalypse. Grave inscriptions do not provide many direct or even clearly identifiable scriptural references, so they are not a very reliable guide. Nonetheless, the absence of epigraphic allusions to the Apocalypse is striking. Andreas Merkt, “Schweigen und Sprechen der Gräber: Zur Aussagekraft fruhchristlicher Epitaphe,” in *Himmel–Paradies–Schalom: Tod und Jenseits in christlichen und jüdischen Grabschriften der Antike,* ed. Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Andreas Angerstorfer and Andreas Merkt (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012). 49–50, tenuously relates inscriptions referring to the palace of Christ to the Apocalypse. He also relates the Trishagion, “holy, holy, holy,” to Apocalypse 4:8 (47), but it evidently had other sources. The only example presented in that volume, by Dresken-Weiland, “Tod und Jenseits,” 218 – 220 (cat. VI.5), is a Greek-language inscription from fifth-century Egypt. The closest to Rome is an epitaph from Ostia: Danilo Mazzoleni, *I reperti epigrafici: ricerche nell’area di S. Ippolito all’Isola Sacra* (Rome: Viella, 1983), no. 233.
of visual quotation is unimportant: “the composition remains apocalyptic in structure if not in detail.”

It was, admittedly, difficult for the sarcophagus sculptor to convey the imminence of Parousia, but concrete elements of that prospective event could have been incorporated, increasing the probability of apocalyptic reception. The most obvious visual clue would be the image of bodily resurrection, and a lapidary precedent was available. A figure with a wand bringing life to one or more recumbent, naked corpses is often interpreted as Ezekiel’s vision of the Lord’s resurrection of the dry bones (37:1-14). A dramatic version appears on Rep. I.5 (ill. 115), where three prostrate bodies are being brought back to life, ready to join two already resurrected by God (represented by a youthful figure apparently pointing to Christ as eternal Logos or conflating the first two persons of the Trinity). In some cases, identification of the scene is assisted by the added depiction of the prophet looking on (e.g., Rep. I.23, ill. 116). One suspects that many of these images were understood by viewers to be, or at least conflated with, Christian resurrection miracles. Indeed, where only a single naked body lies on the ground, the same form of representation is sometimes classified not as Ezekiel’s vision but the resurrection of the youth of Naim (Luke 7:11-16). This iconography of the naked dead and resurrecting Lord is never found on traditio legis monuments.

Another missing apocalyptic reference is the worldly tribulation graphically foreseen in the synoptic gospels and the Johannine Apocalypse, presaged in the Book of Daniel, and reflected in apocryphal sources. Yves Christe rhetorically asked whether “the serenity of

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229 Lange, Ikonographisches Register, 39–40, lists eight scenes characterized as the vision of Ezekiel in Rep. I, plus a few questionable examples. Another fifteen sarcophagi with a similar resurrection image are categorized as the youth of Naim, or perhaps Jairus (117–119). Dresken-Weiland is more circumspect in her description of a similar representation on a sarcophagus in Capua (Rep. II.11) as Christ with a wand and a naked (unidentified) male figure lying next to him. Almost all of these monuments are dated by the Repertorium to the first decades of the fourth century.
early Christian theophanies” was merely illusory, which recalls Lucien de Bruyne’s similar and broader observation about the tranquility of fourth-century Christian funerary art. Visual precedents for apocalyptic tribulation were ready at hand. Searing imagery of battles, death and destruction was widely disseminated in Rome on public and private monuments and also, if somewhat less forcefully, on Christian sarcophagi, for example in the crossing of the Red Sea. These models for “weeping and gnashing of teeth” find no expression on the traditio legis.

A third element that might be expected in an eschatological and apocalyptic representation is some evocation of judgment. As already noted, the standing posture and right-hand gesture of Christ do not replicate Roman judicial scenes. However the final judgment of humanity is of a different sort, and different iconography might be appropriate to express it. Unlike resurrection or tribulation, sculptors did not have many precedents available but they did exist. A sarcophagus lid in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Rep. II.162, ill. 106) depicts Christ as shepherd-philosopher separating the sheep on his right from the goats on his left, as described in Matthew 25:33. It softens the hard edges of the biblical parable with an abstract and symbolic image that leaves out scriptural references to Christ’s kingly raiment and any implications of the relative states of salvation and damnation. Even such mild reference to judgment is foreign to the traditio legis: the facial type, seated position and hand gestures, as well as the narrative presentation are entirely different. The presence of sheep on either side of Christ on a few traditio legis representations provided a perfect opportunity for the sculptor to reflect just this type of allegorical iconography. For example, the lamb frieze along the base of the front of the Sant’Ambrogio sarcophagus

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230 Christe, *Apocalypse de Jean*, 16. De Bruyne’s comments are referred to in chapter 5, notes 56 and 240. He even used the same word, sérénité.

231 The columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius are the most obvious examples of public monuments. Compare the representations on the Grand Ludovisi Sarcophagus (ill. 97). The Red Sea sarcophagi are discussed in chapter 5, note 98; see., e.g., ill. 32.

232 The New York sarcophagus lid is cited by Herrmann van den Hoek, “Apocalyptic Themes,” 35, as evidence that apocalyptic texts “began to have an impact on art in pre-Constantinian times.” This is technically correct (the *Repertorium* dates it circa 300, the Museum web site “late 3rd-early 4th century?”) but misleadingly enthusiastic given the monument’s isolated status in the corpus.

(Rep. II.150, ill. 52) could have incorporated the reference to the synoptic apocalypse in the manner of Rep. II.162, but it does not. Instead, it depicts identical lambs emerging from city gates on either side (Jerusalem and Bethlehem). Compare a similar but simpler representation described by Paulinus of Nola as having once decorated the apse at Fundi (ill. 117), probably datable shortly after 400. Here the painter has added horns to the animals on the left of the central lamb, signifying that it is a judge and they are goats.\textsuperscript{234}

The absence of visual indicia of final judgment did not surprise Yves Christe. On the contrary, he argued that both early Christian representations and patristic literature were more preoccupied with theophany than “imagerie judiciaire.”\textsuperscript{235} Epigraphy supports this view. Dresken-Weiland’s most recent report of the University of Regensburg MECA epigraphy project notes only four Christian Roman inscriptions that mention judgment out of a total sample of 586 referring in some way to life after death, a scarcity that she, too, ascribes to the prevailing conception of afterlife.\textsuperscript{236}

\textsuperscript{234} See Ihm, \textit{Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei}, 80–83, 181–182 (cat. 37; her reconstructive drawing as fig. 17, p. 81). Paulinus’s description of the apse painting is contained in his \textit{Ep.} 32.17: “Christ stands as a snowy lamb beneath the bloody cross in the heavenly grove of flower-dotted Paradise. This Lamb, offered as an innocent victim in unmerited death, with rapt expression is haloed by the bird of peace which symbolises the Holy Spirit, and crowned by the father from a ruddy cloud. The Lamb stands as judge on a lofty rock, and surrounding this throne are two groups of animals, the goats at odds with the lambs. The Shepherd is diverting the goats to the left and is welcoming the deserving lambs on His right hand.” The translation is from \textit{Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola}, trans. and ed. P. G. Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 2.150. Walsh dates the letter to 403 or 404 (329n1). Paulinus opens it saying that the basilica is not quite finished but almost ready for consecration, and the painting appears to have been complete at the time of writing. Engemann, \textit{Deutung und Bedeutung}, 88, referred to one other example of this iconography, a sixth-century mosaic in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (reproduced as his fig. 12, p. 27).

\textsuperscript{235} The expression is from Christe, \textit{Apocalypse de Jean}, 8; the argument is a leitmotif of the entire book.

\textsuperscript{236} Dresken-Weiland, “Tod und Jenseits,” 82. The most notable regional variation that appears in her tabulation concerns Asia Minor, where 8% of the total refer to judgment (4% in Italy and Gaul). The remark on rarity and positive attitudes is at page 83. Her discursive catalogue includes two Roman examples (I.3 at 94–96 and I.27 at 137–139) and two later inscriptions from Italy (II.9 at 167–168) and Gaul (III.5 at 182–183). An example not included in her catalogue is \textit{CIL} 5.05415 (=\textit{ILCV} 3863), from Como, which explicitly refers to the day of judgment and the end of the world. Note that epitaphs are no more helpful in promoting other aspects of the apocalyptic \emph{imaginaire} noted above. Tribulation and earthly chaos are not mentioned and while Dresken-Weiland remarks twenty-three references to resurrection (about 4%), most of these are after the fourth century and more elliptical than direct. There are only four secure fourth-century examples, one papal (Damasus), and none on a sarcophagus. See also Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “Die Aufstehung des Fleisches in den frühchristlichen Grabinschriften,” in \textit{The Human Body in Death and Resurrection}, ed. Tobias Niklas, Friedrich V. Reiterer and Joseph Verheyden (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 371–374.
And yet, despite the absence of explicit depictions of bodily resurrection, or tribulation or judgment iconography, most modern exegetes regard the traditio legis as eschatological and apocalyptic in the full sense, not limited to a vision of Christ's current and enduring reign in heaven but including his pending, if not necessarily impending, return. Such visual signals of resurrection as lambs, palms, the occasional phoenix, and most clearly the gesture of victory, do suggest resurrection, his if not ours. These can look backwards to his sacrifice and first resurrection, but nothing prevents a look forward as well. Christe's main rationale for down-playing the End is his reading of the theological literature (including, or even mainly, later writers presumed to reflect earlier traditions). Not all scholars find the same message in these texts, and in any event, theoretical tracts do not always reflect lay concerns. Often, and late fourth-century apocalypticism seems to be such a case, doctrinal treatises are more prescriptive than descriptive, reactions to and attempts to control or alter popular views. In fact, just around the time when the traditio legis sarcophagi were being produced and regarded by their original viewers there was a resurgence of apocalyptic expectations, evidenced especially in popular literature. To quote Bernard McGinn, “Even the attacks on overt apocalypticism of the writers of the fourth century are witnesses to its continued strength.”

Treatises and sermons grappled with the twin problems of the Christianization of the Roman Empire and the deferral of Parousia, while also concerned to support and expand the role of the institutional church. However the attitudes of the Roman sarcophagus population, experienced and expressed as they gathered in their private sepulchral spaces, were more likely aligned with the accessible and popular literature, taking straightforward and explicit scriptural references at face value. If, for example, the angel of Apocalypse 10 can be understood as a figure of the first Resurrection, he also announces “that time shall be no longer,” that in the days of the seventh angel the trumpet will sound and the mystery

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of God shall be accomplished (Apocalypse 10: 6-7). A brief and clear passage from Matthew's Gospel was more likely to come to the mind of the lay Christian than complicated and not very widely disseminated patristic texts. Christian time had always contemplated a beginning and an end, and any form of apocalyptic allusion had special resonance in the presence of death.

The existing reign of God and the Parousia to come were probably not so rigorously distinguished by most sarcophagus viewers, a position expressed in the compromise formula of a modern commentator: “already but not yet.” The Christ that appeared on the traditio legis recalled at once historical events and timeless paradise: his resurrection, the inauguration of the kingdom of God, its continuation into the late fourth-century present, and the ultimate resolution of all things in the future. In his discussion of the traditio legis, Schumacher coined the useful expression “soteriological overview” (soteriologische Gesamtschau), referring specifically to the Resurrection, epiphany and second coming. Broadly understood — more broadly than Schumacher intended — this notion can suggest a link between historical moments and the end of time, between present and future eschatology, not a singular, compendious vision that finds one controlling interpretation but rather a revelation of different aspects or elements of the image that might be compared and contrasted by an actively engaged viewer.

The particular apocalypticism of the traditio legis was silent about tribulation and judgment because its purpose was to bring comfort and solace in a difficult human moment (although the absence of explicit resurrection remains unexplained). It reflected a positive

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238 Oscar Cullmann, quoted by McGinn, “The End is Not Yet,” 140. This suggestion that the lay faithful were more relaxed than the theologians echoes a comment by Jaroslav Pelikan, also cited by McGinn, Visions of the End, 16: “The impression seems unavoidable that the relation between ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ in Christian apocalyptic raised more problems for the philosophical theologians in the early church and for the proponents of ‘consistent eschatology’ among modern exegeses than it did for believers and worshipers in the second and third centuries.” Pelikan’s “believers and worshipers” were not restricted to or even necessarily primarily composed of the lower orders. Apocalypticism was not a “popular” notion but, on the contrary, the product of educated and literate segments of the population. See McGinn, Visions of the End, 32. All of these observations can equally apply during the apocalyptic revival of the late fourth century.

eschatology consistent with a long-standing Roman funerary tradition of consolation, with none of the *Sturm und Drang* of the Gothic portal. The time had not yet come when the faithful were to be regularly confronted with visual reminders of fire and brimstone in order to excite their penitence.

d) Conclusion

The *traditio legis* was a novel, complex, even confusing form of representation that confronted viewers in a variety of settings, in its most prevalent form as the central feature on late fourth-century Roman sarcophagi. This chapter has deconstructed and reconstructed the image, remarking the many ambiguities in particular elements and their combination. Even the simple three-word sentence *dominus legem dat* presents challenges and suggestions of over-determination. *Dominus* was Christ, but it might lead some to think about the Father. *Lex* was probably the *lex Christi*, the teachings recorded by the evangelists, but the word normally referred to the old law. *Dat* may describe the transmission of the law to Peter (or Peter and Paul, or the apostles, or the church) or its pronouncement and promulgation by Christ, or both. The picture is more multi-faceted still. The Lord is triumphantly resurrected from his own death, but he is also a figure of the future resurrection of both the deceased in the coffin and the viewer. His physiognomy breaches tradition; his posture seems torn between the distinct actions in which he deftly engages on both sides. Peter is catching, holding, receiving, supporting or protecting the scroll. Only Paul seems to act with a relative singularity of purpose, acclaiming, encountering or venerating the risen Christ.

The *traditio legis* is imbued with sacred chronology. It refers to the relatively recent Incarnation and Resurrection, events that occurred within secular history and simultaneously transformed or even replaced it. It speaks in an ever-present tense of the reign of the Christian God and a “new” covenant that by its very name sometimes reinforced by a visual recollection of Moses at Sinai, recalls the earlier one it supersedes.

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and fulfills. And it looks to a future, indefinite in moment but certain of occurrence, the completion of Christian history envisaged in a more comfortable and comforting form than generally associated with "apocalypticism." Nor should investiture be so firmly rejected as it has been by the eschatology school. As a specifically ecclesial message, it might have appealed only to clerics, a small minority of the Roman sarcophagus population, but most viewers were surely impressed by Peter’s emphatic connection to Christ’s volumen, perversely emphasized by his displacement to the left of the Lord. The image projects an impossible asymmetry: Christ does not give the object yet Peter receives it with covered hands. Having regard to the apostolic setting and the formula dominus legem dat, likely painted on most of these sarcophagi, this bookroll most probably evoked the life and death of Jesus recounted in the gospels.

This chapter has belaboured the case for multivalence of meaning and diversity of reception. The scholarly interpretation of forms of representation like the traditio legis tends towards the adversarial, following the lead of most textual exegesis. The proposal here is simultaneous or alternating reception experiences, sometimes complementary but also retaining an edge of contradiction. The extent to which multiple and not entirely consistent understandings of the traditio legis were processed by the original viewers, and how they were reassembled, compared or contrasted, varied depending upon their backgrounds, religious commitments and doctrinal persuasions. The experience probably changed from visit to visit, reflecting the emotional state of the observer and conversations around the tomb. No hierarchical or holistic explanation is either possible or desirable. The richness of the image is reflected in the heat of the modern debates, which may parallel some that occurred within and among the fourth-century Romans for whom these extraordinary monuments were created.

The postscript to this chapter is the disappearance of the traditio legis. Roman sarcophagus production ceased early in the fifth century, and while a few later Ravennate monuments reveal knowledge of the form, it is diluted or altered almost beyond recognition. Some scholars discern a residual impact of the traditio legis in later apse mosaics, notably the
ninth-century Roman series linked to Pope Pascal I (817-824), but these do not preserve essential aspects of the fourth-century composition. Only in the eleventh or twelfth century is there a modest revival.\textsuperscript{241} The perplexities encountered by medieval designers and artists are illustrated in an ivory plaque produced in around 975, now conserved in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (ill. 118).\textsuperscript{242} The Milanese carver took the late antique model in a new direction. He “corrected” the apostolic orientation, strengthened the ecclesiastic message, and added an enforced symmetry. The apostles stand in mirror postures, Peter at Christ’s right hand receiving the keys to heaven, and Paul at his left supporting the end of the unfurled scroll, both with covered hands. The text \textit{dominus legem dat} is completed with the name of its recipient, Paul (rendered as Saul), written horizontally across the \textit{volumen} like an imperial edict. Christ stands, frontal and severe on an exaggerated mound, his two bare feet rigidly planted on a mound, lowering both hands to tender the objects to Peter and Paul. There are no lambs or other distractions.

The strength of the \textit{traditio legis} lay in its novelty and complexity, ambiguity and polyvalence. These features engaged fourth-century viewers and supported their experience of mourning and reflection on the implications of Christian death. The representation disappeared with the medium in which it was most popular, the monumental marble sarcophagus. As the Ottonian ivory suggests, the \textit{traditio legis} in its original form no longer responded to medieval demands and conceptions, or perhaps it simply was no longer understood.

\textsuperscript{241} Christe, \textit{L’Apocalypse de Jean}, 65, remarked the surprising absence of the \textit{traditio legis} in Romanesque painting as well as its brusque resurgence at Berzé-la-Ville near Cluny and San Silvestro in Tivoli. The former is a twelfth-century, seated Maestas variant. The latter, from the thirteenth century, is an accurate reproduction. The scroll has the inscription \textit{dominus legem dat} (partially lost) and another appears on a scroll held by Paul (\textit{michi vivere Christus est et mori lucrum} – Philippians 1:21), establishing greater equality between the apostles. Imagery from the Apocalypse appears above. Regarding later monuments, see also Davis-Weyer, “Das Traditio-Legis Bild,” 23–29.

\textsuperscript{242} Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, Ms. Theol. Lat. Fol 1. The plaque is one of the Magdeburg Ivories. See Lothar Lambacher, Lothar (ed.), \textit{Schätze des Glaubens} (Berlin: Schnell & Steiner, 2010), 34–35 (cat. 3, entry by Lambacher). Not considered by Christe or Davis-Weyer (see previous footnote).
V. Conclusion

The tension between continuity and discontinuity in the historiography of early Christian art and the study of late antiquity was remarked in the Introduction. When one regards the series of documents consisting of fourth-century Roman sarcophagi, the impact of the spread of Christianity among their patrons and viewers appears dramatic and, in historical perspective, abrupt. This is not to deny the important commonalities between Christian and pagan monuments. Remarking the shared workshops and similarity of “social standing” among the consumers, Jaš Elsner judged the institutional separation of classical and Christian archaeology as not only unfortunate but nonsensical:

In respect of logic, materials, historical context and artists — that is, the sociology of production — the division makes absolutely no sense at all, since it is dependent on the separation of Christian iconography from other iconographies (in ways we do not adopt or accept when thinking about Dionysiac or Meleager iconographies, let alone erotes or garlands). \(^1\)

The admonition is fair, but its premise is over-stated. A great deal changed during the fourth century: production practices adjusted to the increasing numerical and financial importance of Christian clientele; while the patrons were all members of the Roman élite and sub-élite, the evolution in their religious affiliation is not a trivial development; and the “historical context” is as much a source of divergence as convergence between Christians and non-Christians in the period from the Tetrarchs to the sack of Rome. The principal distinction between their sarcophagi may be “only” iconography, but viewers cannot be supposed to have been more concerned with materials and style than imagery, especially in the intimate and emotional presence of death.

Just as the sarcophagus population of Rome was rapidly Christianized by the exponential conversion of its wealthy citizens, so the corpus of their funerary monuments “converted,”

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adopting the religion of those who regarded them. Like the human convert, Christian sarcophagi turned away from old practices and beliefs towards a new religion. Their “Christian turn” is not merely a metaphor for but the material analogue of conversion among viewers.

The negative pole of this material conversion is manifest in the near absence on Christian sarcophagi of the themes that populated their pagan counterparts, the Greco-Roman myths of the preceding centuries as well as the representations of everyday life that had replaced them by the time production of Christian monuments began in earnest. The positive aspect of conversion is equally clear in the adoption of biblical themes, exemplified by Jonah. The phenomenon of material conversion is complicated by the development, roughly in the middle of the fourth century, of a different but certainly no less Christian class of images, including the *traditio legis*.

It is fitting to end this study where it began, with death and the viewers. The Christian turn on Roman sarcophagi reflects and reveals the Christian expression and experience of death within the fourth-century Roman sarcophagus population.

1. **Turning away**

In the consideration of nomenclature in the Introduction, reference was made to individuals who straddled the pagan-Christian divide, so-called *incerti* (Kahlos) or “center-Christians” and “center-pagans” (Cameron). Sarcophagi do not reveal any such confusion of spiritual identity. Incompletely converted Romans may have been satisfied with monuments bearing non-Christian representations, but the material “Christian agents,” sarcophagi that unabashedly express their religious affiliation, show little indication of syncretism. For the most part, they faithfully reflect the exclusivity and orthodoxy associated with their religion.

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2 Introduction, notes 88 and 89.
a) Roman religion and mythology

The acceptability of traditional Greco-Roman representations to fourth-century and later Christians in the domestic space has been well documented and enthusiastically embraced by art historians. The evidence of material culture shows us pagan and Christian images juxtaposed with flagrant panache in the domestic setting of the boudoir, according to Elsner. The silver plate and vessels, floor mosaics, sculpture and other luxury objects in question are almost always Christian objects rather than Christian agents, things that may have adorned Christians and their homes but like the Projecta Casket, among the most often cited in this connection, they express no significant Christian visual message or theme. Of particular concern here is to avoid a hasty and unjustified extrapolation of this limited body of material to the completely different context and function of the funerary space. The few examples of adjacent pagan and Christian imagery in catacomb painting could reflect shared areas rather than a syncretism of overtly pagan and Christian subjects. In the case of sarcophagi, the physical character of the monument precludes such ambiguity, permitting the question to be posed directly: do they conflate Christian and

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5 One example commonly said to combine a Christian representation (the head of Christ) and a mythological theme (Bellerophon) is the floor mosaic at Hinton St Mary, Dorset. The Christian attribution has, however, been doubted. See chapter 7, note 18 above.

explicitly non-Christian representations? With modest exceptions, the answer is that they do not.

Scholars who refer to visual syncretism generally mean the Christian adoption of classical or mythological themes. Even more striking would be the penetration of traditional Roman religious praxis into the decoration of Christian sarcophagi. Examples of this phenomenon, however, are marginal; indeed, representations of temples or rites of sacrifice and libation are not all that common on late Roman pagan sarcophagi either. The pre-Christian figure of the orant is a quasi-exception, a pagan religious form widely adopted on Christian sarcophagi. But while the orant initially reflected the cult ritual, by the third century it had acquired an independent status as a symbol of pietas, especially female pietas, or as a reference to the deceased, and it was rarely depicted in conjunction with an image of sacrifice.

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7 This is not meant to suggest a complete divorce between Roman religion and myth, whether in daily life or art, but merely to recognize the difference between rites and stories. Paul Veyne, L’empire gréco-romain (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 433–444, proposed that Roman mythology was both a body of literature providing enjoyment for readers and subjects for painters and sculptors and also a component of their religion, the basis for fleshing out the personalities and biographies of the gods. On the Roman “re-coding” of mythological material, using the example of second- and third-century Hippolytus sarcophagi, see Björn Christian Ewald, “Myth and Visual Narrative in the Second Sophistic – A Comparative Approach: Notes on an Attic Hippolytos Sarcophagus in Agrigento,” in Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi, ed. Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 274–280.

8 See Inez Scott Ryberg, “Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art,” Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 22 (1955): 163–173. Some of the few such depictions are better regarded as elements of historical or mythological narratives than references to actual or ideal religious practice, for example Oedipus’s father Laios making a burnt offering to Apollo (see Hellmut Sichtermann and Guntram Koch, Griechische Mythen auf römischen Sarkophagen [Tübingen: E. Wasmuth, 1975], 51–52 [cat. 52]) or Hippolytus offering a libation to Artemis (see Paul Zanker and Björn Christian Ewald, Mit Mythen leben. Die Bildwelt der römischen Sarkophage [Munich: Hirmer, 2004], 326–328 [cat. 16, entry by Ewald]). In these cases the ritual does not depict a real or even idealized praxis but is part of the story. Cult instruments can be found among the garlands on sarcophagi, but these largely disappeared in Rome in the second century and persisted in the provinces only briefly thereafter. See Helga Herdejürgen, “Sarkophage mit Darstellungen von Kultgeräten,” in Symposium über die antiken Sarkophage: Pisa 5–12 September 1982, ed. Bernard Andreae (Marburg: Kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars, 1984), 7–17.

9 Ulrike Lange, Ikonographisches Register für das Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage, Bd. 1 (Rom und Ostia) (Dettelbach: J.H. Röll, 1996), 75–80, lists about 150 orants in Rep. I (plus a number of doubtful cases), of which 64 are sufficiently complete to judge other elements of the iconography. Of these, about half (31) include identifiably Christian representations. The rest of the orants, so far as one can judge, are mainly either unaccompanied or appear with one or more shepherds.
One form of representation that could possibly reflect a religious ceremony is the so-called *dextrarum iunctio*, where a couple join their right hands in the presence of a presiding *Juno pronuba* or Concordia and the small figure of Hymenaeus, a marriage god.\(^\text{10}\) In some second- or early-third century examples, a sacrifice or offering is also shown.\(^\text{11}\) Even with these accoutrements, the handshake scenes are considered by some scholars to refer to marital harmony in general rather than the rite of the wedding ceremony.\(^\text{12}\) Given the pagan allusions, whether to the ceremony or the state, it could nonetheless be significant if, as suggested by Giuseppe Bovini, the *dextrarum iunctio* appears on a number of Christian sarcophagi.\(^\text{13}\)

The starting point is the so-called Pronuba Sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (*Rep.* I.86, ill. 119).\(^\text{14}\) A senatorial couple with their right hands joined are not only accompanied by Concordia but also metaphorically repeated in small figures of Amor and Psyche. The pagan resonance is further emphasized by a small tableau below in which erotes flank two fighting cocks and a tripod with trophies acclaiming the virtues of the patron. The two-

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\(^\text{11}\) Notably in four similar examples in Florence, Frascati, Los Angeles and Mantua: Reinsberg, *Vita romana*, cat. 12, 15, 29, and 33, respectively. A different form of the central sacrifice and *dextrarum iunctio* appears in her cat. 113.


\(^\text{14}\) See Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophages Roms*, 130 (cat. 26); Reinsberg, *Vita romana*, 227 (cat. 157).
register corner panels, however, depict explicit Christian scenes: the creation of Eve and the healing of the blind man on the left, the Raising of Lazarus and Peter drawing water from a rock on the right.

This monument is not only the best example juxtaposing a dextrarum iunctio with pagan attributes and Christian scenes, it may be the only one. Of the remaining sarcophagi cited by Bovini, some are less securely Christian,¹⁵ and others are less pagan, with no Concordia, Hymenaeus, or other tell-tale attribute. This is the case for a group of three finely-carved, monumental and ostentatiously Christian late fourth-century sarcophagi, all decorated on four sides with the dextrarum iunctio placed discreetly on the back.¹⁶ Bovini also claimed to recognize a fully Christianized version of the dextrarum iunctio in a Roman fragment preserving the husband reaching out his right hand for his now missing spouse below what appears to be a presiding figure of Christ in the place of Concordia, self-servingly dubbed Christus pronubus.¹⁷

Finally, an intriguing case of both pagan motifs and Christian representations accompanying the handshake motif, although in a different way, is the Dioscuri Sarcophagus in Arles (Rep. III.51, ill. 120).¹⁸ The front is divided into four arcades; the two central spaces are occupied by a standing couple, in a scene of farewell on the left and dextrarum iunctio on the right.

¹⁵ The dextrarum iunctio sarcophagus Rep. I.853 is classified as Christian solely because of an accompanying fragmentary kriophoros. A similar monument in San Salvatore, Vescovio was considered Christian by Wilpert and Bovini but not by Wrede, Senatorische Sarkophage Roms, 129-130 (cat. 25). It is not catalogued as Christian in the Repertorium or by Guntram Koch, Frühchristliche Sarkophage (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000). The Sarcophagus of Aurelius Theodorus in the Villa Ada, Rome (Rep. I.918) depicts another senatorial couple in dextrarum iunctio, this time with Hymenaeus. Its Christian attribution relies on the word deposcio in the inscription, which also includes a Dis Manibus dedication. See Wrede, Senatorische Sarkophage Roms, 121-122 (cat. 10); Reinsberg, Vita romana, 227 (cat. 121). Rep. I.688 is another example classed as Christian solely due to its use of the word deposita. On the unreliability of such epigraphic attribution, see Introduction, note 100. Bisconti, “I sarcofagi del paradiso,” interprets a fragment in San Callisto consisting of little more than the feet as originally depicting a dextrarum iunctio in the centre of a strigilated front with two shepherds at the corners.


¹⁷ Rep. I.922. Although the Latin expression is modern, Bovini, “Dextrarum iunctio,” 114–115, notes that Paulinus of Nola employed the term Jesus pronubus. The citation is his Carmina 25.151–152, which refers to the ideal marriage where Jesus comes as miraculous assistant: “tali lege suis nubentibus adstat Jesus pronubus et vini nectare mutat aquam.”

Nude Dioscuri at the ends hold the reins of their horses, one bearded and one clean-shaven. This same design is found on earlier Roman examples, but the Arles monument is distinguished from its predecessors in two ways: it lacks any representation of Concordia (Juno) or Hymenaeus, and the short sides display Christian iconography, Christ between two apostles and the throne of St Peter.

The number of uncontroversial examples in which Christians appropriated the *dextrarum iunctio* with pagan trappings is, therefore, very small and confined to a sub-group within the senatorial élite. The presence of images reflecting traditional religious praxis may thus be classified as marginal and exceptional.

Classical themes like the Seasons and erotes appear on a certain number of Christian sarcophagi, but representations of pagan divinities, semi-divine heroes or the stories recounted by Homer, Ovid or Virgil are vanishingly rare. There is an occasional personification, like the figure watching over the seas on which the ship of Jonah founders around the left side on the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (*Rep.* I.747, ill. 22). Amor and Psyche appear on one sarcophagus together with a Jonah scene (*Rep.* I.985), and also on the Pronuba Sarcophagus (*Rep.* I.86). A horse that could be Pegasus is depicted on the short side of a sarcophagus that is treated as Christian solely on the basis of a kriophoros figure (*Rep.* I.744). And, as noted just above, the Dioscuri are on the front of a sarcophagus in Arles that bears Christian representations on its sides (*Rep.* III.51, ill. 120). In her survey of the Christian use of pagan mythological figures, Janet Huskinson also cited Sol on a sarcophagus in La Gayolle (the Christian attribution of which has been doubted), some

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20 These could be later recarvings or original elements. Gaggadis-Robin, *Les sarcophages païens*, 130, argues on stylistic grounds that the front and sides were carved together and in the last quarter of the fourth century. It is perhaps worth remarking that Christian sarcophagi do not depict Christian praxis either. The more general statement might therefore be that by the third or fourth century, sarcophagi, of whatever persuasion, did not commonly include representations depicting specific religious ceremonies.
reused lids with Ulysses, and a group of Orpheus representations (discussed separately below).  

Aside from their modest number, these sarcophagi combining Christian and pagan representations are noteworthy for what they do not contain. They eschew the major mythological subjects of Roman funerary art: Adonis, Endymion, Hippolytus, Meleager, Persephone. Christians, particularly in the provinces, did sometimes reuse mythological sarcophagi, and while that is undoubtedly significant in terms of the acceptability of the themes (and perhaps the character of the religious affiliation of the patrons), it is a phenomenon distinct from the visual conflation of myth and Christian expression.

Orpheus is a special case, according to Mary Charles-Murray “the only known completely pagan image to have been adopted by the early Church.” He was, she argued, subjected to a “Christian annexation.” The monuments claimed to depict “Christ/Orpheus” include a group of up to half a dozen strigilated sarcophagi. On each of these, Orpheus appears in the centre, in his traditional dress and Phrygian hat holding a lyre, one leg raised and resting on

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23 The closest to an exception is Rep. III.520. This sarcophagus produced in south-western Gaul and dated to the second third of the fifth century represents Meleager and the Calydonian boar flanked by the Dioscuri on the front, with a Chi-rho monogram between cupids on its lid, which emblem does seem to be contemporary with the carving of the chest. It is late, of provincial manufacture, and includes only a Christian symbol, not a Christian image.


25 Mary Charles-Murray, Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), 36–63 (the quoted expressions are at 36 and 46), 114–121. Wilpert made a similar claim for the Christianization of Ulysses, including sarcophagi with this figure in his Christian catalogue, but these monuments have not generally been accepted in the Repertorium. On Ulysses as neutral rather than Christian symbolism, see Fabrizio Bisconti, “Il mito e la Bibbia: due volti della rivoluzione dell’immaginario iconografico nella tarda antica,” in La rivoluzione dell’immagine: arte paleocristiana tra Roma e Bisanzio, ed. Fabrizio Bisconti and Giovanni Gentili (Torino: Intesa Sanpaolo, 2007), 45.
a rock ledge; a sheep or ram is in front and a tree on the left, usually with a bird. The corner fields vary, representing krirophoroi, figures of the deceased and spouse, lions, and in one case a stylized hunt. The Christian attribution of these sarcophagi is far from secure and opinions differ, the classification being based mainly on ambiguous epigraphic formulae. The justification for and explanation of the appropriation of Orpheus into a composite with Christ has relied mainly on a few patristic texts, in particular Clement of Alexandria’s “Exhortation to the Greeks.” It is not evident that this work, which offers, prima facie, a rather negative assessment of the pagan poet, would even have been known to the lay Christian viewers.

The most recent and generous catalogue is Laurence Viellefon, *La figure d’Orphée dans l’antiquité tardive: les mutations d’un mythe: du héros païen au chantre chrétien* (Paris: De Broccard, 2003), 81–82, 192–193, accepting six. Compare other lists in Charles-Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 38–41; Henri Stern, “Orphée dans l’art paléochrétien,” Cahiers archéologiques fin de l’antiquité et du moyen âge 23 (1974): 6–8; Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, 23. Two of these sarcophagi are included in the Repertorium, Rep. I.70 (Pio Cristiano) and I.1022 (Ostia, where both were found), and these are almost universally accepted as Christian because of formulae in their inscriptions (*anima sancta* and *dormit in pace*, respectively), and in the latter case the reference to a certain Quiriacus, a name strongly (although not exclusively) associated with Christians. The inscriptions, however, were probably added later; in the case of Rep. I.1022, the text appears on a lid that is likely a medieval addition. See Huskinson, “Pagan Mythological Figures,” 87 (no. 14); Bisconti, “Il mito e la Bibbia,” 38; Serena Ensoli and Eugenio La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2000), 618–619 (cat. 322, entry by Romoli). A third, similar sarcophagus in the Basilica di San Gavino, Porto Torres, Sardinia, this one with no inscription, is also regarded as Christian by most commentators. Find-spots are invoked as evidence for Christian attribution by Viellefon. Several other sarcophagi with a very similar Orpheus are rarely if ever treated as Christian, including one from the Campo Verano, Rome, another in Boston (although listed by Viellefon), and a chest remarked in the nineteenth century, now apparently lost and absent from the modern literature. All of these lack “Christian” inscriptions or find-spots, and the corner fields may be regarded as “more pagan.” Doubts concerning the Christian attribution of some or all of this group of Orpheus sarcophagi were expressed by Björn Christian Ewald, *Der Philosoph als Leitbild: ikonographische Untersuchungen an römischen Sarkophagreliefs* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1999), 69n368, and Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Über Hirten-Genre in der antiken Kunst* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1980), 150–151.


There may be indications that western theologians knew Clement’s work, but the earliest explicit reference seems to be by Jerome, *Ep.* 70.4.15–17. That letter does not mention any specific texts and considerably post-dates the Orpheus sarcophagi. The first known Latin translation of Clement is by Cassiodorus in the sixth century, and it does not include the *Protreptikos*. These facts do not preclude knowledge by élite early Roman Christians, but nor do they support it.
more extensive knowledge of arcane texts and a more subtle and spiritual analytical reading of them than is plausible.

At the end of the day, whether Orpheus was Christianized, and if so how this transformation should be conceptualized, does not change the basic conclusion concerning the “turning away” because none of the Orpheus sarcophagi include any explicit and unambiguous Christian representations. The boundary between pagan mythological themes and Christian expression remains sharp.

b) Everyday life

Mythological sarcophagi entered a steep decline after around 250, although they did not entirely disappear and there was even something of a revival in the Tetrarchic and early Constantinian periods.29 Pagan customers generally turned instead to what are often referred to as representations of “everyday life,” sometimes called vita romana or vita privata.30 However this visual substitution and its effects among non-Christians should be understood (considered briefly in the discussion of “Turning Towards” below), the Christian sarcophagi went further, turning their backs not only on myth but also, in large measure, on the new iconographical vocabulary. This is noteworthy because unlike mythological themes, the scenes and motifs from everyday life presented no apparent conflict or tension with Christian beliefs or doctrines. Workshop economics and traditions, especially in the early decades of Christian production, favoured homogeneity; it would have been more cost-efficient and less tedious to cater to this small but potentially lucrative new clientele by recycling popular themes.


30 These latter expressions provide the titles of two catalogues in the ASR series: Reinsberg, Vita romana and Rita Amedick, Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben: Vita privata, ASR I.4 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1991). These Latin terms were undoubtedly used in antiquity, but not as art historical classifications of sarcophagi. The term “everyday life” is preferable, even though it does not adequately capture battles and allegorical images like lion hunts that were not everyday events.
The statement that Christian sarcophagi only sparingly incorporated Roman themes of everyday life is subject to two preliminary clarifications. First, it refers to iconographical combinations, not the use by Christians of everyday life sarcophagi that had no Christian imagery. Some of these monuments were probably “Christian objects,” although fewer than the literature of Christian archaeology or the Repertorium classification would suggest. Such appropriations do not interrupt or dilute a Christian turn. Second, the incorporation of purely formal elements borrowed from the non-Christian repertoire is also a distinct phenomenon. The ship in distress that appears in the depiction of the Jonah theme is similar to the one found on many on pagan sarcophagi, but it was not experienced as an independent iconographical element representing everyday life; Red Sea sarcophagi were constructed using elements from battle scenes, but they were biblical, not military, images.\textsuperscript{31}

Paging through the Christian corpus, one does not often encounter the popular figures deployed on the pagan everyday life sarcophagi. The seated reader or “philosopher” is almost never juxtaposed with explicit Christian representations, the Santa Maria Antiqua sarcophagus (\textit{Rep. I.747}, ill. 22) being an early and isolated exception;\textsuperscript{32} the hunt appears in only a handful of cases (see \textit{Rep. II.185}, ill. 16; \textit{Rep. III.642}, ill. 59).\textsuperscript{33} Yet the élite and sub-élite of the Roman Christian sarcophagus population were no doubt just as interested in intellectual pursuits and hunting, both in real life and in their allegorical significance, as their non-Christian neighbours. Other categories of everyday life representations are

\textsuperscript{31} On the Red Sea group, see chapter 5, note 98.
\textsuperscript{32} Others in the Repertorium are also quite early: \textit{Rep. I.811}, I.912, \textit{Rep. III.23}, 197 (the problematic La Gayolle sarcophagus; see note 22 above), and the Christian attribution of all but the first is doubtful precisely because of the lack of other, unequivocally Christian, representations. No Christian examples are cited in the brief survey of “philosopher” sarcophagi by Koch and Sichtermann, \textit{Römische Sarkophage}, 208, or in the catalogue by Ewald, \textit{Der Philosoph als Leitbild}.
\textsuperscript{33} The full hunting scene found occupying the front on a number of non-Christian sarcophagi is restricted in the Christian group to \textit{Rep. II.185} in Osimo (ill. 16), and only if the lid (where the Christian iconography appears) belongs with the chest. Bernard Andreae, \textit{Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben: Die römische Jagdsarkophage}, ASR I.2 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1980), 123, concluded it did but noted the controversy (123n568). He identified the Osimo sarcophagus as the only Christian example, excluding less fulsome representations of hunting, including \textit{Rep. I.6} and I.188. He could not have known the atypical Lamta sarcophagus, \textit{Rep. III.642}, discovered in 1990 (see chapter 6, note 16). A late, non-metropolitan example is \textit{Rep. III.220} in Clermont-Ferrand, dated to the second third of the fifth century.
equally rare or entirely absent from the corpus of Christian agents, like the "curriculum vitae" of the child, athletic competitions, and occupational scenes. And although Christians did hold high military rank, sarcophagi with Christian imagery do not depict battles or victorious commanders. As for the marriage motif, the dextrarum iunctio, as already noted it was only sparingly Christianized. The Pronuba Sarcophagus is the singular specimen that actually combines the spousal handshake with biblical scenes.

The two main potential exceptions to this exclusionary rule are meals and pastoral motifs. Banquet scenes formally similar to non-Christian examples appear with some frequency, often as pendants to the Jonah theme. In its Christian usage, the depiction of the meal could reflect the actual commemorative event (a practice shared with non-Christians), or it might bear some newly-invested spiritual interpretation. In either case, the scene has a funerary rather than an "everyday" function, so this category is not properly regarded as an exception. That leaves the most important group, the bucolic idyll.

While the combination of pastoral and Christian motifs is often remarked, the number of examples is not actually all that great. Most of the monuments with bucolic representations that are classified as Christian in the Repertorium (mainly in the first volume) are either uninformative fragments of sheep or shepherds, or they are included based solely on the "good shepherd" interpretation of a kriophoros. Many or most of these sarcophagi were probably not Christian and may represent some of the "missing" fourth-century pagan monuments; the rest represent, at most, a Christian appropriation of "neutral" bucolic imagery. The explicit incorporation of Roman pastoral allegory into explicit Christian iconographical programs is far more limited. No more than around thirty examples can be

34 See the catalogue of Amedick, Vita privata, for these and other categories. See also the chronological table in Reinsberg, Vita romana, 268–273.
35 Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Sarkophagbestattungen des 4.–6. Jahrhunderts im Westen des römischen Reiches (Rome: Herder, 2003), 35, noted that four sarcophagi in Rep. I bear inscriptions identifying the deceased as military. Two (Rep. I.778, 831) include Jonah scenes; one (Rep. I.303) has a fragment of the miracle at Cana; the preserved portion of the fourth has a Christogram but no Christian iconography. None include any martial iconography.
36 A clear example is Rep. I.778 (the Jonah portion is ill. 18).
37 On Christian commemorative meals, see the Introduction, note 140.
38 On the lack of pagan fourth-century sarcophagi, see chapter 2, note 45.
identified, although the survival of so many small fragments prevents statistical inference.\textsuperscript{39} There is a strong but by no means exclusive link between the pastoral motif and the Jonah theme, which is found on over half the examples. In chapter 5, it was argued that this evidence was insufficient to support the “bucolicization of Jonah” as an independent facet of the biblical theme (the Pastoral Jonah) on both conceptual and numerical grounds (most Jonahs have no shepherd). The reverse statistic, the substantial percentage of Christian sarcophagi with shepherds or sheep that also depict Jonah, could be meaningful, or it may merely reflect the large number of Jonah sarcophagi, especially in the early period to which the pastoral motif is mainly confined. Dividing the Christian corpus into two broad chronological groups, before and after 350 CE, none of the sarcophagi in question are in the late group. No \textit{traditio legis} sarcophagus presents a shepherd (although there are, of course, many allegorical lambs).

2. Turning towards

Material conversion did not result in a sudden transition to blank marble. As they turned away from non-Christian themes and motifs, sarcophagi expressed themselves with a new vocabulary. Some viewers of the Christian monuments harboured visual expectations based on their experience of sarcophagi with representations of everyday life and the old mythological themes; especially in the early period, Christians must have attended many commemorative events for pagan friends and relatives. But while remarking the absence of these motifs, Christian viewers were probably more concerned with what they did see than what they did not. Conversion is primarily the adoption of something new.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} Of the approximately 175 sarcophagi in Rep. I listed as including a shepherd or bucolic theme by Lange, \textit{Ikonographisches Register}, 20–21 (“Bukolische Szene”), 43–48 (“Hirt” and “Hirtengenre”), only about fifteen have biblical or Christian scenes. Most include Jonah (listed in chapter 5, note 181). See also Rep. I.85, 560, 689, 811; one could add Rep. I.30, a pastoral allegory of the apostles. Because of more stringent criteria, Rep. II has fewer isolated bucolic motifs; it includes about a dozen examples of bucolic and Christian combinations, including the Jonah cases mentioned in the earlier footnote and Rep. II.97, 98, 113, 148, 162 (pastoral allegory), 164. Most of the few cases in Rep. III are later and of local manufacture. There are perhaps four metropolitan examples: Rep. III.18, 109, 309, 601.

\textsuperscript{40} There is an instructive analogy in the vocabulary of conversion in scriptures, patristic texts and other literary genres. Jean Bouffartigue, “Par quels mots le grec ancien pouvait-il désigner le passage d’une religion à une autre?” in \textit{Le problème de la christianisation du monde antique}, ed. Hervé Inglebert, Sylvain Destephen and
a) Narratives and ideas

The Christian turn in sarcophagus decoration occurred in the short space of a few decades. Taking in the corpus as a whole, the conversion may seem surreptitious, a series of small steps that cumulatively established something new. But the viewer of a singular monument, with rare exceptions, saw the transformation as complete. The Christian visual substitution was both rapid and thorough. Its initial content was a collection — sometimes a cacophony — of scenes and figures associated with Christian texts: Old Testament stories, the miracles of Jesus and other narratives from the New Testament and the Christian apocrypha.

This phenomenon was specifically associated with the tomb. Evidence is not extensive, but it seems that in their houses, wealthy Christians expressed their romanitas with the same profane imagery as their pagan neighbours. The continuity of domestic iconography does not undermine but rather underscores the importance of the almost exclusive adoption of Christian representations by Christian sarcophagi. Some patrons were content with “neutral” or non-figural monuments, not only in the Constantinian period but throughout the fourth century. However the Christian sarcophagi, the agents that manifested religious conversion, rigorously turned towards the iconography of biblical and related narratives. They imposed on their viewers a visual experience peculiar to this intimate space and funerary function, a Christian sight in the presence of death.

This does not mean that the converted sarcophagi were entirely disconnected from earlier or contemporary pagan monuments. As already remarked, one encounters vestigial intrusions of everyday life motifs, mainly shepherds and sheep, especially in the earliest examples (e.g., Rep. I.35,744, Rep. II.241; ill. 4, 22, 27). There are also purely formal links.

Bruno Dumézil (Paris: Picard, 2010), 19–31, analyzes early Greek lexical practices, concluding that most terms emphasize coming to believe in God, adhering to a new group, transferring allegiance, or “turning towards.” Fabrizio Bisconti, “Primi passi di un’arte cristiana. I processi di definizione e l’evoluzione dei significati,” Antiquité Tardive 19 (2011): 36. But compare the same scholar’s use of “revolution” to describe the effect: Bisconti, “Il mito e la Bibbia.” The two conceptions are not contradictory; they can be taken to reflect Bisconti’s view of the process and its effect.

The economics of Christian sarcophagus production favoured the adaptation of existing models (ships, sea monsters, the reclining figure denoting sleep). Most important from the viewer's perspective were the non-Christian facets of reception. The Jonah theme reached into the pre-Christian past and incorporated elements of the pagan present. His nakedness resonated with memories of pagan heroes; his languorous rest might evoke a “better place” (Elsner) not entirely discontinuous with Roman idyllic allegories; the Jewish and Primal Jonaths established associations with Hebrew history and human origins. Yet these facets of reception, important though they might be in individual cases, hovered on the periphery of the Christian core that alluded to the narrative of the book of Jonah and the sign(s) enunciated by Jesus. Alternative readings of this narrative were possible and indeed likely — among different viewers or by a single viewer at different times, or even simultaneously — including the “happy ending” and a more literal understanding of the rest scene. But Jonah’s principal message was in any event referential, an unsubtle citation of events in Christian history (including its Jewish pre-history). The same can be said of other motifs from the Old Testament (Daniel, Noah, the three Hebrew youths, Abraham, and so on), the New Testament (Lazarus and other miracles), and the apocrypha (lives of the apostles, especially Peter).

A complicating feature in this turn towards Christian iconography was the appearance, probably beginning shortly after the middle of the fourth century, of new forms of representation, represented in this study by the traditio legis. These have sometimes been labelled as doctrinal, theological, or less polemically, Ideenbilder. The divide around 350 CE is striking when one compares the chronological distributions for the Jonah corpus and the traditio legis monuments, presented in Figures 4.2 and 6.2. The comfortable scholarly model for this development is an orderly evolution: borrowed and ambiguous figures like the orant and the kriophoros give way to biblical narratives, which are later supplemented

43 See chapter 5, note 179.
by representations with theological content but lacking a tight scriptural reference. This final phase is generally attributed to the involvement of clerics and theologians in the design of the images, either directly or through the funerary adoption of forms of representation already available in the ecclesiastical context. For some scholars, this mid-century transformation reflects a decisive shift in meaning, an abandonment of pleas for personal salvation in favour of evocation of the heavenly kingdom. In the terminology adopted here, one might ask whether there was not, then, a second (or perhaps secondary) “Christian turn.”

In approaching that question, it is useful to compare a previous shift in Roman sarcophagus imagery, the “demythologization” that occurred about a hundred years earlier. The development cannot be ascribed to a general rejection of mythology, since the old themes remained popular in domestic and public decoration (just as traditional imagery persisted in the Roman house, Christian and non-Christian, a century later). One scholarly view regards both myths and scenes from “real life,” like hunts, bucolic repose or intellectual activity, as ways to evoke a common range of allegories and metaphors; the particularization of myths, for example by adding portrait features to mythological figures, is mirrored by the generalization of the images from everyday life. Under an alternative explanation, the

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46 On the problematic assumption of direct clerical involvement in sarcophagus design and issues of chronology, see Introduction, note 93. Although the discussion in chapter 6 expresses doubt regarding the evidence for an origin of the traditio legis in the apse of Old St Peter’s, some other monumental model is still possible; see chapter 6, note 85.
48 This argument is developed most extensively by Michael Koortbojian, “The Mythology of Everyday Life,” in Iconographie funéraire romaine et société: Corpus antique, approches nouvelles?, ed. Martin Galinier and François Baratte (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2013), 147-169. See also Zanker, “Ikonographie und Mentalität,” 247–251. Not all the everyday life representations are evidently allegorical or metaphorical. The case is more difficult to make for categories like professional activity.
shift in forms of representation in the funerary realm is taken to indicate “a profound permutation of attitudes towards death.” 49

The allegorical reading of the scenes and figures from everyday life on sarcophagi is persuasive, not least because many of the depictions are in fact far from “everyday” (the Roman élite rarely hunted lions, and most were not sheep ranchers). However, if both forms of representation alluded to the same metaphors of death, the dramatic change in the iconography to express them is all the more remarkable. To call this decoupling of the means from the end a change in fashion or patronal taste is at best uninformative, at worst misleading. 50 Even rising hem lines can indicate something more than just a commercial desire to increase skirt sales (consider the social and political implications of the mini-skirt in the 1960s).

The appearance of new Christian forms of representation after 350 CE bears some analogy to the demythologization of pagan sarcophagi, but it was a less disruptive event for at least two reasons. First, the process was additive rather than substitutional. Where the new images were deployed (they were not universal) they generally had pride of place, but biblical scenes did not disappear. Sometimes these were relegated to sides or lids but by no means always, as evidenced by their prominence on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Rep. I.680, ill. 68). This example is an extreme case, but most of the later traditio legis sarcophagi also include biblical scenes (and one expects that more would if they were fully preserved). Christian narratives persisted right to the end of metropolitan sarcophagus production.

The second link between the new Christian images and the old was the transparency of their common reference to scripture. Representations like the traditio legis have been


50 This observation regarding “fashion” has already been made in connection with the decline in the Jonah theme. See chapter 5, page 176. The decoupling is more commonly thought of as operating in the other direction: imagery is unchanged even as the mentality or experience it expresses evolves. For example, the apotheosis imagery of the second century that is repeated in the fourth on the Consecratio ivory (British Museum, M&ME 1857, 10–13.1; ill. 3) probably no longer meant the same thing for its late antique pagan viewers. See John Bodel, “Death on Display: Looking at Roman Funerals,” in The Art of Ancient Spectacle, ed. Bettina Ann Bergmann and Christine Kondoleon (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 269.
called “conceptual images” because they lack a single and precise textual source. Their contemplation nonetheless led just as surely to the Christian message as did biblical scenes and figures. The *traditio legis* is more complicated to decode than the Jonah theme, but both required some intellectual effort on the part of the viewer; neither is a simple “bible for the illiterate,” the mere illustration of a text. Even apparently less challenging depictions — Noah or Daniel, Christ raising Lazarus or healing the blind man, Peter drawing water from a rock — had symbolic or allegorical meanings appropriate to the funerary context, some obvious and others less so. The relationship between the new and old images may be analogous in some respects to the parallel metaphors of myth and everyday life, but it is more obvious, direct, and explicit.

Terminology has tended to insert a wedge between the conceptual or apostolic representations and narrative scenes. Labels like “doctrinal” or “theological” prejudge the nature of the development. Apostolic themes, and Peter’s special relation with Christ on the *traditio legis*, expanded the stock of images and may well have borne an ecclesiastical flavour. The scholarly vocabulary implies a further, unnecessary assumption that such images reflect a new and enhanced level of participation by clerical advisers. More important, it suggests that biblical themes are somehow devoid of doctrine or theology, a claim that cannot withstand the subtlety of, for example, the deployment of the Jonah cycle. The additional late-century forms of representation have no monopoly on spiritual meaning in connection with Christian death.

One “doctrinal” claim occasionally heard, perhaps most staunchly defended by Thomas F. Mathews, is that the iconography of Christ enthroned, surrounded by a mandorla or appearing in the *traditio legis*, had special importance as an anti-Arian, pro-Nicene visual statement, an affirmation of the divine character of Christ against its dilution among adherents of the competing confession. Such an argument imputes “party positions” (Richard Gwynn’s expression) to the images, something most scholars have been unwilling

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to do. If the case can be made at all, it would be stronger with respect to ecclesiastical examples for which one may more readily imagine a clerical strategy (like the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana, ill. 94, cited by Mathews). With respect to sarcophagus themes, the three youths in Babylon refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar (e.g., Rep. II.10, ill. 42) is probably the most plausible potential example. A more general assertion of an anti-Arian theme running through the Ideenbilder in general, or the traditio legis in particular, cannot be accepted.

In sum, the middle of the fourth century did not witness a second material conversion of the already Christian sarcophagi, or even a full visual turn. The progression from Jonah to the traditio legis was an organic development, an extension or fulfillment of the original Christian turn with the addition of new forms of representation that are less inhibited, more overt references to religious beliefs. This is hardly surprising after half a century of Christian possession of the imperial crown, the failure of Julian's contrarian experiment, and the transformation of the urban landscape with church building.

b) The Christian imaginaire of Christian death

To their viewers, sarcophagi were always about death. Visitors to the tomb were not immune to pedagogy and propaganda, supposing such intentions might have been

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harboured by the producers, but the mourners’ attention was not easily distracted from the poignant event that brought them into the presence of the monument and its unsettling and perhaps frightening contents. While regarding the outside of the sarcophagus, viewers could not help but think about what lay only a few centimetres away. It has been suggested that the Christian corpse, unless it was the body of a martyr, one of Peter Brown’s “very special dead,” was especially repugnant because it materially confirmed the sinfulness of mortality.\(^{53}\) Whatever might be the particular and personal reaction to the nearness of death, this powerful, emotional, confusing and disquieting experience was at the crux of reception, regardless of religious affiliation.

There is, however, a fundamental and transformative distinction between Christian and non-Christian sarcophagi. It does not lie in a greater reluctance of the former graphically to reproduce the moment or fact of death, as sometimes suggested.\(^{54}\) This view is both narrow and anachronistic. It is true that several of the mythological themes found on earlier, often much earlier, pagan monuments did focus on death (Meleager, Niobe, Phaetont), however most did not. In any event, the more appropriate comparison is with later themes that do not explicitly or literally allude to death: Dionysian representations, frolicking sea creatures, and scenes of everyday life. Battle sarcophagi may depict slaughtered warriors, but the “hero” who represents the deceased is quite alive.\(^{55}\) Conversely, Christian themes do include stories about death, like the popular scene of the raising of Lazarus, although it significantly focuses on the moment of death’s conquest.\(^{56}\)


\(^{55}\) There is an analogy to the Red Sea sarcophagi and the victorious figure of Moses. See chapter 5, note 98.

\(^{56}\) On the corpus of Lazarus scenes, see Introduction, note 16.
Mythology, everyday life and Christian sarcophagus iconography all had symbolic and allegorical connections to death, the event that had occasioned their production and reception, regardless of whether it was shown directly. What distinguishes the Christian monuments is neither a denial of death nor the absence of its direct depiction. The Christian exception lies instead in the implications of its novel visual vocabulary, a repertoire of representations drawn from entirely different sources. Jonah and the *traditio legis*, together with other biblical, narrative, conceptual and apostolic representations, did not merely reflect a further development of the old mentality. They pointed to a new way of thinking about death. Indeed, not only its imagery but death itself was transformed, or recalling the musical metaphor of this study’s title, transposed. Both the motifs and their referent were Christianized, whence the doubled adjective in the heading above: a Christian *imaginaire* of Christian death.  

Representations on Christian sarcophagi fuelled the *imaginaire* of death shared by the Christian sarcophagus population of fourth-century Rome. It should not hastily be generalized beyond this geographically, chronologically, socially and economically defined group. One side of the engagement, the monuments, is still accessible, even if they are often fragmentary, lacking polychromy or gilding, and completely *dépaysé* from the original context and function. The other side, the viewers, is no less important but can only be reconstructed from historical information. Drawn from the wealthy households of Rome, they were often recent or perhaps incomplete converts to Christianity. Much of the extant corpus of early Christian art is funerary, but this merely reflects the hazards of survival and the relative hardiness of carved marble. It is not due to the excessive number of sarcophagi. Their quantum was restricted by the number of deaths in a thin sliver of Roman society.

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57 The French word *imaginaire* is a convenient tag for the common repertoire of motifs shared by a given group of individuals in a particular context, including their narratives, emotions, concepts and images. The term has a variety of applications and meanings, and the usage here is influenced by comments of Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 8–10. Stökl Ben Ezra specifically remarked that the notion of an *imaginaire* extends beyond literary narratives to “sensual impressions,” although he did not mention the visual, perhaps because of its presumptively lesser role in connection with his subject. The English “imagination” is quite different, highlighting the faculty of an individual rather than the “language” of a group; yet it often seems to be the translator’s preferred (or only) option.
Although there were far more living Christians than dead ones, we know more about the Christian *imaginaire* of Christian death than of Christian life.

This *imaginaire* of death is not exhausted by sarcophagus imagery. In principle, it should also encompass rites and rituals, theories and theologies, but the visual expression and experience cannot be reduced to such other dimensions. The divergent diachronic trajectories of these elements partially explain the difficulty of pinning down the "Christianization of death," the investigation of which has focused more on practices than images. The relationship among the various contributions to the *imaginaire* of death was recursive but complex, and one cannot assume either a linear development or a singular vector of causation. As remarked in the Introduction, images are not inevitably derivative from something else, whether mentalities, theologies or rituals. Nor should the production and collective experience of Christian sarcophagi be regarded as the result of a visual, and implicitly clerical, "strategy." Whether and to whatever extent church officials may have had a hand in its development and dissemination, viewers engaged with this imagery in the private and intimate space of the tomb as part of their personal mourning and commemoration.

A primordial and defining characteristic of Christian sarcophagi is their religion. As noted in the consideration of the multi-faceted Jonah theme, Christian religion does not exhaust but dominates the relationship between the object and its viewer. More subtle than many other biblical narratives or allusions, Jonah’s depictions nonetheless highlight the religious expression of Christian sarcophagi. Similarly, the *traditio legis* demanded more of the viewer than most other conceptual or apostolic forms of representation, but it, too, underscores this material religiosity.

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58 See chapter 2, note 35.
60 Elsner, “Inventing Christian Rome,” is correct to remark the importance of Christian art as a component of Christian self-assertion and an "agent of Christianization" (74), but his treatment of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (and the Codex-calendar of 354) as exempla of “material rhetorics of Christianization” risks confusing public and private, ecclesiastical and personal. Compare Cantino Wataghin, “I primi cristiani,” 24.
The Christianity of these monuments is so obvious that we may no longer appreciate how remarkable it must have seemed at the time. Pagan representations of myths, lion hunts or scenes from everyday life were not just old stories or snapshots of contemporary (or imagined) pastimes, yet their allegorical and even spiritual resonance is not commensurate with the religious character of the Christian imagery. This is not merely a matter of definition, although it is admittedly difficult to apply a term like “religion” without extensive discussion and subtle distinctions to both Christianity and the practices, traditions and beliefs associated with the Roman state. While some sentiments aroused by the pagan monuments might be characterized as religious — especially potential allusions to afterlife, a controversial matter discussed briefly below — they bore no direct and explicit connection to the major cults. The imagery provided metaphors for the good, peaceful, virtuous and even idyllic life. It neither reflected nor reinforced religious observance and belief. Even the mythological sarcophagi focussed on mourning and consolation in choosing stories like the death of Meleager or the sleep of Endymion. They did not depict the traditional and ritual appeasement of Jupiter, Venus or Mars.

Michel Foucault remarked that Christianity is a confessional religion; Christians are not only obliged to believe certain things, they must also show that they believe them. With the zeal of the (material) convert, Christian sarcophagi met this standard, ostentatiously professing their religion in a brazen display of scriptural scenes, figures and narratives, thereby assisting the mourners who saw them to experience the peculiar personal piety characteristic of this religion. The Christian core of the Jonah theme evoked the events of the book of Jonah, their connection with Christian salvation and the words of Jesus. The *traditio legis* was equally explicit, even without a scriptural reference point, in its expression of exclusively Christian religious content. While not “depicting belief,” whatever that would


look like, these and similar iconographies cited, reproduced and affirmed specific bases for a particular brand of belief, piety and practice.

The deeply religious character of these forms of representation was both the sign of and a precondition for their role as mediators between viewers and scriptures. The degree to which this constituted each viewer an “exegete,” as Elsner would have it, should not be exaggerated. Most Christian representations were not excessively complex, although some aspects may be less comprehensible today. Chronological, geographical and functional generalization in the scholarly literature lumps sarcophagi with other monuments, like church mosaics, for which the interpretive task was usually more challenging due to both arcane iconography and difficult viewing conditions. It is unlikely that the Jonah theme (or Daniel, Noah, Jesus miracles, etc.) excessively strained the abilities of educated, well-off, often recently-trained viewers, if necessary with help from friends and relatives assembled at the tomb. Even the more complicated *traditio legis* probably had an established, if flexible, range of accepted meanings. These cautions are not intended to question the importance of the hermeneutic activity of the viewer, whose active intellectual engagement has been underlined throughout this study. Indeed, interpretation of visual productions was not a uniquely Christian habit. Imperial iconography also had significance that exceeded its separate and narrative elements, and the same could be said of pagan sarcophagi. Without characterizing their work as "exegesis," one must recognize the importance of the Christian viewers' task of connecting representations and a proprietary set of religious texts. The sarcophagi "spoke" of the Christian religion, embodied in the

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scriptures, and the figure-ground type relationship between the visual and the implicitly textual was central to the construction of the *imaginaire* of death.

A further signal of the religious content of the Christian *imaginaire* is the relative rarity of self-representation, and especially its absence from scriptural images. Visual references to the deceased still appear in the occasional clipeus, but it is a format in decline. In deference to the historicity and religious significance of biblical figures, they are not rendered with portrait features. One might draw a parallel, although with caveats regarding the difference in social status, to a trend in epigraphy: family commemoration is less common in Christian than contemporaneous non-Christian grave inscriptions.

Erwin Panofsky expressed this distinction in temporal terms: Christian iconography, he wrote, eliminated the “‘retrospective’ or commemorative principle”; it emphasized “not what the deceased had been or done but what would happen to him on account of his faith.” Panofsky’s implicitly binary classification of Christian and pagan sarcophagi has a grain of truth, but it is too blunt and conceals in its terminology a different sense in which Christian sarcophagi were intensely temporal, in both directions.

The characterization of pagan sarcophagi as backward-looking arises from their focus on the virtues of the deceased and the good life of the Roman élite. Thus Paul Zanker and Björn Ewald called their work on mythological sarcophagi *Mit Mythen leben* (“living with myths”), which, as Christopher Hallett observed, might seem a “paradoxical title for a book about coffins.” Scenes from everyday life still more directly reflected, or idealized, “what the deceased had been or done,” extolling such worldly and worthy pleasures as intellectual

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66 On the disputed “portrait” Jonah, see chapter 5, page 237.
67 Brent Shaw, “Latin Funerary Epigraphy and Family Life in the Later Roman Empire,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 33 (1984): 481–482, described it as a “horizontal” orientation between the deceased and his or her relatives versus a “vertical” orientation of both deceased and family *ad caelestam*.
activity, bucolic peace, convivial banquets, marital concord, gymnastic contest and professional achievement. Yet it is too simple to regard non-Christian sepulchral iconography purely as an elaborate allegory for a comfortable past. There has long been a spectrum of opinion among Romanists regarding the extent to which these images also, or even primarily, evoked notions of afterlife. At one end lies Franz Cumont, for whom the Roman funerary imaginaire floated on a plane of Pythagorean immortality; at the other is Arthur Darby Nock, an early critic of this view. More recent scholarship has been less categorical.\(^{70}\) Taking into account the varied literary, epigraphic and visual formulae, the most likely solution is to assume that some Roman viewers were more inclined to consider the post mortem situation of the deceased than others, but that all related the sarcophagus representations to the life already led, or in some cases to an idyllic life that might be imagined to have been led.

Like the retrospective stereotype of pagan sarcophagi, the forward-looking characterization of Christian monuments is also an over-simplification. Quite aside from the continuing if less widespread application of the “commemorative principle” in the iconography, there is no reason to suppose that the prayers and grief of Christian mourners rudely distinguished between memory and salvation, both matters of vital concern to bereft family members.\(^{71}\) Commemorations at the tomb were, precisely, memorial events, and the visual representations cannot be severed from that function.

Panofsky’s particular if somewhat tendentious purpose in these citations was to highlight an alleged shift from looking back, a primary emphasis on life, to looking forward, a vision of deliverance from death. The comments in the preceding paragraphs suggest the need to qualify and nuance that judgment. But there is another, more fundamental aspect of temporality embedded in the Christian imaginaire of Christian death that is not reflected in the “backward versus forward” analysis at all. It has nothing to do with self-representation and everything to do with the imagery. Christian sarcophagi expressed a temporal gamut

\(^{70}\) See the discussion in chapter 5, pages 242-243 and related footnotes.

from hard historicism to soft salvation, passing through the emotional present experienced by fourth-century visitors to the tomb.

The visual programs of some Roman imperial monuments swept across the past and future, “combining analeptic and proleptic elements of continuous narrative into a synthetic whole.”72 The same is true, and more profoundly so, of Christian sarcophagi. In their emotional, spiritual and physical confrontation with death, grieving viewers felt a pressing need to recall their catechisms and sacred texts, the basis for a belief system in which the past was pregnant with the future, and the future contained and fulfilled both past and present. The representations carved on these monuments extended across the arc of human existence: beginning with Adam, through the Hebrew prophets, to the Incarnation and the lives of Jesus and Peter, traversing the great breach in time when its fabric was rent by the Crucifixion and Resurrection, through the (contemporary) fourth-century moments of death and viewing, and onward towards eventual salvation. Past and future were shown allegorically in the Jonah cycle and more directly by the resurrection symbolism of the traditio legis. Pagan sarcophagi emphasized commemoration and the good life, perhaps sometimes including a projection of the past into a generalized future state of idyllic comfort. The historical references on Christian sarcophagi were more concrete; they alluded to “real” events recounted in the Old and New Testaments or apocryphal literature, rather than myths from an indefinite past or allegorical depictions of everyday life. At the same time, these monuments were also more insistently and consistently concerned with the future, in which lay the salvation and resurrection of the faithful.

The present is less clearly represented by Christian sarcophagi than either the past or the future. The reign of the kingdom of God was remarked in chapter 7 as an important association of the traditio legis, but hierophany is essentially timeless, more of an eternal continuum than a specific “present.” The mundane and datable present, marked by the passing of this particular deceased and the ritual commemorative gatherings attended by

these viewers, was not highlighted by the sarcophagus imagery, which was rather anchored in the past and pointing towards the future.\textsuperscript{73} Forward motion through the unpleasant present was underscored by calling the date of death the \textit{dies natalis}, reminiscent of the use of \textit{neofitus(a)} to describe the deceased upon his or her conversion.\textsuperscript{74}

The explicitly religious character of Christian sarcophagus imagery and its persistent emphasis on temporality — looking back to scriptural narratives and forward to salvation, redemption and resurrection — form the crux of the new \textit{imaginaire}, a reorientation from the secular to the sacred. Christian sarcophagi downplayed not so much death as life. Mythological themes were “lived with,” and scenes from everyday life recalled the virtues of the deceased and the best that life had to offer, in the past and even in an ineffable and uncertain afterlife. Representations of Christian history, theophany and salvation indicated a different direction, or perhaps more accurately a new dimension that unfolded outside profane space and time. Death was still the tragic event that brought the viewers to the tomb where they struggled to come to terms with it, but Christian death was not the end of life and demanded a different \textit{imaginaire}. The allegories and metaphors of the pagan monuments evoked the positive aspects of human existence and its sad termination by death. To the extent that they also looked forward into a fuzzy post mortem idyll, this “better place” was an extension of the virtues and values of the comfortable lives lived by the Roman sarcophagus population, a wistfully imagined vision of more of the same (with the real-life imperfections removed), as if seen through a looking-glass. Pagan sarcophagi did not deny the ontological status of death.

The Christian ones did, or at least tried to. The Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection had transformed the scheme of human being. Death had become at most a passage, not an existential marker. For patristic authors, this formed the core of a new theology; for lay

\textsuperscript{73} One possible exception to ignoring the mundane present could be the holdover representations of a banquet. On meals and their depictions, including realistic and allegorical interpretations, see the Introduction, note 140.

\textsuperscript{74} On the Christian recasting of death as birth, see Alfred Clement Rush, \textit{Death and burial in Christian antiquity} (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 72–87. The conflation of the date of (re)birth and the date of death is reflected in the inscription on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (see chapter 6, note 77).
Romans, it was a matter of applied soteriology. A key factor in the success of Christianity in the Roman Empire was the immediacy of the Christian god, a deity that took an active interest in his people, received their pious penitence, and offered forgiveness of their failings. This personal relationship with god was nowhere more intensely experienced than in the presence of death. Salvation and resurrection occupied the thoughts of grieving and mourning Christians left behind as it did those contemplating their own demise, leading some to complete only then the process of conversion. Christian death was a keystone of the Christian message. It figured especially large in Paul’s advocacy briefs, providing literary motifs for a Christian imaginaire: Christ delivered the faithful from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2); he has swallowed death so that Christians should have everlasting life (I Peter 3:22); death has lost its dominion (Romans 6:9) and its sting (I Corinthians 15:55); and so on. The theological claim of death’s insignificance enhanced rather than diminished Christianity’s emotional and spiritual support to lay believers brutally faced with undeniable evidence of mortality.

We do not know precisely what prayers were recited, psalms chanted or words of consolation exchanged among the members of the Roman Christian sarcophagus population attending commemorative events for their deceased friends and relations. We do know something about what they saw. Christian sarcophagi provided a gamut of representations to prepare them for contemplation and consolation in a new key. In the place of a celebration of life, whether lived or projected into an indefinite future, they were offered a panorama of sacred history. There were references to the past, to Christian power expressed in miracles (especially instances of quickening the dead), early glimmers of


martyrdom (essentially limited to Peter), and biblical allegories of rebirth. This past pointed to a glorious future, not a pleasurable extension of the good life but salvation and eternal communion with God. Death was visually "swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:54) by the triumphant Christ of the *traditio legis*, or in the stories of Jonah, Daniel, Noah and the three Hebrew youths.

In the fourth century, paying due consideration to their audience of wealthy Romans, Christian sarcophagi provided support for living with Christian death. They were experienced by their viewers in a variety of ways with a diversity of meanings, but without any narrow concern for doctrine or theology. These monuments may now seem “learned” or even arcane in their references to scriptural and conceptual aspects of Christianity, but they were certainly less so to their fourth-century viewers. After the middle of the century, with greater confidence and number, Christians could include among their funerary reflections the importance of the ecclesiastical vessel within which the foretold future would unfold, but one should not confuse the intimacy of the tomb with a church or even a domestic place of worship.

The other over-arching element in the Christian experience of Christian sarcophagi was uplifting consolation, a transposition of the traditional Roman aid to mourning. The tomb was not the place and the fourth century was not the time for the dour, forbidding, even threatening iconography and expression associated with church decoration in the middle ages. Christian sarcophagi contributed to a vision of salvation for the deceased and those left behind, a soft salvation that might hint at the importance of penitence and conversion (as, perhaps, in Jonah’s rest scene) but without too fine a link with the niceties of patristic or even local clerical demands. They were optimistically apocalyptic, offering a positive statement of eternal life and resurrection, rounding the corners and omitting any harsh admonitions.

The Christian turn explored in this study is neatly confined to a specific corpus of monuments available to a small cohort of viewers during a relatively brief span of time; indeed, it spent itself within that body of material and period. The tonality of Christian
death and its *imaginaire* later underwent further transpositions for which the haunting, majestic and often perplexing imagery of fourth-century sarcophagi was no longer suited.
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Abbreviations:


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Illustrations

[N.B. The illustrations are not appended to the electronic submission of this dissertation.]