

# **The Image of Christ in Late Antiquity:**

## **A Case Study in Religious Interaction**

**Thesis and Abstract**

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**Adam Levine  
OSS ID: 415795  
Corpus Christi College**

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**Abstract**

This dissertation focuses on images of Christ that date from the first half of Late Antiquity, defined as the three centuries between AD 200 and 500. The cultural dynamics of this period left a distinct impression on Christian art, and this dissertation traces that impact. Unlike other studies that attempt to resolve ambiguity within the corpus of Christ images, the argument here maintains that ambiguity was a key component in the creation and subsequent interpretation of the Late Antique Christian iconography. The dissertation proceeds in three parts, each comprising two chapters. In the first section, the history and historiography of the image of Christ is explored, and a methodology capable of accommodating the diverse meanings assigned to the Christ's discrepant and ambiguous iconographies is developed. In order to better understand the socio-religious environment in which the first images of Christ were produced and interpreted, the second section of the dissertation moves away from material culture and towards method and theory. The notion that interpretation is a group level phenomenon is critiqued, and a model explaining how individuals in Late Antiquity could have made sense of ambiguous images of Christ is advanced. The final section turns back to the material culture and applies the framework developed in the second section to two artworks: (1) the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and (2) the floor mosaic from the Hinton St. Mary Roman Villa now in the British Museum. By complementing the standard analyses of Christian art with interpretations grounded in the diverse interactions viewers had with artworks, new perspectives will emerge that provide a fuller picture of Late Antique Christianity and the iconography of its godhead alike.

## **Abstract for the Faculty of History**

This dissertation focuses on images of Christ that date from the first half of Late Antiquity, defined as the three centuries between AD 200 and 500. The cultural dynamics of this period left a distinct impression on Christian art, and this dissertation traces that impact. Unlike other studies that attempt to resolve ambiguity within the corpus of Christ images, the argument here maintains that ambiguity was a key component in the creation and subsequent interpretation of the Late Antique Christian iconography.

The dissertation proceeds in three parts, each comprising two chapters. In the first section, the history of the image of Christ will be explored, and a methodology capable of accommodating the diverse meanings assigned to the image will be developed. The first chapter surveys discussions of Christ's image in both primary sources from Late Antiquity and secondary scholarship to demonstrate that Christ's 'true image' was at most unknown and at least non-standardised in Late Antiquity. The uncertainty around Christ's image lent itself to an ambiguous and amorphous conception of Christ, and this ambiguity manifested itself in several divergent iconographies. The second chapter picks up the thread by discussing the development of the three iconographies for which we have evidence from Late Antiquity: (1) the image of a bearded Christ, (2) the image of a beardless youth, and (3) the image of Christ as an infant. Across all three image types, the figure of Christ became more easily identifiable as Christ over time through the use of an increasingly standardised set of Christological signifiers that alluded, each in its own way, to scripture; yet, at the same time, the variety of image types used to depict Christ proliferated. It appears, in the terms used by the dissertation, that the 'ontological' consensus on what 'Christ' as a theological concept stood for was overlaid on continued 'epistemological' ambiguity. Put simply, 'Christ' may have meant one thing, but how this one

thing manifested itself differed substantially from person to person. The typical narrative of Christ's image has dealt primarily with the image as a reflection of ontological consensus. While theology is undeniably important to any discussion of Christ's iconography, this dissertation attempts to complement this focus by turning to epistemological ambiguity to better understand the variety of Christ's representations. Instead of understanding Christ's image exclusively as a reflection of Christology, the image of Christ is analysed as part of a Late Antique cultural conversation in which different individuals were trying to make sense, in visual form, of the concept of 'Christ.'

In order to better understand the socio-religious environment in which the first images of Christ were produced and interpreted, the second section of the dissertation moves away from material culture and towards method and theory. The third chapter provides an overview and critique of the scholarship on Roman religion, the purpose of which is to complicate the normal elision of individuals into religious 'groups.' However modulated by group affiliations, each individual had different religious views, something that would have been especially true in the syncretic religious culture of Late Antiquity. The model of a 'network'—a fluctuating and complicated matrix of interconnections—is suggested as framework for understanding religious interaction in Late Antiquity. The fourth chapter continues the discussion of Late Antique interactivity by expanding the view from the religious to the cultural landscape. The chapter argues that the period between AD 200 and 500 was coterminous with a phenomenon known as the 'Second Sophistic,' an intellectual movement with a profound influence on modes of interpretation among the elite. The effect of the Second Sophistic and its educational regime, *paideia*, on interpretation, religious and otherwise, is outlined in some detail. The second

section, therefore, develops a model for understanding how certain individuals in Late Antiquity would have made sense of an ambiguous religious image.

With this methodology developed, the final section turns back to the material culture to apply the new framework. Whereas the first section of the dissertation deals with images spanning the entire period considered here, the third section dedicates each of its chapters to a specific artwork. The purpose of each of these chapters is to understand the likely viewers for the two artworks and, once the likely audiences are established, to disentangle the multiple interpretations that may have been possible for each object. The detailed focus on a single object and its multiple interpretations may seem hyper-specific and unrepresentative, but this type of focus is the only way to capture the complicated and individualised responses to an object that a viewer may have had. Although an exploration of only two objects may seem myopic, the detailed and nuanced interpretation of a limited sample of objects allows for a *depth* of analysis that standard, diachronic narratives cannot capture.

The fifth chapter looks at the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, perhaps the iconic artwork of Late Antiquity. The marble relief sculpture from Rome was commissioned for the prefect of the city and was without question intended to be understood as a Christian artwork. Even so, there are good reasons to suspect that non-Christians would have viewed the sarcophagus. Through the application of the framework developed in the second section, a non-Christian interpretation of the sarcophagus is provided and an important corrective is added to the typically Christianising discourse on this famous sarcophagus.

The sixth chapter discusses the mosaic from Hinton St. Mary now in the British Museum. The central figure of the mosaic, laid on a floor in Dorset, England, is often interpreted as an image of Christ, but, unlike the case of Junius Bassus' sarcophagus, this designation cannot be

made with absolute certainty. Most studies of the floor have focused on the admittedly puzzling iconography of the figure normally understood to be Christ; however, by focusing on the archaeological context of the mosaic, this dissertation derives some more certain conclusions about the composition of the viewing audience. With this viewing audience established, the chapter concludes with a novel interpretation of the image that embeds it within contemporaneous Christological debates.

While each successive section of the dissertation builds on those that precede it, each section can also be thought of as a discrete argument. The first argues for a Late Antique art history of Christ's image that focuses on signification—the process by which an image obtains its meaning—in addition to iconography. The second section argues for the importance of signification to individual interpretation, art historical or otherwise, between AD 200 and 500. The third section acknowledges the inherent dynamism of signification and explores how that affects the ways in which Late Antique viewers understood and related to artworks. By complementing the standard analyses of Christian art with interpretations grounded in the diverse interactions viewers had with artworks, new perspectives emerge that provide a fuller picture of Late Antique Christianity and the iconography of its godhead alike.

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This is a dissertation about the image of Christ in Late Antiquity. The topic has been a fascination of mine since my time as an undergraduate, and I owe my sincerest thanks to Kathleen Corrigan at Dartmouth College for helping to foster and develop my ideas on the subject. It was this interest and my passionate pursuit of it that allowed me to receive funding from the Rhodes Trust for my studies at Oxford. I am in debt to the Trust for its generous support and its provision of a fantastic opportunity for study and self-growth. A special thanks is reserved for the previous Warden of the Trust, Don Markwell, for his insights, observations, and (though he may decry the word) some of the best advice I have ever received.

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## Introduction

The history of Christian art begins with a mystery. According to one of the foremost Early Christian iconographers, André Grabar, ‘The earliest Christian images appeared somewhere about the year 200.’<sup>1</sup> Grabar’s contention has been so widely accepted that one scholar writes without even a footnote that ‘Christian art as such cannot be dated any earlier than the end of the second century or beginning of the third century.’<sup>2</sup> Of course, there is nothing in itself wrong with the idea that Christian art appeared ca. AD 200, but the acceptance of the position means, as Grabar puts it, ‘that during roughly a century and a half the Christians did without any figurative representations of a religious character.’<sup>3</sup> This is a strange conclusion to reach and there are a number of reasons to question its accuracy. First, as Grabar himself notes, the dating for the earliest Christian images is ‘rather insecure’ since it is based almost exclusively on stylistic analyses.<sup>4</sup> Second, the century and a half in question coincided with a period characterised by the wide production of religious art, even among supposedly aniconic religions, like Judaism.<sup>5</sup> But the most important critique of Grabar’s dating—and by extension the dating that has been rather uncritically accepted by Late Antique and Early Christian art historians—is that Grabar’s statement is simply inaccurate. What Grabar meant to say is that the

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<sup>1</sup> André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, 1968), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London, 2002[2000]), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 7. For some problems and pitfalls of stylistic analyses, see especially: Ernst H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London, 1966). For a reflection on the necessity of style to the art historical enterprise, see: Jaś Elsner, ‘Style’, in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago, 2003[1996]), 98 ff.

<sup>5</sup> On Jewish artistic production, see especially: Lee I. Levine and Zeev Weiss (eds.), *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity* (Portsmouth, 2000); Guntram Koch, ‘Jüdische Sarkophage der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike’, in Leonard V. Rutgers (ed.), *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem: Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Art and Archaeology in Honor of Gideon Foerster* (Leuven, 2002), 189 ff.; Jodi Magness, ‘Helios and the zodiac cycle in ancient Palestinian synagogues’, in William G. Dever and Sy Gitin (eds.), *Symbiosis, Symbolism and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina* (Winona Lake, 2003), 363 ff.

earliest *extant* Christian art ‘appeared somewhere about the year 200.’ Grabar and those following him have confused the absence of evidence with the evidence of absence.

One could rightly argue at this point that the words cited above were delivered in Grabar’s 1961 Andrew W. Mellon lectures, and no refuting evidence has been turned up in the intervening fifty years. That alone should indicate Grabar’s accuracy, should it not? If we leave the dating issues aside (and the possibility that we have been dating things to accord with Grabar’s theory), there are nonetheless three persistent problems that suggest the initial date of Early Christian images needs to be reconsidered.

First, we have textual evidence to suggest that images of Christ were produced before AD 200.<sup>6</sup> Both Irenaeus and Hippolytus identify such images and associate them with the Gnostic sect of Christianity started by Karpokrates in Alexandria at some point during the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus records the following description in his *Against the Heresies*:

They [i.e., Gnostics] also possess images, some of them painted, and others formed from different kinds of material; while they maintain that a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them. They crown these images, and set them up along with the images of the philosophers of the world, that is to say, with the images of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the rest. They have also other modes of honoring these images, after the same manner of the Gentiles.<sup>8</sup>

Leaving aside the apparent categorisation of Christ as a philosopher, a subject to which we will return in later chapters, it is striking that Irenaeus so explicitly identifies the practice of Christian image creation within a period from which supposedly no images remain. And lest one think that this odd strain of image worship was constrained to Alexandria, Irenaeus explains that

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<sup>6</sup> In addition, a number of extant fourth-century texts also mention a tradition of Christian image production. For example, see: Eusebius, ‘Historia Ecclesiastica’, VII.18.4, in Cyril Mango (ed.), *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453* (Toronto, 2004[1986]), 16; Epiphanius of Salamis, ‘Testament’, in *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Hippolytus, ‘Refutation of All Heresies’, VII.20, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325, Volume 5* (Buffalo, 1886), 113-14.

<sup>8</sup> Irenaeus, ‘Against the Heresies’, I.25.6, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1*, 351.

‘From among these also arose Marcellina, who came to Rome under Anicetus, and, holding these doctrines, she led multitudes astray.’<sup>9</sup> The reference to Anicetus, who was the Pontiff of Rome from ca. AD 157-168, anchors the spread of this image-worshipping heresy to the heart of the empire well before our supposed earliest images turn up. Another 2<sup>nd</sup> century source, the apocryphal ‘Acts of John,’ tells of a painted image of the evangelist John before which candles are lit and garlands are hung.<sup>10</sup> While the date of the text is not entirely secure, the point for us is that there is some evidence in support of the position that Christian image-production may well have predated the earliest extant image.<sup>11</sup>

This brings us to the second issue with Grabar’s theory: not all images that were produced would have survived. Consider the following (pseudo-)statistical thought experiment. To simplify matters grossly, if we imagine that the preservation of an image is entirely probabilistic, then the most important driver of object survival is the number of objects produced.<sup>12</sup> For example, if objects are preserved 0.01% of the time (an entirely fabricated survival rate), then 1 of every 10,000 objects will survive to the present day. Looked at from the inverse perspective, this example would suggest that in order to have one object survive the vagaries of time some 10,000, on average, would need to be produced.<sup>13</sup> The point is not that the exact survival rate is 0.01%; the point is that for a single object to enter our modern sample set nearly two millennia after the fact, a large number of objects would have had to be produced.

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<sup>9</sup> Irenaeus, ‘Against the Heresies’, I.25.6, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1*, 351.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (eds.), *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume 2*, trans. Robert McLaughlin Wilson (Philadelphia, 1964), 188 ff.

<sup>11</sup> For the most recent discussion of the Acts of John (with bibliography), see: Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: A History* (Cambridge, 2011), 36-38.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this ignores the fact that not all objects were equally likely to have been preserved, so the calculus is more complicated than indicated. Nevertheless, the simplified view taken here serves to expose some of the flaws in the logic of the standard narrative(s) explaining the late second/early third century appearance of Christian art.

<sup>13</sup> Note also that an image produced in AD 100 has to survive a century longer than an image produced in AD 200, which further decreases the chance of its preservation. In other words, the chance of survival is inversely proportional to its age, a fact that perhaps explains a small part of the absence of Christian images before the turn of the third century.

In turn, the primary driver of the number of Christian images produced is the number of Christians who want to depict images related to their faith.<sup>14</sup> The standard rationale for the appearance of Christian images around AD 200 appeals to this very point by arguing that there were not many *willing* image makers in the first two centuries. ‘Many’ though is not the same as ‘any,’ and the explanations traditionally given for the lack of willing image-makers do not stand up to scrutiny. Two reasons are cited above all others as constraints on ‘paleo-Christian’ image production: (1) an aversion to images inherited from Judaism and (2) a fear of expressing the Christian faith brought on by persecution. As far as the aniconic inheritance from Judaism is concerned, a number of archaeological findings, none more spectacular than the synagogue at Dura-Europos (Figure 1), demonstrate that Jews employed anthropomorphic imagery in at least certain cases. Dura-Europos and synagogue mosaics like those at Beth Alpha and Tiberias (Figures 2, 3) may not be generalizable, but they demonstrate variation in the practice of image worship among Jews. Deviation from orthodoxy may be the only thing that can be generalised across religions.<sup>15</sup>

The issue of Christian persecution is a real one, but the idea that it subdued image creation completely seems a difficult position to maintain since, if persecution suppressed image creation, then one wonders why it is that the earliest Christian images appear to date from a period that coincides with the persecution of Christianity under Septimius Severus?<sup>16</sup> Or what are we to make of the apparently undiminished image production under the persecution of Diocletian? The effect of persecution on image-producers probably was not any greater than it

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<sup>14</sup> Of course there are other drivers, such as production per person, but the highest correlation is probably with population size.

<sup>15</sup> For the authoritative application of this argument in art history, see: Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1988[1984]), esp. 1-29.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1965), 347 ff.; Andrzej Wypustek, ‘Magic, Montanism, Perpetua, and the Severan Persecution’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997), 276-97. However, for a complication to the image of ‘Severus as persecutor,’ see: Paul Keresztes, ‘The Emperor Septimius Severus: A Precursor to Decius’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 19 (1970), 565-78.

was on martyrs: surely there were those willing to do what they believed in regardless of the circumstances. None of this is to say that persecution and aniconism did not affect early Christianity; although neither may be sufficient to explain the apparent absence of Christian images from the first two centuries, these external constraints certainly mitigated the production of Christian images. In probabilistic terms, that the rate of image creation was somewhat diminished by aniconism and persecution suggests that it might take longer for an image to survive to the present day. The notion that it might take 150 years, roughly four generations, for a Christian image to survive for us today even though images were being produced seems far less strange when viewed this way.

One could counter that while the foregoing may explain why the earliest Christian images appear to date to ca. AD 200 even though they were produced beforehand, the suddenness with which Christian iconography appears on the scene remains unaddressed. Again, however, if we abstract the process of image-making to the number of image-makers, it should be clear that we would not expect *linear* growth. As several studies of the sociology of religion have shown, religious ideas spread like viruses: they either die out or they spread rapidly and *exponentially*.<sup>17</sup>

While we do not have good material evidence representing image-making among the lower classes, it is of note that geometric growth is exactly the trend that we see among later elite office-holders. Timothy Barnes and, more recently, Alan Cameron demonstrate that from Constantine's reign onwards, Christians suddenly come to represent a much larger percentage of office-holders than previously suspected, and this in turn advances the date attributed to the

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Dan Sperber, 'The Modularity of Thought and the Epidemiology of Representations', in Lawrence A. Hirschfeld and Susan Gelman (eds.), *Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge, 1994), 39 ff.; Richard Dawkins, 'Viruses of the Mind', in Bo Dahlbom (ed.), *Dennett and His Critics: Demystifying Mind* (Oxford, 1997[1995]), 13 ff.

‘conversion’ of the Roman elite by nearly half a century.<sup>18</sup> The rapidity of the change from outlawed *superstitio* under Domitian to official (and widespread) religion under Constantine provides evidence for Christianity’s exponential growth, albeit over the course of an extra hundred years. For our purposes though it is sufficient to note that by the late second century it is entirely conceivable that a critical mass of Christians would have been reached that was capable of producing enough images for some to survive until today in a manner that seems ‘sudden’ to modern art historians.

Although the foregoing may explain away some of the issues with the appearance of Christian images ca. AD 200, a significant problem remains and it brings us to the third issue with assuming that Christian images appear only at the close of the second century. If the survival rate of objects were relatively high, say 1% instead of 0.01% (such that on average one out of every 100 objects has been preserved to the present day), then we would expect a much greater likelihood that an object from the first two centuries might have survived. In the absence of a way to calculate the actual survival rate, and in conjunction with textual sources that suggest there were at least some Christian images in circulation before AD 200, we must consider the possibility that there are extant Christian images from the first two centuries and that, today, we simply cannot tell them apart from contemporaneous non-Christian imagery. Put somewhat differently, the earliest Christian images may not have been differentiable—that is, they may have been ambiguous.

The idea that early Christian iconography would have been difficult to differentiate from contemporaneous non-Christian imagery is not all that surprising for two reasons. On the one

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy D. Barnes, ‘Statistics and the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995), 135 ff.; Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford, 2011), 173 ff.

hand, Christian art looked to pre-existing (and by definition non-Christian) prototypes.<sup>19</sup> One obvious implication of this relationship is that early Christian art would have looked strikingly similar to the corpus from which it was borrowing. Perhaps the alterations are so subtle that we cannot tell the difference; or perhaps there were no differences to speak of.

The second reason not to be surprised by the overlap of Christian and non-Christian iconographies is that such admixed imagery was typical of the Roman Empire, which was characterised by a huge diversity of cults, many of which were blended together in a syncretic stew of deities. Christianity developed within this cultural matrix, and the iconographic syncretism we see among non-Christian religious images during the first centuries of Christianity probably extended to the newcomer as well. Iconographical ambiguity, in other words, may have been a fundamental component of early Christian images. As Mary Charles Murray puts it: ‘The most important feature... of Early Christian art is the controlling influence of the principle of adaptability... *Ambiguity meant that these particular images could be made to convey several ideas at once...* [emphasis added]’<sup>20</sup> It is reasonable then to ask: if the iconography of early Christianity were so ambiguous, then how could Christian images ever be differentiated from non-Christian images? Put simply, what changed to allow Christian images to be identified?

First, and above all else, the context of image locations changed, and this change relates to the ‘critical mass’ of Christians that probably emerged ca. AD 200. The larger number of image producers created more images, which resulted in a greater number of extant images and, in general, a more clearly defined Christian context. The apparent ‘emergence’ of Christian art at the close of the second century thus has less to do with external constraints than internal dynamics. The growing religion produced more images, which resulted in both more surviving

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<sup>19</sup> For a fuller discussion with bibliography, see Chapter 1 below.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Charles Murray, ‘The Emergence of Christian Art’, in Jeffrey Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (Fort Worth, 2007), 62.

and better contextualised images. It is important to note that even if the iconography did not change at all, the context alone would have been enough to scrub certain images of their ambiguity.

For a concrete example, consider the image of a young, muscled man laid out in a restful pose (Figure 4). In non-Christian art, the *topos* was characteristic of Endymion, the handsome Aeolian shepherd who chose eternal sleep over aging and death. A strikingly similar iconography, however, was recycled in Christian imagery to depict Jonah's rest beneath the gourd-vine, as, for example, we see on the painted ceiling of the catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus (cf. Figure 5).<sup>21</sup> What then separates the non-Christian image of Endymion from the Christian image of Jonah? The answer may seem obvious but is seldom explicated: the *juxtaposition* of the Endymion iconography with Christian scenes—in particular the throwing of Jonah overboard—establishes the Christological meaning of the catacomb painting.<sup>22</sup> Most of the other figures on the ceiling, from the *orant* figures to the good shepherd (the latter of which we will discuss in much greater detail in a subsequent chapter), could have been understood in a number of different ways; however, the inclusion of references to scripture would have anchored a viewer's interpretation.<sup>23</sup> In the event that a Christian context is given for an otherwise ambiguous image, it becomes possible to assign a Christological meaning to the figure.

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<sup>21</sup> On the relation between Jonah and Christ's images, see especially: Otto Mitius, *Jonas auf den Denkmälern des christlichen Altertums: Archäologische Studien zum christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter, Volume 4* (Freiburg, 1897); Eduard Stommel, 'Zum Problem der frühchristlichen Jonasdargestellungen', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 1 (1958), 112-115; Antonio Ferrua, 'Paralipomeni di Giona', *Rivista di archeologia Cristiana* 38 (1962), 7-69; Jakob Speigl, 'Das Bildprogramm des Jonasmotivs in den Malereien der römischen Katakomben', *Römische Quartalschrift* 73 (1978), 1-15.

<sup>22</sup> The demand for this type of decoration was only justified by a high enough death rate of Christians. That is, the possibility for the catacomb painting relied on the existence of a Christian community. 'Critical mass' had been met by the time that the vault was decorated.

<sup>23</sup> For a similar associative argument, see: Michael Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berkeley, 1995), esp. 1 f.

This contextual change, however, does nothing to explain the shift in iconography that began around AD 200. While Christian images were not introduced *per se*, explicitly Christian iconography was, most notably in the form of painted and carved biblical scenes like the references to the Book of Jonah discussed above. The second change at the close of the second century, therefore, was the appearance of ‘visual narratives’ that illustrated or alluded to the New Testament.<sup>24</sup> These scenes are the first examples of images that could be unambiguously identified *even without surrounding context*. Indeed, juxtaposition of an ambiguous image with these ‘scriptural scenes’ may have lent Christian meaning to the former, much as in the case of Endymion above. The iconographic transition can be restated in the following terms: whereas Christian images before AD 200 were largely passive vehicles for the religion that were indeterminable from contemporaneous non-Christian imagery, after AD 200 Christian images more actively proclaimed their Christian status. Over the course of the period investigated here, the assertion of an explicitly Christian imagery was elaborated and slowly refined through the inclusion of unique identifying signifiers such as the cruciform halo (cf. Figure 6) in addition to scriptural scenes.

It is easy to try and situate this development, as some scholars have, in relation to the more widely used art historical notions of *Andachtsbild* (contemplative images), *historia* (narrative images), and *Kultbild* (devotional images).<sup>25</sup> While there is a general development among these three image types, the trajectory, which will be discussed at some length in the second chapter, is not so simple. Perhaps the key problem with the abovementioned division of image types is that the three terms cannot be neatly cordoned off from one another, especially

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<sup>24</sup> On the concept of ‘visual narratives’ (one that influenced Koortbojian), see especially: Richard Brilliant, *Visual Narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art* (Ithaca, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Søren Kasperson, ‘Introduction’, in Søren Kasperson and Ulla Haastrup (eds.), *Images of Cult and Devotion: Functions and Reception of Christian Images in Medieval and Post-Medieval Europe* (Copenhagen, 2004), 3-5.

during the period considered by this dissertation. If the implications of the previous sentence seem messy, then it means that we are probably on the right track; reality is messy.

This dissertation will focus on a very specific and a particularly messy subset of Christian images—images of Christ that date from the first half of Late Antiquity (broadly termed ‘Late Antiquity’ for short), which we will define as roughly the three centuries between AD 200 and 500.<sup>26</sup> Often, Late Antiquity is dated either from the reign of Constantine or that of Diocletian; I have moved that date backward in part to deal with the earliest Christian material and in part because, as I will argue in Chapter 4, Late Antiquity was characterised by great continuities with the century or two preceding it.<sup>27</sup> The end-date was selected in part because it clusters around the fall of the western Empire and in part because of it follows the ecumenical council of AD 451, which formalised (and reaffirmed) a theology that is instrumental to the understanding of the subject matter here. The cultural dynamics of this period left a distinct impression on Christian art, and it is this dissertation’s aim to trace that impact. Unlike other studies that attempt to resolve ambiguity within the corpus of Christ images, the argument here will maintain that ambiguity, if not intentional, was a key component in the creation and subsequent interpretation of the Late Antique Christian iconography.

The dissertation proceeds in three parts, each comprising two chapters. In the first section, the history of the image of Christ will be explored, and a methodology capable of accommodating the diverse meanings assigned to the image will be developed. The first chapter surveys discussions of Christ’s image in both primary sources from Late Antiquity and

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<sup>26</sup> Providing dates for Late Antiquity is a contentious issue. For a recent discussion, see: Philip Rousseau, ‘Preface and Acknowledgements’, in Philip Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Malden, 2009), xviii ff.

<sup>27</sup> For a similar periodisation, see: Gerhart Rodenwaldt, ‘The Transition to Late-Classical Art’, *Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 12* (Cambridge, 1939), 544-570; Jaś Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100-450* (Oxford, 1998); Janet Huskinson, ‘The Later Roman Empire’, in John Boardman (ed.), *The Oxford History of Classical Art* (Oxford, 2001), 297-344.

secondary scholarship to demonstrate that Christ's 'true image' was at most unknown and at least non-standardised in Late Antiquity. The uncertainty around Christ's image lent itself to an ambiguous and amorphous conception of Christ, and this ambiguity manifested itself in several divergent iconographies. The second chapter picks up the thread by discussing the development of the three iconographies for which we have evidence from Late Antiquity: (1) the image of a bearded Christ, (2) the image of a beardless youth, and (3) the image of Christ as an infant.

Across all three image types, the figure of Christ became more easily identifiable as Christ over time through the use of an increasingly standardised set of Christological signifiers that alluded, each in its own way, to scripture; yet, at the same time, the variety of image types used to depict Christ proliferated. It appears, in the terms used by the chapter, that the 'ontological' consensus on what 'Christ' as a theological concept stood for was overlaid on continued 'epistemological' ambiguity. Put simply, 'Christ' may have meant one thing, but how this one thing manifested itself differed substantially from person to person. The typical narrative of Christ's image has dealt primarily with the image as a reflection of ontological consensus. While theology is undeniably important to any discussion of Christ's iconography, this dissertation attempts to complement this focus by turning to epistemological ambiguity to better understand the variety of Christ's representations. Instead of understanding Christ's image exclusively as a reflection of Christology, the image of Christ is analysed as part of a Late Antique cultural conversation in which different individuals were trying to make sense, in visual form, of the concept of 'Christ.'

In order to better understand the socio-religious environment in which the first images of Christ were produced and interpreted, the second section of the dissertation moves away from material culture and towards method and theory. The third chapter provides an overview and critique of the scholarship on Roman religion, the purpose of which is complicate the normal

elision of individuals into religious ‘groups.’ However modulated by group affiliations, each individual had different religious views, something that would have been especially true in the syncretic religious culture of Late Antiquity. The model of a ‘network’—a fluctuating and complicated matrix of interconnections—is suggested as framework for understanding religious interaction in Late Antiquity. The fourth chapter continues the discussion of Late Antique interactivity by expanding the view from the religious to the cultural landscape. The chapter argues that at least the first half of Late Antiquity was coterminous with a phenomenon known as the ‘Second Sophistic,’ an intellectual movement with a profound influence on modes of interpretation among the elite. The effect of the Second Sophistic and its educational regime, *paideia*, on interpretation, religious and otherwise, is outlined in some detail. By the end of the second section, therefore, we will have developed an understanding of how certain individuals in Late Antiquity would have made sense of an ambiguous religious image.

With this methodology developed, the final section turns back to the material culture to apply our new framework. Whereas the first section of the dissertation deals with images spanning the entire period considered here, the third section dedicates each of its chapters to a specific artwork. The purpose of each of these chapters is to understand the likely viewers for the two artworks and, once the likely audiences are established, to disentangle the multiple interpretations that may have been possible for each object. The detailed focus on a single object and its multiple interpretations may seem hyper-specific and unrepresentative, but this type of focus is the only way to capture the complicated and individualised responses to an object that a viewer may have had. Although an exploration of only two objects may seem myopic, the detailed and nuanced interpretation of a limited sample of objects allows for a *depth* of analysis that standard, diachronic narratives cannot capture.

The two objects selected for the final section both date from the middle of the fourth century and thus neatly bisect the period on which we are focused. Both images, moreover, show a similar type of Christ, the beardless youth, and both come from elite contexts. In spite of these similarities, which allow us to control for a certain amount of interpretive variation (individual interpretations, as we have said, are inflected by group affiliations), the two objects were also selected because they differ from one another in important ways.

The fifth chapter looks at the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Figure 7), perhaps the iconic artwork of Late Antiquity. The marble relief sculpture from Rome was commissioned for the prefect of the city and was without question *intended* to be understood as a Christian artwork. As we shall see, however, there are good reasons to suspect that non-Christians would have viewed the sarcophagus, which leads one to wonder what these non-Christians would have made of the work's iconography. Through the application of the framework developed in the second section, an important corrective is added to the typically Christianising discourse on this famous sarcophagus.

The sixth chapter discusses the mosaic from Hinton St. Mary (Figure 8), an object often considered an oddity. The mosaic, laid on a floor in Dorset, England, is often interpreted as an image of Christ, but, unlike the case of Junius Bassus' sarcophagus, this designation cannot be made with absolute certainty. In other words, here we have an ambiguous image for which we cannot impute any degree of artistic intentionality. Most studies of the floor have focused on the admittedly puzzling iconography of the figure normally understood to be Christ; however, by focusing on the archaeological context of the mosaic, we can derive some more certain conclusions about the composition of the viewing audience. With this viewing audience

established, the chapter concludes with a novel interpretation of the image that embeds it within contemporaneous Christological debates.

While each successive section of the dissertation builds on those that precede it, each section can also be thought of as a discrete argument. The first argues for a Late Antique art history of Christ's image that focuses on signification—the process by which an image obtains its meaning—in addition to iconography. The second section argues for the importance of signification to individual interpretation, art historical or otherwise, between AD 200 and 500. The third section acknowledges the inherent dynamism of signification and explores how that affects the ways in which Late Antique viewers understood and related to artworks. The mystery of Early Christian art is a mystery of our own making. By complementing the standard analyses of Christian art with interpretations grounded in the diverse interactions viewers had with artworks, new perspectives will emerge that provide a fuller picture of Late Antique Christianity and the iconography of its godhead alike.

## **Section I**

### **Christ in the Material Record: History and Historiography**

In this section, the material evidence from AD 200 to 500 and the scholarship that has grown up around it are explored in some detail. The first chapter surveys the primary and secondary sources that have dealt with Christ's image in order to establish that the image of Christ was characterised by ambiguity—what we have seen Mary Charles Murray call the ability to mean multiple things—above all else during the centuries on which we are focused. Said somewhat differently, the image of Christ generated multiple interpretations among viewers, none of which were necessarily wrong. As Chapter 1 demonstrates, scriptural references were invoked by some Church Fathers to argue that Christ was ugly and by others to argue that he was beautiful. These oppositional arguments do not point to a logical flaw in either camp; instead, they point to the flexible interpretations that could be transposed onto the figure of Christ.

The secondary literature reveals other arguments that have been framed as mutually exclusive but are, in fact, complementary. Previous attempts to pigeonhole the prototype for Christ's iconography as the emperor, as some deity (or combination of deities), or as a philosopher are outlined and reconciled. This reconciliation suggests both that the Christ's iconography was derived from all three prototypes and that an image of Christ could have signified multiple things to multiple people or even multiple things to a single person. In resolving the tensions between the various 'origins' theories for Christ's image, however, a problem presents itself: if the image of Christ were derived from some prototype, then how was an image of Christ differentiated from that prototype? As we saw in the introduction, it is exceedingly likely that there are artworks that pre-date AD 200 and were 'Christian' but for which insufficient contextual evidence remains to allow us to identify them as such. Given the

difficulty in differentiating the earliest Christian images from their models, how can we identify the images of Christ? Or, to rephrase it, what is it that makes an image of Christ unambiguous?

The final section of Chapter 1 answers this question by introducing a systematic methodology for identifying Christ images known as ‘interpretive juxtaposition.’ Although interpretive juxtaposition provides compelling new insights into artworks as varied as a sarcophagus from Milan and a Roman catacomb mosaic, the most important conclusion that we can draw from the application of this methodology is that it only allows us to identify a small number of the earliest Christian artworks definitively as Christ. Even using a rigorous approach the majority of early images that may illustrate ‘Christ’ remain ambiguous. The implication that the earliest Christian images were ambiguous accords both with the primary sources as well as with what we know of the first half of Late Antiquity, a period during which the number of gods across the empire proliferated and were broadly syncretised with one another into new hybrids. In fact, as we will see, the image of Christ seems to have partaken in this syncretic process to a degree.

Since the image of Christ was the subject of active experimentation, it should not be surprising then that over the course of the period studied here, the variety of Christ types increases. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century we have evidence for at least five different images of Christ in circulation (as opposed to three image types we find in third century). It is undeniable, however, that over these same centuries it becomes easier to identify images of Christ. The study of the Good Shepherd from the first chapter is a case in point: by the end of our period the use of the Good Shepherd diminishes greatly even while the examples that continue to be produced come to include unambiguous Christian attributes like a cross (cf. Figure 9). These two observations would appear to disagree with each other. On the one hand, increasing iconographic diversity

would suggest increasing ambiguity, while on the other an increasingly standardised language of signifiers identifying Christ would suggest decreasing ambiguity.

The second chapter takes up the challenge of squaring these seemingly contradictory positions by identifying two separate types of ambiguity in Christ's image. The first, which describes the increasing diversity of Christ types, will be called 'epistemological' ambiguity and relates to the different manifestations that Christ took for different individuals. Each and every image, whatever its iconography, was understood as 'Christ'; what was being said about Christ, however, changed from person to person and type to type. The second form of ambiguity, which relates to the decreasing flexibility in interpreting an image as anything other than Christ, will be called 'ontological' ambiguity and has to do with the concept of 'Christ.' That an ontological consensus emerged between AD 200 and 500 had to do in large part with the fact that the concept of Christ became increasingly better-defined as a result of the on-going theological debates of the period. The ontological-theological consensus was materialised in the visual record through a set of signifiers—most notably the cross—that were specific to Christ and alluded to his salvific significance.

The two chapters in this section keep close contact with the objects themselves and conform to the standard discursive model of art history. The result of this approach is to show that throughout the period analysed here the image of Christ remained ambiguous in some form, even if the nature of that ambiguity changed. However, if ambiguity was the overriding constant of the period, and if multiple understandings were the norm, then a less macroscopic perspective is needed to tease out the dynamics of interpretation in Late Antiquity. Said differently, if interpretations differed on the level of the *individual*, then studying the level of the broader *society* or *culture* is inadequate; it is confusing our units of analysis. This first section then

highlights and describes the ambiguities among Late Antique images of Christ and it also indicates some of the shortcomings of our current models of interpretation.

## Chapter I

### Ambiguity and Its Roots among Late Antique Images of Christ

How did a Late Antique viewer know when s/he looked at an image that it was Christ? This chapter attempts to answer that question, and in the process reaches the conclusion that the image of Christ was ambiguously defined—that is, it was open to multiple interpretations. One reason for this ambiguity is that no clear consensus existed surrounding how Christ should be depicted. The opening section of this chapter surveys the possible methods by which Christ's image could have been preserved to show that when the first identifiable images of Christ appeared around AD 200, there was no entrenched tradition of depicting Christ analogous to that described by Cicero (with a blend of sarcasm and incredulity) for the deities of the Roman pantheon:

According to the rule you have laid down, it may be said that Jupiter is always bearded, Apollo always beardless; that Minerva has gray and Neptune azure eyes; and, indeed, we must then honor that Vulcan at Athens, made by Alcamenes, whose lameness through his thin robes appears to be no deformity.<sup>28</sup>

Second, the absence of a consensus representation suggests that the images of Christ that did appear were 'constructed' or, at least, adapted from pre-existing prototypes. The second section of this chapter surveys the scholarship on the image of Christ and documents several important trends within it. Third, any argument premised on the foundation that an image of Christ is modelled on pre-existing prototypes must be able to differentiate the image of the former from the images of the latter, which as we saw in the Introduction was not a simple task in the case of images produced before AD 200. Early Christianity developed in the cultural matrix of, not dissociated from, the Late Roman Empire; thus, differentiating a figure of Christ

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<sup>28</sup> Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. C.D. Yonge (New York, 1877), I.30, 30.

from the *contemporaneous* prototype from which it derives is not a trivial exercise. A review of the scholarship on the image of the Good Shepherd demonstrates the difficulty in differentiating an image of Christ from its prototype.<sup>29</sup> In an attempt to contend with the issues presented by the literature on the Good Shepherd, the final section outlines a systematic methodology for identifying images that plausibly could have been interpreted as ‘Christ.’<sup>30</sup> The picture that will emerge from the following sections is one of a Late Antique religious landscape in which Christianity, a religion that lacked a clear iconography for its central figure, borrowed and repurposed various iconographies from the Roman world. How and why certain prototypes were chosen is less important here than the fact that multiple prototypes were selected and multiple interpretations were possible.

### **I. Ambiguity in the Earliest Records of Christ’s Image**

In the early centuries of Christianity, many of the now-central dogmatic principles of the religion were debated actively. The notion that there was a ‘single’ Christianity has, in recent decades, been problematized; and even among what would now be considered the ‘orthodox’ Church Fathers, there was a tremendous amount of disagreement on everything from what

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<sup>29</sup> The Good Shepherd was selected for its particularly detailed scholarship (see below); however, any number of other allegorical ‘types of Christ’ or non-specific scenes could have been selected. For discussions of Orphic imagery, see especially: Sister Mary Charles Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Art* (Oxford, 1981). See also: Paul C. Finney, ‘Orpheus-David: A Connection in Iconography between Greco-Roman Judaism and Early Christianity?’, *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1978), 6-15. For Christ as a fisherman, see especially: Franz J. Dölger *Ichthys: Der heilige Fisch in den antiken Religionen und im Christentum, Volume 1* (Münster, 1910). See also: Lois Drewer, ‘Fisherman and Fish Pond: From the Sea of Sin to Living Waters’, *The Art Bulletin* 63 (1981), 533-47; Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, ‘The Early Fish Symbol Reconsidered’, in Ithamar Gruenwald, Shaul Shaked, and Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Messiah und Christos* (Tübingen, 1992), 199-205. For an example of the confusion endemic in early Christian iconographical studies, the overlap between the iconographies of Orpheus and the fisherman is treated in: Robert Eisler, *Orpheus the Fisher: Comparative Studies in Orphic and Christian Cult Symbolism* (London, 1921), esp. 11-19 and 59-70.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge, 1995), 251-60.

constitutes the godhead to the nature of Christ's faith.<sup>31</sup> Included among these debates was an on-going discussion about Christ's appearance, an argument abetted by the lack of any written description of his image from his life, the New Testament, or any of the apocrypha.

One of the guiding theological principles of Christian exegesis, one developed by the Church Fathers, was to interpret certain Old Testament stories as literal prefigurations for the life of Christ. 'Typology,' as the method is known, was employed to legitimise Christianity by drawing parallels between the Old and the New Testaments.<sup>32</sup> In spite of their uniformity in turning to the Old Testament, the Church Fathers were divided on which passage to use as the basis for describing Christ's appearance. The appearance ascribed to Christ differed greatly depending on which section of the Old Testament was invoked.

The majority of early Patristic commentaries suggest that Christ was ugly, an argument that is based on the description of the Messiah from the Book of Isaiah (53:2)<sup>33</sup>:

He grew up before the Lord like a young plant  
whose roots are parched in the ground;  
he had no beauty, no majesty to draw our eyes,  
no grace to make us delight in him;  
his form, disfigured, lost all the likeness of a man,  
his beauty changed beyond human semblance.

While several Church Fathers commented on this passage and Christ's implied ugliness,<sup>34</sup> Irenaeus explains up the position most concisely: 'the divine Scriptures do in both respects

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Richard Longenecker, 'The Obedience of Christ in the Theology of the Early Church', in Robert J. Banks (ed.), *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to Leon L. Morris on His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Grand Rapids, 1974), 141-52; Douglas A. Campbell, 'The Meaning of PISTIS and NOMOS in Paul: A Linguistic and Structural Investigation', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992), 85-97; Robert Matthew Calhoun, 'John Chrysostom on ek pisteos eis pistin in Rom 1:17: A Reply to Charles L. Quarles', *Novum Testamentum* 48 (2006), 131-46; Michael F. Bird and Michael R. Whinton, 'The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Hippolytus' *De Christo et Antichristo*: Overlooked Patristic Evidence in the *Pistis Christou* Debate', *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009), 552-62.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London, 1960). For a discussion of the application to the visual arts, see: Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, esp. 64-93.

<sup>33</sup> In the Christian tradition, Christ was ultimately designated as the Messiah, the Jewish king who will rule at the end of history, since it was believed that he will preside over the Final Judgment in his Second Coming. For our purposes, the important point is that the association allowed for the extension of Messianic attributes cited in Old Testament passages to Christ.

testify of Him: also, that He was a man without comeliness, and liable to suffering.<sup>35</sup> Yet, despite the explicit description of a Messiah ‘without beauty’ in the Book of Isaiah, a sizable minority of ante-Nicene Church Fathers nonetheless maintained the exact opposite position that Christ was in fact *beautiful*.<sup>36</sup> The textual basis for the ‘beautiful Christ’ argument is recorded in Psalm 45:2:

You [i.e., the Messiah] surpass all mankind in beauty,  
your lips are molded in grace,  
so you are blessed by God forever.

That Christ was interpreted as being both beautiful and ugly underscores the degree of ambiguity concerning Christ’s image. Some Church Fathers, perhaps responding to this uncertainty, even suggested that Christ’s appearance was polymorphous. Cyril of Jerusalem writes: ‘The Saviour comes in various forms to each person according to need.’<sup>37</sup> Origen almost exactly echoes this sentiment:

Although Jesus was only a single individual, he was nevertheless more things than one, according to the different standpoint from which he might be regarded; nor was he seen in the same way by all those who beheld him... he did not appear in like fashion to all who saw him, but according to their several abilities to receive him.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Justin Martyr, ‘The First Apology’, L, in Leslie W. Barnard (ed.), *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies* (New York, 1997), 57; Hippolytus, ‘Answer to the Jews’, XIV.2, in Geoffrey D. Dunn (ed.), *Tertullian* (London, 2004), 102; Tertullian, ‘On Idolatry’, XVIII, in Jan Henrik Waszink and J.C.M. van Winden (eds.), *De Idololatria: Critical Text, Translation and Commentary*, (Leiden, 1987), 61; Origen, ‘Contra Celsum’, VI.75, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4*, 607; Cyprian, ‘Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5*, 520; Novatian, ‘Concerning the Trinity’, IX.8, in Russell J. DeSimone (ed.), *The Trinity: The Spectacles, Jewish Food, In Praise of Purity, Letters* (Washington, D.C., 1974), 43-44.

<sup>35</sup> Irenaeus, ‘Against the Heresies’, III.19.2, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1*, 449.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Clement of Alexandria, ‘Miscellanies’, II.5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2*, 351; Basil of Caesarea, ‘On the Holy Spirit’, IX.22, in David G.K. Taylor (ed.), *The Syriac Versions of the Du Spiritu Sancto by Basil of Caesarea* (Leuven, 1999), 37.

<sup>37</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, ‘Catecheses’, X.5, in Andrew A. Stephenson (trans.), *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Volume 1* (Washington, D.C., 1969), 198.

<sup>38</sup> Origen, ‘Contra Celsum’, II.64, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4*, 457.

Whether beautiful, ugly, or polymorphous, the conflicting images of Christ presented by these early written descriptions suggest that Christ's image was not yet 'standardized.'<sup>39</sup> It goes without saying that these early sources were not attempting to be documentary, but the lack of consensus nevertheless demonstrates that Christ's image was at most unknown and at least not uniformly agreed upon.

A similar conclusion emerges from the two other sources that could lay claim to having captured Christ's image: (1) *acheiropoieta* (lit., 'images not made by hands'), so-called 'miraculous' images that, upon contact with Christ's face, preserved his visage<sup>40</sup>; and (2) portraits created during Christ's lifetime. Among *acheiropoieta*, the three best known are: (1) the *Sudarium*, (2) the Shroud of Turin, and (3) the *Mandyllion*.<sup>41</sup> The *Sudarium*, better known as the 'Veil of Veronica' (Figure 10), allegedly was an imprint of Christ's face on the cloth that he used to wipe himself on his ascent to Calvary. Despite the claim to ancient origins, the earliest mention of the relic is made only in the twelfth century,<sup>42</sup> and it was not until the thirteenth century that accounts of the Veronica story became somewhat standardized.<sup>43</sup> The more than one-thousand-year gap separating the supposed 'creation' of the *Sudarium* and its (re-)discovery

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<sup>39</sup> The image of Christ will never be fully standardised (see Conclusion). After Byzantine Iconoclasm, however, what we will call Christ's 'Jovian' image appears to survive in proportionally greater numbers.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Gerhard Wolf, 'From Mandyllion to Veronica: Picturing the "Disembodied" Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West', in Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (eds.), *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Villa Spelman Colloquia Volume, 6* (Bologna, 1998), 153-79. Anthony of Piacenza, a sixth century pilgrim, records seeing an imprint of Christ's body on a column at the Church of the Flagellation in Jerusalem, for which see: Anthony Piacenza, 'Travels', in John Wilkinson (ed.), *Jerusalem Pilgrims: Before the Crusades* (Warminster, 2002), 140. See also: André Grabar, *La Sainte Face de Laon: Le Mandyllion dans l'art orthodoxe* (Prague, 1931).

<sup>41</sup> Other *acheiropoieta* on cloth could allegedly be found at Memphis, Kamuliana, Hieropolis and Caesaera. Cf. Hans Belting, 'In Search of Christ's Body. Image or Imprint?', in *The Holy Face*, 1-11. The three *acheiropoieta* treated here, however, typify the problems that apologists face in verifying the authenticity of each supposedly miraculous image.

<sup>42</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, VI, cited in Averil Cameron, 'The Mandyllion and Byzantine Iconoclasm', in *The Holy Face*, 33-54.

<sup>43</sup> Ewa Kurlyuk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a "True" Image* (Cambridge, 1991), 143-144.

is highly suspicious and, coupled with the odd provenance of the object, has led a number of scholars to argue that the *Sudarium* is a social construction, not an *acheiropoieton*.<sup>44</sup>

The Shroud of Turin (Figure 11) also is alleged to have miraculously preserved Christ's visage. Advocates of this theory maintain that the Shroud was Christ's burial cloth and that his image was transposed to the object. Such arguments have proven more difficult since 1988, when a group of scientists published a report in *Nature* that dated the Shroud to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, many (less scholarly) apologists continue to argue for the Shroud's authenticity on the grounds that the object is the same relic as the *Mandylion* (Figure 12).<sup>46</sup> Various histories of *Mandylion* have existed<sup>47</sup>; however, each version of the story claims that Abgar, king of Edessa, was sick and sent his scribe, Hanan, to ask Christ to cure the ruler. The earliest extant version of the Edessene legend, written by Eusebius of Caesarea, claims that Christ informed Abgar by letter that he would send a disciple. After Christ's ascension, Thaddeus supposedly travelled to Edessa, cured Abgar, and converted the Edessene kingdom.<sup>48</sup> This first version was revised in the first half of the fourth century in the *Acts of Thaddeus*.

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<sup>44</sup> See especially: Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Alichristlichen Literatur* (Leipzig, 1899), 102-196; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago, 1996[1994]), esp. 208-24; Wolf, 'From Mandylion to Veronica', 153 f. See also: Christoph L. Frommel and Gerhard Wolf, *L'immagine di Cristo dall acheropita al mano d'artista dal tardo medioevo all'età barocca, Studi e testi (Volume 432)* (Vatican City, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Damon, P. E., D. J. Donahue, B. H. Gore, A. L. Hatheway, A. J. T. Jull, T. W. Linick, P. J. Sercel, L. J. Toolin, C. R. Bronk, E. T. Hall, R. E. M. Hedges, R. Housley, I. A. Law, C. Perry, G. Bonani, S. Trumbore, W. Woelfli, J. C. Ambers, S. G. E. Bowman, M. N. Leese and M. S. Tite, 'Radiocarbon dating of the Shroud of Turin', *Nature* 337 (1989), 611-615. See also: Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks, and Shrouds* (London, 1997), esp. 89-132.

<sup>46</sup> Ian Wilson, *The Shroud of Turin: The Burial Cloth of Jesus Christ?* (Garden City, 1979); Robert Drews, *In Search of the Shroud of Turin: New Light on Its History and Origins* (Totowa, 1984). Joe Nickell, *Inquest on the Shroud of Turin* (Buffalo, 1983); Kenneth E. Stevenson and Gary R. Habermas, *Verdict on the Shroud: Evidence for the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Ann Arbor, 1981).

<sup>47</sup> Steven Runciman, 'Some Remarks on the Image of Edessa', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 3(1931), 243. Averil Cameron, 'The History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1973), 80-94. Sebastian Brock, 'Transformations of the Edessa Portrait of Christ', *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 18 (2004), 57-70. See also: Kurt Weitzmann, 'The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogenetos', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 11 (1960), 163-84.

<sup>48</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.13, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (New York, 1953), 76-82.

Perhaps written by the bishop Rabbula,<sup>49</sup> the *Acts of Thaddeus* are the first to associate an image with the Abgar legend. This image, however, is neither an *acheiropoieton* nor is it curative.

Rabbula writes:

When Hanan the archivist saw that Jesus had spoken thus to him, he undertook and painted the portrait of Jesus with choice colors, since he was the royal painter, and brought it with him to his lord King Abgar. When king Abgar saw the portrait he received it with great joy and placed it with great honor in one of the rooms of his palace.<sup>50</sup>

This story was revised twice in the sixth century, first by Procopius who reverts to the designation of the *Mandyllion* as a letter,<sup>51</sup> and then again by Evagrius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, who finally introduces the *Mandyllion* as an *acheiropoieton*.<sup>52</sup> A range of scholars, from Steven Runciman to Averil Cameron, have argued that social-historical factors—including a siege by the Sassanians and the competition of various elite factions within Edessa—contributed to the sixth century appearance of the *Mandyllion*.<sup>53</sup> Whatever the precipitating cause(s), the amorphous legend of the *Mandyllion* suggests that the origins of the image are dubious. The implication, of course, is that on its own internal logic, the claim made for the Shroud of Turin's authenticity is undermined by the inauthenticity of the *Mandyllion* from which it claims descent.

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<sup>49</sup> Hans J.W. Drijvers, 'The Protonike Legend, the *Doctrina Addai* and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa', *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997), 288-315.

<sup>50</sup> Rabbula, 'Acts of Thaddeus', XIII, in George Howard (ed.), *The Teaching of Addai* (Chico, 1981), 9-11.

<sup>51</sup> Procopius, *de Bello Persico*, II.26-27 and XII.6-7, cited in Averil Cameron, 'The *Mandyllion* and Byzantine Iconoclasm', 33-54.

<sup>52</sup> Evagrius, 'Ecclesiastical History', IV.27, Michael Whitby (trans.), *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus* (Liverpool, 2000), 225-228. For the Syriac oral tradition on the object, see: Hans J.W. Drijvers, 'The Image of Edessa in the Syriac Tradition,' in *The Holy Face*, esp. 14-15. For conceptions of the *mandyllion* among Greek communities, see: von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, 102-196. For evidence that the story had gained traction by the eighth century, see: Robert W. Thomson, 'An Eighth-Century Melkite Colophon from Edessa', *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962), 249-258; Brock, 'Transformations of the Edessa Portrait of Christ', 46-57.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. n. 47 above. See also: Ernst Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), 103-4.

Like *acheiropoieta*, the first unambiguously identifiable images of Christ do not appear until centuries after his death.<sup>54</sup> As we saw in the Introduction, the supposed absence of third-century representations of Christ has been attributed to the persecution of Christians as well as to the legacy of aniconism in Judaism.<sup>55</sup> The argument that for the role of persecution in delaying the emergence of Christian art rests in part on the underground location of the burial catacombs in which many of the first images can be found.<sup>56</sup> These subterranean catacombs, which are largely carved into soft tufa bedrock, are dispersed throughout the Italian peninsula, from Rome to Naples. The earliest extant images from the eastern half of the empire, by contrast, are found above ground in the house-church from the Syrian site of Dura-Europos. Only two scenes depicting Christ are identifiable—Christ healing the paralytic and Christ walking on water (Figures 13, 14)—but a number of Old Testament scenes are fairly well-preserved (Figure 15).<sup>57</sup>

Whether in the East or the West, three different types of Christ image were in circulation between AD 200 and 500: (1) the so-called ‘Jovian’ image of Christ, (2) the image of Christ as a beardless youth, and (3) the image of Christ as a child.<sup>58</sup> In his Jovian image Christ wears long,

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Johannes Kollwitz, *Das Christusbild des Dritten Jahrhunderts* (Münster, 1953), 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 66-68.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Edward L. Cutts, ‘Traditions of Christian Art. Chapter 1—Classical. The Catacomb Paintings’, *The Art Journal* 2 (1876), 86. For an interesting historiographical note on the widespread adoption of the idea, see: Wendel W. Meyer, ‘A Tale of Two Cities: John Henry Newman and the Church of the Catacombs’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61 (2010), 746-63. For a dismissal of this view, see especially: Leonard V. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City* (Leuven, 2000).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Carl H. Kraeling with C. Bradford-Welles, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: The Christian Building* (Locust Valley, 1967); Ann L. Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (Oxford, 1973), 1-9. On Dura-Europos in general, see: Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven, 1979); Anabel Wharton, *Refiguring the Post-Classical City* (Cambridge, 1995), 33-34 and 60-61. On the relationship to the synagogue, see: Michael I. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford, 1938), esp. chap. 4; Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, D.C., 1990). See also: Lisa R. Brody and Gail L. Hoffman (eds.), *Dura-Europos Crossroads of Antiquity* (Boston, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Further complicating matters, in the following centuries at least two new variants of the bearded image of Christ would appear. The first, known as the ‘Ancient of Days,’ depicts Christ as an elderly, bearded male with white hair. Only three potentially Late Antique examples of this type are known: A 7<sup>th</sup> century icon at Saint Catherine’s Monastery at the base of Mount Sinai in Egypt and two 6<sup>th</sup> century ivory plaques now in the Walters Art Gallery and the Staatliche Museum. The second type of bearded Christ, known as the Syro-Palestinian type, depicts Christ with short, cropped hair and beard. Like the Ancient of Days, this image is preserved in only a few examples, most of which are of questionable date. The sole Syro-Palestinian images with secure pre-Iconoclastic dates are a fresco

centrally-parted hair with a medium-length beard in a similar style to Jupiter (cf. Figure 16).<sup>59</sup> The Jovian image, which was used widely and can be found on sarcophagi from Gaul as well as vases from Syria (cf. Figures 17, 18), ultimately would become the type most often used to represent Christ; it was not until the seventh or eighth century, however, that this trend becomes recognisable in the visual record.<sup>60</sup> In contrast to the Jovian type, a number of images depict Christ as a ‘beardless youth’ with a hairless (or clean-shaven) face and a full head of curly hair.<sup>61</sup> It has been suggested, however, that this image was meant to be recognised as a symbol of a generic saviour rather than as a portrait of Christ.<sup>62</sup> As with the Jovian image, the iconography of the beardless youth is used in depictions of Christ across the empire (Figures 19, 20). Finally, in addition to the images of Christ in his Jovian guise and as a beardless youth, the iconography of Christ as an infant (often accompanied by his mother, the Virgin Mary) was in equally wide circulation even if fewer examples remain (Figures 21, 22).<sup>63</sup>

The use of the three different images described above (and potentially more) in various times and places between AD 200 and 500 indicates the period in question was characterised by experimentation in the depiction of Christ. Although it is possible that the different images depict Christ at different stages in his life, the application of a definite chronology to the beardless

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from Abu Girgeh and an issue of *solidi* by Justinian II. On the Ancient of Days, see: Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons* (Princeton, 1976), 41-42. On the Syro-Palestinian image, see: James D. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II (685-695, 705-711 A.D.)* (New York, 1959), 46-62.

<sup>59</sup> On the Jovian type, compare: Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, 1985), 165; Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, 2003[1993]), 69-72. See also: George M.A. Hanfmann, ‘Socrates and Christ’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 60 (1951), 205-33; for whose influence, see: Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Berkeley, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Carmelo Capizzi, *Pantocrator. Saggio d’esegesi: letteraria—iconografia* (Rome, 1964); Anthony Cutler, ‘The Dumbarton Oaks Psalter and New Testament. The Iconography of the Moscow Leaf’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37 (1983), 35-46.

<sup>61</sup> On the beardless youth, see especially: Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 119-21; Mathews *The Clash of Gods*, 115-41 with bibliography.

<sup>62</sup> Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 15-20.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 30-41 with bibliography.

youth and the Jovian type is not possible. The most obvious and compelling evidence in support of this point is the use of the beardless youth and the Jovian image types in similar scenes across the empire and, in some cases, even in the same building. Consider, for example, the different depictions of Christ in passion scenes from the doors of Santa Sabina in Rome, where he is bearded (Figure 23), and the Maskell Ivories, where he is beardless (Figure 24).<sup>64</sup> The mosaics from Santa Costanza in Rome provide another, even more proximate, case in point: in the same building one image renders a beardless Christ giving the law to Peter and Paul while another shows a bearded Christ giving Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Figures 25, 26).

Another possible explanation for making sense of Christ's variant images, one that broadly accords with Origen's polymorphous conception of Christ that we have encountered already, is that the three types in use during Late Antiquity were, like the contemporaneous Christological debates among the Church Fathers, attempts to define the Christian godhead. The visual 'definitions' imposed by the three iconographies discussed above imply the existence of different ways of seeing and 'understanding' Christ. In this reading, the multiplicity of image types indicates not only competing interpretations of Christ but also the ability for Christ to be interpreted as many things to many people. The point is perhaps best summarised by Augustine:

Even the physical face of the Lord is pictured with infinite variety by countless imaginations, though whatever it was like he certainly had only one. Nor as regards the faith we have in the Lord Jesus Christ is it in the least relevant to salvation what our imaginations picture him like, which is probably quite different from reality...<sup>65</sup>

While the next chapter will turn to the development of each of these three image types once they entered the visual record, for the moment it suffices to note that the iconographic diversity strongly suggests that no single prototype for Christ's image can be identified; at the

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<sup>64</sup> For more detailed discussions of each of these works and for a full bibliography, see the following chapter.

<sup>65</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity*, VIII.4, in Stephen McKenna (trans.), *On the Trinity: Books 8-15* (Cambridge, 2002), 11.

very least, multiple prototypes—one for each type of Christ image—should be identifiable. In part for this reason the prototypes for Christ’s image have received a great deal of attention by scholars for more than a century. It is to a survey of that scholarship that this chapter turns next.

## II. Prototypes for Christ’s Variant Images

The earliest theories explaining the origins of Christ’s image suggested that Christ’s iconography was derived from images of the Roman emperor. According to this theory, as Beat Brenk explains, the earliest images of Christ ‘drew upon Roman triumphal art in cases where it was necessary to emphasise the kingly rule of Christ.’<sup>66</sup> Following this logic, Christ’s frontal and symmetrical appearance was an emulation of analogous poses of the Roman Emperor (cf. Figures 27, 28).<sup>67</sup> Likewise, scenes of Christ teaching, surrounded by his disciples, have been likened to *adlocutio* scenes (Figures 29, 90), and scenes of Christ entering Jerusalem have been likened to the emperor’s *adventus* (Figures 31, 32).<sup>68</sup>

The most influential proponents of this position, which will be referred to as the ‘imperial theory,’ were André Grabar, Ernst Kantorowicz, and Andreas Alföldi.<sup>69</sup> Grabar, who became most widely associated with the argument positing an imperial prototype for Christ’s iconography, suggested that the relatively undeveloped imagery of the catacombs was unfit for the grand claims that were made for Christ after Constantine’s conversion. Imperial iconography, according to Grabar’s logic, was appropriated for Christian art because of its

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<sup>66</sup> Beat Brenk, ‘The Imperial Heritage of Early Christian Art’, in Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, (New York, 1980), 49.

<sup>67</sup> André Grabar, *L’Empereur dans l’Art Byzantin: Recherches sur l’Art Officiel de l’Empire Orient* (Paris, 1936), 197-198.

<sup>68</sup> Grabar, *L’Empereur dans l’Art Byzantin*, 234-236.

<sup>69</sup> For an excellent survey of the influence of these scholars, see especially: Mathews *The Clash of Gods*, 16-22. See also: Per Beskow, *Rex Gloriarum: The Kingship of Christ in the Early Church* (Stockholm, 1962).

connections with omnipotence and supremacy.<sup>70</sup> Kantorowicz and Alföldi argued more generally for an uninterrupted succession from the Roman to the Byzantine Empire and drew upon the similar iconographies used for the emperor(s) and for Christ as material evidence of this continuity.<sup>71</sup>

More recently, a group of scholars has attempted to provide a corrective to the imperial theory. Thomas Mathews, whose book *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* provides the most thorough such critique,<sup>72</sup> suggests that the image of Christ is derived from the iconographies of Roman deities—an argument that we will call the ‘religious theory.’<sup>73</sup> The lack of early scholarship focusing on the links between Christian and ‘pagan’ (a term further inspected in Chapter 3) iconography is certainly telling and may point to the discomfort of predominantly (Judaean-)Christian scholars likening the image of Christ to a non-Christian deity<sup>74</sup>; but Mathews arguably steps too far in his argument, and his willingness to dismiss the imperial influence seems strong.<sup>75</sup> As he explains:

The art historians who in the 1930s proposed to interpret the imagery of Early Christian art as an adaptation of imperial motives and compositions attached an excessive value to the forms and trappings of imperial rule. Christ, they imagined, must have been assimilated into the person and role of the emperor in order to acquire the dignity and majesty that were his due. But the citizens of Late Antiquity did not see their commander-in-chief in so positive a light as to clothe their new God in his likeness.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 5-54.

<sup>71</sup> Andreas Alföldi, *Die Monarchische Repräsentation im Römischen Kaiserreiche* (Darmstadt, 1934), as discussed in Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 17-18; Ernst Kantorowicz, ‘The “King’s Advent” and the Enigmatic Panels in the Doors of Santa Sabina’, *Art Bulletin* 26 (1944), 206-231; Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957), 42-86.

<sup>72</sup> Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, chap. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Erich Dinkler, *Christus und Asklepios* (Heidelberg, 1980); Jean-Michel Spieser, ‘The Representation of Christ in the Apses of Early Christian Churches’, *Gesta* 37 (1998), 63-73.

<sup>74</sup> See following chapter. See also: Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 16-22.

<sup>75</sup> For critiques, see: Dale Kinney, ‘Review: *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*’, *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994), 237-42; Peter Brown, ‘Review: *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*’, *The Art Bulletin* 77 (1995), 499-502; W. Eugene Kleinbauer, ‘Review: *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*’, *Speculum* 70 (1995), 937-41; Annabel J. Wharton, ‘Review: *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*’, *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), 1518-19.

<sup>76</sup> Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 191.

While Mathews is not alone in his argument for a religious origin for Christ's iconography, most other scholars working to disentangle the relationship between Christian and non-Christian iconography seem more interested in complementing the 'pagan' origins for Christian imagery with other theories. As Robin Margaret Jensen explains:

Although Mathews' thesis offers an important moderating corrective to an overly simplistic explanation of fourth-century art that views post-Constantinian art as a radical departure from the earlier phase, the changing political situation of the fourth-century church undoubtedly contributed to the change in contemporary iconography.<sup>77</sup>

One reason for Jensen's more nuanced use of the religious theory is revealed in a later book where she proposes that the Jovian image of Christ is likely derived from portraits of philosophers.<sup>78</sup> Jensen's argument follows those of a number of predominantly German scholars, most notably Paul Zanker whose 'philosopher theory' is most clearly articulated in *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*.<sup>79</sup> Zanker, who points out that images of philosophers in Late Antiquity were not exclusively bearded (Figure 33),<sup>80</sup> connects the Jovian image of Christ to depictions of 'charismatic philosophers', a group of 'holy men,'<sup>81</sup> and the beardless image of Christ to that of the 'precocious child intellectual,' which he terms the *wunderkind*.<sup>82</sup> Although Zanker is somewhat accommodative of other theories, his argument is plagued by his insistence that any given image must be derived from a single prototype. As he explains:

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<sup>77</sup> Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 100

<sup>78</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2005), 154-159.

<sup>79</sup> Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 289-292. See also: Björn C. Ewald, *Der Philosoph als Leitbild. Ikonographisches Untersuchungen an römischen Sarkophagreliefs* (Mainz, 1999).

<sup>80</sup> Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, esp. 268 f. See also: R.R.R. Smith, 'Late Roman Philosophers', in R.R.R. Smith and Kenan T. Erim (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 2: The Theatre, a Sculptor's Workshop, Philosophers, and Coin-Types*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 146-157.

<sup>81</sup> Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 307-309. See also: Edmund R. Leach, 'Magical Hair', *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 88 (1958), 147-168.

<sup>82</sup> Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 276.

Christ himself, the apostles, prophets, and saints are all depicted like pagan intellectuals. As a rule they wear the Greek mantle (*pallium*) with undergarment and hold a book roll in one hand—even when this seems rather an impediment in certain scenes of miracles... when there was a need to fashion the very essence of Christ into a single visual image, he was depicted *exclusively* as the teacher of wisdom starting in the later third century, both in catacomb paintings and on sarcophagi [emphasis added].<sup>83</sup>

Zanker's philosopher theory taken together with the imperial and religious theories suggest that the image of Christ was capable of being and was perceived as multiple things to multiple people in Late Antiquity. That the theories traditionally have distinguished themselves from one another and at times opposed one another seems to miss the point. Although each approach has a well-thought out and not invalid position, those positions are not mutually exclusive and, in point of fact, work from the same shared assumption that the image of Christ is derived from some Roman prototype. Although it is easy to differentiate the theories according to *which* prototype is identified for Christ's image, the common belief that the iconography of Christ draws upon Roman images lends the imperial, religious, and philosopher theories an overriding unity. The origin of this unified assumption has a history of its own, and it is to this history that we turn next.

### Roman Prototypes for Christian Images: An Overview of the Scholarship

The first major work on Christ's iconography in Late Antiquity was written at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Ernst von Dobschütz. In *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende. Texte u. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, Dobschütz offers the first comprehensive treatment of Christ's image in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium.<sup>84</sup> Dobschütz argues that images of Christ can be divided into three categories: (1) images of Christ

<sup>83</sup> Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 290.

<sup>84</sup> Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*. For an earlier work more in the tradition of an emblem book than a systematic analysis, see: Maurice Didron, *Christian Iconography; or, the History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, 2 Volumes, trans. Ellen J. Millington (London, 1851).

in life, (2) images of Christ in agony, and (3) images of Christ after his death. According to Dobschütz, each image type derived from an *acheiropoieton*, which in turn implied that each captured a particular ‘historical moment’ from Christ’s life. Dobschütz’s division serves his purpose of identifying the ‘historical’ Christ rather than some Roman prototype. As a result, while *Christusbilder* was a trailblazing work foundational to future studies, it lies slightly outside of the tradition that informs the imperial, religious and philosopher theories.

At the same time as Dobschütz, Nikodim P. Kondakov began publishing similarly indirect but influential works on the iconography of Christ.<sup>85</sup> Kondakov, whose works focused mostly on later or medieval artworks and Slavic artistic traditions, is particularly notable for his use of an art historical framework (rather than a strictly religious one) for the analysis of Christ’s images. Kondakov’s use of what he termed ‘Ikonografija,’ which is most closely translated as ‘iconography,’ employed stylistic and historical analyses in an attempt to unravel the social and political relationships encoded by iconographical similarities. Kondakov’s approach would prove particularly influential on his students Dmitirii Ainalov, Jacob Smirnov, and André Grabar.<sup>86</sup>

Although Russian scholarship of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is often overlooked (in part because it is not widely translated), it had an important influence on the literature that we are surveying here. Of particular note is the concept of ‘inverted perspective,’ which Ainalov introduced in 1900 to explain the visual system of representation in the ‘Roman East.’ Inverted perspective, which refers to a representational system in which objects that are further away appear larger than objects that are supposed to be closer (i.e., lines diverge instead of converge at

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<sup>85</sup> Nikodim P. Kondakov, *Ikonografiiia gospoda boga i spasa nashego Iisusa Khrista* (St. Petersburg, 1905); Nikodim P. Kondakov, *Ikonografiiia Bogomateri, 2 Volumes* (St. Petersburg, 1914).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Henry Maguire, ‘André Grabar, 1896-1990’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991), xii. For the close relationship between Kondakov’s and Ainalov’s scholarship, see especially: Victor Lasareff, ‘Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin’, *The Art Bulletin* 20 (1938), 45 f.

the horizon), has been used by scholars for many different purposes; what made Ainalov's characterisation so important was his argument that the method of representation continued in an unbroken chain from the Late Roman East through Byzantium and into modern times, most notably in the form of Russian icons.<sup>87</sup> The notion of stylistic continuity is an important one that will reappear in a later chapter.

Ainalov's notion of inverted perspective was well suited to co-option by two very different but influential strands of Viennese Late Antique art history.<sup>88</sup> One, espoused by Josef Strzygowski, interpreted Ainalov's 'inverted perspective' as the stylistic expression of an 'eastern' type that would later come to dominate the 'non-inverted' perspective of the west. As Ernst Kitzinger puts it:

Together with Strzygowski's *Orient oder Rom*, which was published almost simultaneously, Ainalov's [*Hellenistic Foundations of Byzantine Art*] was instrumental in changing the entire orientation of research concerning the origins and early history of Christian art—and Byzantine art in particular—by focusing attention on the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean littoral, countries which nineteenth-century scholarship had largely ignored because of an undue and exclusive preoccupation with Rome. Thus Ainalov's primary concern was *geographic* and *ethnic* [emphasis added].<sup>89</sup>

Kitzinger's characterisation is somewhat misleading in that, whereas for Strzygowski race was the sole point, Ainalov's purpose was to identify Russia as the heir of a continuous artistic (not racial) tradition.<sup>90</sup> Ainalov's work, perhaps ironically, was also closely related to

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<sup>87</sup> See: Dmitrii V. Ainalov, *Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, trans. Elizabeth and Serge Sobelevitch (New Brunswick, 1961[1901]). For the influence of the theory, see: Wladimir de Grüneisen, *Études comparatives: Le Portrait. Traditions hellénistiques et influences orientales* (Rome, 1911), cited in Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 65. For more recent discussions of inverted perspective, see: Kurt W. Nyberg, *Omvänt perspektiv i bildkonst och kontrovers: En kritisk begreppshistoria från det gångna seklet* (Uppsala, 2001); Clemena Antonova, 'On the Problem of "Reverse Perspective": Definitions East and West', *Leonardo* 43 (2010), 464-69; Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God* (Farnham, 2010), esp. 29-62.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Josef Strzygowski, 'Zwei weitere Stücke der Marien tafel zum Diptychon von Murano', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 8 (1899), 678 n. 1. See also: Joseph Gutmann, 'Early Christian and Jewish Art', in Harold W. Attridge (ed.), *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Detroit, 1992), 270.

<sup>89</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, 'The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art', *Dumbarton Oaks Paper*, 17 (1963), 97.

<sup>90</sup> Ainalov's work was related more explicitly to race by Rostovtzeff. See: Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art*, 57-99. Compare with Dmitrii V. Ainalov, *History of Ancient Russian Art* (Simferopol, 1920).

Alois Riegl's (whose politics were almost antithetical to Strzygowski's), albeit for different reasons. Riegl differentiated an 'optic' from a 'haptic' form of decoration in *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, a differentiation that Oskar Wulff mapped onto Ainalov's traditional and inverted perspectives in *Die umgekehrten Perspektive und Niedersicht*.<sup>91</sup> The emphasis on inverted perspective here has less to do with the importance of this method of representation than it does with highlighting the similar trajectories that early Christian art history has taken; the focus on style as a marker of continuity and disjunction has had a wide-ranging impact. Even Kurt Weitzmann, whose work on the 'Hellenistic' heritage of Byzantine art remains influential,<sup>92</sup> acknowledges the debt owed to the early Russian art historians of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium when he writes: 'Thanks to scholars like Kondakoff [sic], Pokrovsky, Ainalov, Smirnov and others, Byzantine art was a firmly established subject in Russia by the time West European scholars began seriously to be concerned with it.'<sup>93</sup> Weitzmann, however, seems to be suggesting that the treatment of Byzantine art by 'Western European scholars' was an organic development distinct from and uninfluenced by earlier Russian academics. Although we have already seen that this was not the case, there was, to Weitzmann's point, another German tradition that had different intellectual origins.

While the intellectual history has become more muddled in the past half-century, two strands of interest in what became known as 'Christian archaeology' emerged independent of Kondakov and his pupils—one Catholic and the other Protestant.<sup>94</sup> The Catholic strand was embodied by Josef Wilpert who lived and excavated in Rome and whose influence was more

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<sup>91</sup> Oskar Wulff, *Die umgekehrten Perspektive und Niedersicht* (Leipzig, 1907).

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Kurt Weitzmann, 'The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and Their Impact on Christian Iconography', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 14 (1960), 43-68.

<sup>93</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, 'Byzantine Art and Scholarship in America', *American Journal of Archaeology* 51 (1947), 396. For Ainalov's influence on Jacob Smirnov, see: Suzanne Spain Alexander, 'Review: *Les symboles de l' "Ecclesia" dans la création de l'art chrétien du IIIe au VIe siècle*', *The Art Bulletin* 57 (1975), 573-75.

<sup>94</sup> See Chapter 4 below.

prominent among later Italian scholars.<sup>95</sup> Wilpert was the first to publish comprehensive catalogues of both the early Christian catacomb paintings and sarcophagi.<sup>96</sup> Wilpert's studies, however, were saturated with an overt desire to legitimate Catholicism. As Graydon Snyder puts it, Wilpert endeavoured to show: '...how the primary elements of the Roman Catholic faith have been verified by the data of early Christian iconography.'<sup>97</sup> Wilpert's scholarship thus focused on reading central elements of Catholicism—from the Eucharist to the importance of Mary and the Petrine foundation of the church—into the iconography of the earliest Christian art.

Wilpert was critiqued in his own time, and that critique was largely meted out from the second, less overtly theological strand of Christian archaeology.<sup>98</sup> This second 'school' traces its academic roots to more 'art historical' and 'scientific' founding fathers, notably Adolph Goldschmidt and Franz Joseph Dölger. Goldschmidt, who was a friend and colleague of Heinrich Wölfflin and adopted many of his comparative strategies for the study of medieval art,<sup>99</sup> was an important influence on a younger generation of scholars including Gerhart Rodenwaldt, Wolfgang Volbach, and Kurt Weitzmann.<sup>100</sup> Rodenwaldt had the earliest impact of

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<sup>95</sup> The work of both Giuseppe Marchi and Giovanni de Rossi preceded Wilpert's, and de Rossi in particular also had a close relationship with the Vatican, where he served as secretary of the library; nevertheless, the influence of Wilpert has proven stronger on subsequent scholars. See: Reiner Sörries, *Josef Wilpert (1857-1944): ein Leben im Dienste der christlichen Archäologie* (Würzburg, 1998). However, for Marchi and de Rossi, see: Giuseppe Marchi, *Monumenti delle arti cristiane primitive nella metropoli della cristianesimo* (Rome, 1944); Giovanni B. de Rossi, *Roma sotterranea cristiana, 3 Volumes* (Rome, 1864-67).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Josef Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Rom* (Freiburg, 1903); Josef Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi* (Vatican City, 1929-36). For Wilpert's influence, see: Orazio Marucchi, *Manual of Christian Archaeology*, trans. Hubert Vecchierello (Patterson, 1935); Giuseppe Ferretto, *Note storico-bibliografiche di archeologia cristiana* (Vatican City, 1942); Aldo Nestori, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe Romane* (Vatican City, 1975).

<sup>97</sup> Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 12.

<sup>98</sup> See especially: Paul Styger, 'Die Methode der Katakombenforschung', *Separatdruck aus Monatsrosen*, 1/2 (1930) 1-14; Erich Dinkler, *Die ersten Petrusdarstellung* (Marburg, 1939), both cited in: Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 10.

<sup>99</sup> On Goldschmidt's systematic approach, see: W. Eugene Kleinbauer, *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History* (New York, 1971), 44-46. See, however: Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, 1984), 99. See also: Carl G. Heise, *Adolph Goldschmidt zum Gedächtnis, 1863-1944* (Hamburg, 1963).

<sup>100</sup> Rodenwaldt, in particular, is often overlooked despite being the first to apply a Wölfflinian comparative approach to the study of ancient art, an achievement most pronounced in *Die Kunst der Antike: Hellas und Rom* (Berlin, 1927) where he importantly contrasts Greek and Roman art while demonstrating the fundamental continuity between the two. Rodenwaldt's exclusion from the canon may have something to do with his Nazi sympathies, although he was

these three students; while his publications focused on Roman art (which he differentiated from early Christian art),<sup>101</sup> he nonetheless proved influential for his opus *Die Kunst der Antike* and for his stewardship of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI) of which he was Secretary General from 1922 to 1931.<sup>102</sup> The DAI had already established itself as an important source of support for ‘Protestant’ scholarship through its grant and fellowship programs, one of which was awarded to Joseph Sauer, the author of the first comprehensive treatment of Christ’s early iconography since von Dobschütz.<sup>103</sup>

Dölger, whose work on Christianity’s relationship to Hellenism was more influential on Christian archaeology than Rodenwaldt’s, contributed to Late Antique Christian scholarship with important studies of the use of fish and solar iconographies in early Christianity.<sup>104</sup> Dölger, like Goldschmidt, proved to be an influential teacher, most notably for Theodor Klauser.<sup>105</sup> Klauser was an early member of the ‘Bonn’ group of Christian archaeologists (founded by Dölger and Hans Lietzmann, a vocal critic of Wilpert’s) and a founder of the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. The *Reallexikon*, his most seminal contribution to the field, traced the interaction of Christianity with Roman antiquity and provides a telling nod to Dölger’s legacy.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, as a catalogue, the *Reallexikon* betrays some of Klauser’s intellectual debt to the DAI and its

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never an official member of the party. See: Adolf H. Borbein, ‘Gerhart Rodenwaldt’, *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1987), 697-700.

<sup>101</sup> See Chapter 4 below.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. William Calder, ‘Rodenwaldt, Gerhart’, in Nancy Thomson de Grummond (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the History of Classical Archaeology, Volume 2* (Westport, 1996), 965-66.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Sauer, ‘Das Aufkommen des bärtigen Christustypus in der frühchristlichen Kunst’, *Strena Buliciana* (1924), 303–29.

<sup>104</sup> On fish imagery, see: Ichthys. On solar imagery, see: *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit und der Schwarze* (Münster, 1918); *Sol Salutis. Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum* (Münster, 1925).

<sup>105</sup> Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 9. Theodor Klauser, *Franz Joseph Dölger, 1879-1944: Sein Leben und sein Forschungsprogramm ‘Antike und Christentum’* (London, 1980). The institute at Bonn was renamed the Franz Joseph Dölger-Institut in 1955 by none other than Klauser.

<sup>106</sup> *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1950-) and *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* (1958-2000) were both started by Klauser at the Dölger-Institut. In the same way that Dölger concentrated on fish and solar imagery, Klauser took an interest in a focused iconographical analysis of the Good Shepherd. See especially: Theodore Klauser, ‘Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte’, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 1 (1958), 20-51.

cataloguing program. A number of scholars, including Klauser from 1931 to 1934, began working on catalogues of early Christian objects during time spent at the institute either on fellowships or as residents.<sup>107</sup>

Klauser and his colleagues set the stage for the works of Friedrich Gerke and Johannes Kollwitz who are, for our purposes, the two most notable scholars in the German tradition. Gerke was interested primarily in sarcophagi, although a more general work on the relationship between Late Antiquity and Christianity was published posthumously.<sup>108</sup> Gerke's first major contribution to the scholarship on sarcophagi appeared and took as its focus the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Figure 7); he followed up this successful debut with a publication of the sarcophagi of the pre-Constantinian period.<sup>109</sup> Gerke, who devoted an entire book to the image of Christ in Late Antiquity,<sup>110</sup> made his most lasting contribution to the field with his proposition that Christ's iconography follows a strict tri-partite chronology. According to his scheme, the pre-Constantinian image of Christ as a philosopher was followed by the Constantinian image of Christ as a miracle-worker, which in turn was supposedly succeeded by the post-Constantinian images of a victorious Christ and of Christ the Ruler.<sup>111</sup> Although the neatness of Gerke's division and the coherency of his categories are subject to critique, the formalisation of a chronology that allows the conception of Christ as a philosopher to sit alongside the conception

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Theodor Klauser, *Gesammelte Arbeiten zur Liturgiegeschichte, Kirchengeschichte und Christlichen Archäologie* (Münster, 1974).

<sup>108</sup> Friedrich Gerke, *Kunst der Welt, Spätantike und frühes Christentum* (Baden-Baden, 1967).

<sup>109</sup> Friedrich Gerke, *Der Sarkophag des Iunius Bassus* (Berlin, 1936); Friedrich Gerke, *Die christlichen Sarkophage der vorkonstantinischen Zeit* (Berlin, 1940).

<sup>110</sup> On the iconography of the lamb, see: Friedrich Gerke, 'Der Ursprung der Lämmerallegorien in der altchristlichen Plastik', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 33 (1934), 160-96. On the development of Christ's iconography in general, see: Friedrich Gerke, *Christus in der spätantiken Plastik* (Mainz, 1948[1940]). More generally, see: Friedrich Gerke, 'Ideengeschichte der ältesten christlichen Kunst', *Zeitschrift für Kirchen Geschichte* 59 (1940), 1-120.

<sup>111</sup> Gerke, *Christus in der spätantiken Plastik*, 7 ff.

of Christ as a Ruler has proven influential.<sup>112</sup> One could argue that it was Gerke's conceptualisation that first crystallised the divisions between the three origins theories discussed above. Johannes Kollwitz was interested in sarcophagi as well and his first major work (which was, like Gerke's *Die christlichen Sarkophage*, published by the DAI) focused on Theodosian sculpture.<sup>113</sup> In 1953 Kollwitz published *Das Christusbild des dritten Jahrhunderts* in which he argued that the image of Christ drew its iconography and meaning from the image of the emperor.<sup>114</sup> Although their precise arguments may be overly reductive, the close empirical analysis of objects and the interest in situating them in their context has proved as influential as the Russian attempt to use style and iconography as markers of cultural change.

In addition to the German and Russian literatures surveyed thus far, there exists a set of Francophone scholarship that is more self-consciously aware of its ties to the early Russian art historians in part because its father figure, André Grabar, studied under and was influenced deeply by Kondakov, Ainalov, and Smirnov.<sup>115</sup> Grabar published widely on Late Antique and Byzantine art; however, he is perhaps best remembered for his contributions to the study of early Christian iconography. Just before moving from Strasbourg to Paris, Grabar published *L'Empereur dans l'Art Byzantin: Recherches sur l'Art Officiel de l'Empire Orient*, in which he

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<sup>112</sup> For critiques, see: Friedrich W. Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage, Volume 1* (Wiesbaden, 1967), cited in Snyder's critique in *Ante Pacem*, 107-10; Peter Franke, 'Traditio Legis und Petrusprimat: Eine Entgenungauf Franz Nikolasch', *Vigiliae Christianae* 26 (1972), 267-68. For Gerke's influence, see: Spieser, 'The Representation of Christ', esp. n. 50.

<sup>113</sup> Johannes Kollwitz, *Oströmische Plastik der theodosianischen Zeit* (Berlin, 1941)

<sup>114</sup> Kollwitz, *Das Christusbild*. On the imperial influence on Christ's iconography, see: Johannes Kollwitz, 'Das Bild von Christus dem König in Kunst und Liturgie der christlichen Frühzeit', *Theologie und Glaube* 37/38 (1947-48), 95-118.

<sup>115</sup> For examples of the Russian (and slav[on]ic) influence Grabar in particular, see: *Boianskata tsurkva: arkhitektura—zhivopis'* (Sofia, 1924); *La peinture religieuse en Bulgarie* (Paris, 1928). Grabar, however, was aware of the pre-existing Francophone scholarship on Christian iconography, for example: Didron, *Christian Iconography*; Edmond F. Le Blant, *Étude sur les sarcophages chrétiens antiques de la ville d'Arles* (Paris, 1878); Gabriel Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile aux XIVe et XVIe siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos* (Paris, 1916); Marius Besson, *Saint Pierre et les origines de la primauté romaine* (Geneva, 1929)

argued, like Kollwitz, that the image of Christ was derived primarily from imperial iconography.<sup>116</sup>

Over his career, however, Grabar's position would soften considerably, so much so that by the time that he delivered his Mellon lectures, which were published posthumously under the title *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins*, Grabar was willing to accommodate the possibility that a single image had multiple prototypes. For Grabar, each prototype was selected for a specific meaning; thus, the existence of multiple prototypes allowed for multiple meanings. As he explains: '...taken apart from its specific context, an image can be understood in many different ways...'<sup>117</sup> Grabar, however, was explicitly interested in the Christian context and thus read each image through a Christian lens. Grabar's approach has proven influential on his Francophone successors, which include his son Oleg (whose work was primarily concerned with the rise of Islam), Gilbert Dagron, and Jean-Michel Spieser, all of whom share Grabar's appreciation for the fluidity of meaning.<sup>118</sup> Grabar's legacy and his continued relevance stem largely from his incorporation of structuralist theories of knowledge and, in particular, semiotics into his work.<sup>119</sup> As Henry Maguire remarked in Grabar's obituary when discussing his approach in *Christian Iconography*: 'Grabar's discussion, which drew extensively on semiotics and linguistics, was in many respects ahead of its time...'<sup>120</sup>

If it was Grabar who introduced semiotics into the study of Late Antique art, then it was Tonio Hölscher who most clearly articulated a semiotic theory for interpreting Late Roman

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<sup>116</sup> André Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'Art Byzantin: Recherches sur l'Art Officiel de l'Empire Orient* (Paris, 1936).

<sup>117</sup> Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, xlix.

<sup>118</sup> For Oleg Grabar, see: *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, 1995). For Gilbert Dagron, see: 'From the *mappa* to the *akakia*: Symbolic Drift', in Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (eds.), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* (Leuven, 2007), 203 ff.. For Jean-Michel Spieser, see: 'Comparatisme et diachronie. À propos de l'histoire de l'iconographie dans le monde paléochrétien et byzantin', in François Boespflug et Françoise Dunand (eds.), *Le comparatisme en histoire des religions* (Paris 1997), 383-399.

<sup>119</sup> For a 'semiotic' reading on *Martyrium*, see: Annabel J. Wharton, 'Rereading *Martyrium*: The Modernist and Postmodernist Texts', *Gesta* 29 (1990), 3-7.

<sup>120</sup> Henry Maguire, 'André Grabar, 1896-1990', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991), xiv.

images. At least partly influenced by the post-structural theories that were popular at the time of its publication, Tonio Hölscher reframed discussions on Roman iconography by analogising Roman art to a ‘semantic system’ in which various iconographical forms were associated with corresponding meanings.<sup>121</sup> The earliest images of Christ, following such a reading, were selected from an existing lexicon of Roman art on the basis of the compatibility in meaning between the Roman prototype and the desired association with Christ. As Grabar puts it for the imperial theory, ‘All the “vocabulary” of a triumphal or imperial iconographic language was poured into the “dictionary” which served Christian iconography...’<sup>122</sup> The linguistic analogy favoured by Grabar and later by Hölscher is especially relevant to Late Antique images of Christ, if not entirely in the ways that those authors imagined. Grabar and Hölscher seem to work from a conception that an image and its meaning exist in a one-to-one correspondence. This is almost certainly not the case.<sup>123</sup>

Grabar’s notion of an exclusively Christian audience for Christian art is particularly problematic since it privileges Christian readings, a topic to which we will return in much greater detail in our interpretation of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. Hölscher is more sensitive to multiple viewing publics and the possibility for multiple interpretations of an image.<sup>124</sup> Nonetheless, Hölscher seems to reify interpretations *within groups* by allowing only for a circumscribed set of interpretations that is still limiting. What neither scholar effectively

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<sup>121</sup> Tonio Hölscher, *The Language of Images in Roman Art*, trans. Anthony Snodgrass and Annemarie Künzl-Snodgrass (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>122</sup> Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 41-42.

<sup>123</sup> On Grabar, see: Wharton, ‘Rereading *Martyrium*’, 3-7. On Hölscher, see: Jaś Elsner, ‘Foreword’, in *The Language of Images in Roman Art*, esp. xxv ff. See also: Jaś Elsner, ‘Alois Riegl and Classical Archaeology,’ in Peter Noever, Artur Rosenauer, and Georg Vasold (eds.), *Alois Riegl Revisited: Beiträge zu Werk und Rezeption/Contributions to the Opus and its Reception* (Vienna, 2010), 45-57.

<sup>124</sup> Hölscher is decidedly vague, however, in his discussion of the degree to which he envisions style to act as a signifier separate from iconography. Some clarity may be provided by looking to the work of those scholars that influenced Hölscher’s thinking. See, for an example: Guido Kaschnitz-Weinberg, ‘Bemerkungen zur Struktur der ägyptischen Plastik’, *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen* 2 (1933), 7-24.

achieves is the recognition that certain images can convey multiple meanings to the same *individual*. Although Grabar and Hölscher adopted a linguistic metaphor well-suited to analyse how images can accommodate multiple compatible meanings, both failed to actualise the potential of the linguistic metaphor. An analogy to language, of course, may not in itself be the best framework for understanding how images were interpreted in Late Antiquity. What makes a linguistic comparison appealing is the now-current acceptance that language is dynamic. The dynamism of Late Antique iconography at a very high level can be brought to the fore through a brief discussion of how the imperial, religious, and philosopher theories for the origins of Christ's iconography do not exclude one another; rather, they are completely compatible. It is possible that a single image encoded at least two and potentially all three meanings at once. A brief pair-wise comparison of the imperial, religious and philosopher theories will demonstrate how, in Late Antiquity, an image labelled as an emperor, a deity, or a philosopher could have equally have signified any and all of those meanings.

### The Compatibility of the Imperial, Religious, and Philosopher Theories

It was quite common in antiquity for the emperor to depict himself in the guise of a deity.<sup>125</sup> Claudius, who depicted himself as Jupiter (Figure 34), may have been the first Roman emperor to do so.<sup>126</sup> In the second half of the second century, Commodus commissioned a portrait bust of himself as Hercules (Figure 35).<sup>127</sup> Only a few years later, Septimius Severus and his son, Caracalla, had themselves rendered in the guise of Sarapis (Figures 36, 37).<sup>128</sup> Emperors continued to depict themselves in the guise of a deity, most often Sol (cf. Figures 38,

<sup>125</sup> Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988), 297-334.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response* (Oxford, 2003), 48-51.

<sup>127</sup> For a more detailed treatment, see: Michael P. Speidel, 'Commodus the God-Emperor and the Army', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993), 109-114.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Anna Marguerite McCann, *The Portraits of Septimius Severus, A.D. 193-211* (Rome, 1968).

39, 40), throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>129</sup> Even Constantine allegedly depicted himself in the guise of Helios on the sculpture that adorned his triumphal column in Constantinople.<sup>130</sup>

The emperors appropriated religious imagery to make claims to the universality and supremacy of their power.<sup>131</sup> The iconography of the emperor and the iconography of pagan deities were fused together and in certain contexts one was inseparable from the other. For example, in some instances the emperor was considered a deity himself and he was both depicted and worshipped as one after his death.<sup>132</sup> For a visual materialisation of this belief, consider the Column Base of Antoninus Pius, which depicts the emperor's apotheosis as he is carried to heaven by a winged genius (Figure 41).<sup>133</sup> The conflation of imperial and religious iconography in the Roman Empire suggests that any appropriation of imperial imagery was also an appropriation of religious imagery. Likewise, any appropriation of religious imagery could have called to mind the associations between the depicted deity and the emperor.

In Late Antiquity philosophers, like emperors, also could have been associated with religion. Between AD 200 and 500 an active group of philosophers in the eastern part of the empire became associated with both the Hellenistic philosophical tradition and with the pagan religions of the east, and, in so doing, became a symbols of both philosophy and of

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. Gaston H. Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus* (Leiden, 1972), 45-172; Marianne Bergmann, *Die Strahlen der Herrscher: Theomorphes Herrscherbild und politische Symbolik im Hellenismus und in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz, 1998), esp. 40 ff.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Cyril Mango, 'Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), 74; Garth Fowden, 'Constantine's Porphyry Column: The Earliest Literary Allusion', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991), 119-131; Jonathan Bardill, *Constantine: Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2012), 28-37.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Hans Peter L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture* (New Rochelle, 1982[1947]).

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Glen W. Bowersock, 'The Imperial Cult: Perceptions and Persistence', in Ben F. Meyer and Ed P. Sanders (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, Volume 3*, (Philadelphia, 1982), 171-182; Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the West* (Leiden, 1987).

<sup>133</sup> Penelope J.E. Davies, *Death and the Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius* (Austin, 2004[2000]), 96-100.

‘Hellenism’—i.e., eastern pagan cult practices.<sup>134</sup> These philosophers were largely the same people that Peter Brown refers to as ‘holy men,’ predominantly ascetics whose miraculous powers included healing (Figures 42, 43).<sup>135</sup> Although in Late Antiquity holy men were more popular in the eastern part of the empire,<sup>136</sup> the ascetic tendencies of these philosophers and their popularity among the masses were seen by the patrician class as a threat to Roman society.<sup>137</sup> Thus, in his polemic against Christianity, Celsus argues that Christ was nothing more than a charlatan like other ascetic philosophers.<sup>138</sup> The image of the Late Antique philosopher, in other words, would have been inextricably associated with Hellenism.

The image of the emperor likewise had philosophical connotations from the time of Hadrian into the mid-third century. It was, in fact, customary for the emperor to be shown without a beard until AD 117 when Hadrian first depicted himself with facial hair in the style of the ancient Greek philosophers (Figure 44).<sup>139</sup> By virtue of Hadrian’s success as a ruler, a bearded appearance became the standard among his successors.<sup>140</sup> Antonius Pius and Lucius Verus wore beards, so too did Marcus Aurelius who was himself a Stoic philosopher (Figures, 45, 46, 47).<sup>141</sup> A beard was worn by emperors without interruption for nearly a century, until

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<sup>134</sup> R.R.R. Smith, ‘Late Roman Philosopher Portraits from Aphrodisias’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990), 153-55. Cf. Frank R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370-529, 2 Volumes* (Leiden, 2001).

<sup>135</sup> Peter Brown, ‘The Holy Man in Late Antiquity’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 92-101; Garth Fowden, ‘The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982), 33-59; Cf. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 287-289.

<sup>136</sup> Asceticism did appear in the west where it was largely associated with Priscillianism. See Chapter 5 below.

<sup>137</sup> James Francis, ‘Pagan and Christian Philosophy in Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii*’, *The American Benedictine Review* 32 (1981), 100-113; James Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, 1995). See Chapter 5 below for further discussion and bibliography.

<sup>138</sup> Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 131 f.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 217-43

<sup>140</sup> A similar appearance would legitimise the successor by visually linking him with his predecessor. The tradition of dynastic portraiture had been established already by the Julio-Claudians and Flavians. See especially: Sheldon Nodelman, ‘How to Read a Roman Portrait,’ in Eve D’Ambra (ed.), *Roman Art in Context: An Anthology* (Englewood Cliffs, 1993), 10-24.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 21 n. 1.

Elagabalus and Severus Alexander changed the status quo at the close of the Severan dynasty.<sup>142</sup> For the next two decades, the image of the emperor oscillated between bearded and beardless until, during the ‘age of anxiety,’ emperors appear to have adopted a short-cropped beard as a replacement for the philosopher’s beard that the Hadrian introduced (Figure 48).<sup>143</sup> This short beard has sometimes been called a ‘military beard,’ but the implication of the term, that there was a beard associated only with the military, is misleading. For example, emperors including Probus and Numerian were depicted with facial hair closely resembling a philosopher’s beard (Figures 49, 50).<sup>144</sup> Does this mean that Probus and Numerian, both of whom had to contend with war (the former along the Danube and the latter against the Sassanians), did not care to be seen as military emperors? The fact is that a military association was most likely important to these emperors, which suggests that a beard may have been capable of signifying both philosophical proclivities and martial competence. Such dynamism of meaning is perhaps best materialised by Julian the Apostate whose beard on certain issues of coinage could easily stand for either his well-known philhellenism or, given the battle regalia in which he is shown (Figures 51, 52), his able militarism.

The compatibility of the imperial, religious, and philosopher theories suggests that sweeping iconographical generalisations are difficult to make about Late Antique images. The Roman Empire had expanded to cover almost the entire Mediterranean region, and the diversity

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<sup>142</sup> Admittedly some emperors, like Caracalla, wore shorter beards; the fact remains though that Elagabalus and Severus Alexander were the first since Hadrian to lack a beard in their official portrait-images.

<sup>143</sup> The majority of emperors during this period did not wear beards; the notable exceptions were Gordian I and Pupienus. On this period, see especially: Eric R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge, 1965); Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Government’s Response to Crisis, AD 235-337* (New Haven, 1976). See also: Averil Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire, AD 284-430* (Cambridge, 1993), 3-4. For an interesting note on the differential effects of the crisis, see: Lukas de Blois, ‘The Third Century Crisis and the Greek Elite in the Roman Empire’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 33 (1984), 358-77.

<sup>144</sup> Both Probus and Numerian were named after Marcus Aurelius, which suggests the use of a longer philosopher’s beard in their portraits may have been intentional. Probus’ full name was Marcus Aurelius Probus and Numerian’s full name was Marcus Aurelius Numerius Numerianus Augustus.

of cultures encompassed by the Empire make broad iconographical interpretations difficult. When interpreting early images of Christ, it is necessary to consider all of the alternative and overlapping prototypes for these images. Any analysis of early Christian iconography should not try to fit all images of Christ into an overly rigid scheme; instead, Christ's early images should be interpreted as an amalgam of multiple, dynamic meanings.

That the imperial, religious, and philosopher theories are compatible, however, does nothing to change the fact that imperial, religious, and philosopher prototypes were each drawn upon in constructing the image of Christ. The observations on the one hand that Christ's image was often ambiguous and could be variably interpreted, and on the other that Christ's images were derived from Roman prototypes begs a seemingly simplistic question: How was an image of Christ differentiated from its prototype? Despite the apparent obviousness of that question, systematic methodologies for determining whether an image depicts Christ have seldom been proposed. Mary Charles Murray came the closest in her work on Orphean imagery of Christ, but Murray was primarily concerned with the gradual evolution of an image class (the beardless youth) from a prototype (Orpheus) instead of how the two—the image of Christ and the image of the prototype—could be differentiated.<sup>145</sup> Like Murray's work, most scholarship has been interested in 'what' Christ's image signified—imperial power, divinity, philosophical knowledge and prudence, etc.—instead of 'how' images of Christ communicated that they depicted Christ. Both of these issues are important, especially since, as we just saw, an image can signify multiple things. The question of how an image signifies Christ has received far less attention, and, in part for that reason, is of particular interest to us here.

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<sup>145</sup> Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, esp. chap. 2. See also: Mary Charles Murray, 'The Christian Orpheus', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 26 (1977), 19-27; Finney, 'Orpheus-David'; John B. Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Syracuse, 2000), esp. 38-85.

### III. Towards a Methodology for Interpreting Images as Christ

The *topos* of the ‘Good Shepherd’ provides an acute case in which ambiguity and uncertainty has created a mass of at times contradictory scholarship.<sup>146</sup> The use of the Good Shepherd in Early Christian art long has been a point of scholarly discussion since Josef Wilpert’s publications of Early Christian catacombs and sarcophagi more than a century ago.<sup>147</sup> Discussions of the Good Shepherd often note that the motif is found on early Christian sarcophagi with some regularity. The sepulchral context of these finds, suggests that the iconography carried a funerary meaning. The Good Shepherd’s association with the afterlife was hardly unique to Christianity and was preceded by an iconography that depicted Hermes as *psychopomp*—i.e., as a guide to the underworld (Figure 53).<sup>148</sup> A similar tradition existed as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC in which a ram-bearer, the so-called *moschophorus*, functioned in votive as well as funerary contexts (Figure 54).<sup>149</sup>

It is entirely conceivable given such a precedent that despite the many biblical and patristic references to Christ as a shepherd, the image of the Good Shepherd could have implied salvific themes to a Late Antique audience without necessarily carrying a Christian meaning.<sup>150</sup> Theodor Klauser espoused this position, suggesting that the Good Shepherd was associated primarily with charity, philanthropy, and *Soteria* (lit. ‘salvation’).<sup>151</sup> Klauser’s position has not

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<sup>146</sup> For a good overview of the positions, see: Walter Lowrie, *Art in the Early Church* (New York, 1947).

<sup>147</sup> Wilpert, *Die Malereien*, tables 15 and 35, 1-2. On the catacombs see also Anton Legner, ‘Hirt, Guter Hirt’, in Günter Bandmann, Wolfgang Braunfels, Johannes Kollwitz, and Engelbert Kirschbaum (eds.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie, Volume 2* (1970), 289-99.

<sup>148</sup> See especially: Charles H. Hoole (trans.), *The Shepherd of Hermas* (London, 1870). See also Johannes Quasten, ‘Der Gute Hirt in frühchristlicher Totenliturgie und Grabeskunst’, *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati. Studi e testi 121* (Vatican City, 1946), 373-406; Anton Legner, *Der Gute Hirt* (Düsseldorf, 1959).

<sup>149</sup> The exact nature of the relationship between the Good Shepherd and *moschophorus* iconographies remains an open question. The iconographies are sufficiently similar, however, to suggest a degree of influence on the former by the latter. Cf. Katherine Kreesling, *The Votive Statues of the Athenian Acropolis* (Cambridge, 2008), 117.

<sup>150</sup> For a good discussion, see: Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 37-41. See also: Gérard Brett, ‘The Mosaic of the Great Palace in Constantinople’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), 34-43.

<sup>151</sup> Klauser, ‘Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte’, 20-51.

been abandoned completely,<sup>152</sup> but it has been heavily critiqued by a number of scholars who interpret the Good Shepherd, when used in a Christian context, as a symbol of Christ.<sup>153</sup> These scholars draw on scholarship at least as old as Klauser's that identifies the Good Shepherd with the Son of God and, in particular, with baptism.<sup>154</sup> It is worthwhile to quote André Grabar at length for his discussion of the Good Shepherd (with reference to the *orant* figure he saw as its complement), which works the Good Shepherd into his linguistic analogy of 'image as sign':

It is certainly not the task of the historian to judge the relative effectiveness of the image-sign of Paleo-Christian art as a means of iconographic expression. But recognition of the limits of its effectiveness does indicate what functions could have been assigned to it. These functions are comparable to those general ideas of language. Some of these general ideas are abstract in character, while others tend to become so as a result of frequent use. In the series of abstract ideas there is, for instance, the notion of piety, which has as an image-sign the *orant*, or the idea of philanthropy, which—although it is less obvious to us because of the greater rarity of the iconographic term—has its iconographical counterpart in the figure of the shepherd carrying the lamb. In a series of ideas made banal by use, some examples that come quickly to mind are names of feasts: the Annunciation to the Virgin, Easter, the Epiphany of Christ's Baptism. The words, like the corresponding image-signs, are enough to recall the evangelical events commemorated by the feasts.<sup>155</sup>

Grabar's more nuanced account of how meaning was inscribed into the iconography of the Good Shepherd is convincing; however, there is a crack in his appeal to the contemporary reader to trust that what may be unclear at present would have been clear in antiquity. Grabar's faith that a symbol's Christian meaning would have been apprehended relies on the assumption that viewers of the symbol were Christian—these images were, according to Grabar, *de facto* effective for their intended audience. It is not clear, however, that Grabar's conception of the

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*. For a variant relating the Good Shepherd to the good life, see Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Über Hirten-Genre in der antiken Kunst, Abhandlungen der Rhenschisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 65* (Opladen 1980).

<sup>153</sup> Johannes Kollwitz, *Christusbild*, 5-7; Janet Huskinson, 'Some Pagan Mythological Figures and Their Significance in Early Christian Art', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 42 (1974), 68-97; Paul C. Finney, 'Good Shepherd', Everett Ferguson, Michael P. McHugh, and Frederick W. Norris (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York, 1999[1997]), 845-6.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Theodore Kempf, *Christus der Hirt: Ursprung und Deutung einer altchristlichen Symbolgestalt* (Rome, 1942); Johannes Quasten, 'Das Bild des Guten Hirten in den altchristlichen Baptisereien und in den Tauf liturgien des Ostens und Westens', in Franz J. Dölger (ed.), *Pisculi, Ergänzungs Volume zu 'Antike und Christentum'* (Münster, 1939), 220-44.

<sup>155</sup> Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 9-10.

viewing audience was the right one. Increasingly, it appears that Christian, Jewish, and ‘pagan’ artefacts not only used similar iconographies, but also that artefacts featuring supposedly cult-specific iconographies found their way into other religious contexts.<sup>156</sup> That between AD 200 and 500 a Jewish gold glass was used in a Christian context, after all, should be no more startling than the more widely accepted fact that in contemporaneous Sarapea one finds statues of Mithras and Asklepios.<sup>157</sup> One potential implication of acknowledging more fluid boundaries between Christians, Jews, and pagans—one suggested in the Introduction as well—is that iconographies or their intrinsic meanings (insofar as images had any) might not have been religiously circumscribed.<sup>158</sup> Religious meaning might not have been rigidly limited, and the iconographies between cults may have been sufficiently similar to allow for multiple interpretations, each activated by a different viewer. A growing body of evidence suggests that burials were not necessarily geographically divided by religion, perhaps even in Rome.<sup>159</sup> An image of the Good Shepherd in a Christian catacomb may have been seen by non-Christians; indeed, it may have even been intended just as readily for non-Christians as Christians. Through this lens, the Good Shepherd may have been a Late Antique rather than a Christian image.

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<sup>156</sup> For a discussion of ‘paganism,’ see the following chapter. For discussions of the interaction between Christians and Jews, the work of Leonard V. Rutgers is of particular note. See: ‘Überlegungen zu den jüdischen Katakomben Roms’, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 33 (1990), 140-57; Leonard V. Rutgers, ‘Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 96 (1992), 101-18; Leonard V. Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interactions in the Roman Diaspora* (Leiden, 1995).

<sup>157</sup> See especially, Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee, *Art Treasures from the Temple of Mithras* (London, 1986). See also: David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe, Volume 2: The City of Rome* (Cambridge, 1995), 471.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, esp. 274-79. For a relevant contribution with a later focus, see: Herbert L. Kessler, ‘Shaded with Dust: Jewish Eyes on Christian Art’, in Herbert L. Kessler and David Nirenberg (eds.), *Judaism and Christian Art: Aesthetic Anxieties from the Catacombs to Colonialism* (Philadelphia, 2011), 74-114. See also: Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, 3 Volumes* (New York, 1953).

<sup>159</sup> See especially: Jodi Magness and Gideon Avni, ‘Jews and Christians in a Late Roman Cemetery at Beth Guvrin’, in Hayim Lapin (ed.), *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Late Roman Palestine* (Bethesda, 1998), 87-114; Mark J. Johnson, ‘Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century: Shared Tombs?’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997), 37-60. The problem is best stated by Jaś Elsner. See: ‘Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Jewish Art and Early Christian Art’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003), 117-18.

Boniface Ramsay has suggested something similar in arguing that the Good Shepherd's disappearance from the visual record during the course of the fifth century was due to the *lack* of an inherently Christian meaning for the image.<sup>160</sup> For Ramsay, the Good Shepherd was a symbol of charity, salvation, and, above all else, protection; as Christianity concentrated its religious power, the need for such symbolism diminished and was replaced by the need for dogmatic representations. Thus, according to Ramsay, the Good Shepherd in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia represents the transitional moment when the old salvific iconography of the Good Shepherd is (uncomfortably) reconciled with the dogmatic requirement of depicting Christ Incarnate (Figure 9).<sup>161</sup> It is equally plausible, however, that the explicit use of a new iconography—namely the insertion of a halo behind the shepherd's head and a cross in his hand—was intended for the first time to unambiguously identify the Good Shepherd with Christ. In such a reading, previous images were recognisable signs of salvation and protection that were sufficiently non-specific to allow for multivalent and contingent interpretations by a diverse audience. Coming full-circle on the linguistic and semiotic analogy, it is conceivable that the Good Shepherd, and perhaps certain other (or all) images of Christ between AD 200 and 500, were floating signifiers.<sup>162</sup>

#### Interpretive Juxtaposition: A Systematic Method for Identifying Images of Christ

One intriguing element of Ramsay's work is his implication that the image of Christ depicted in the mosaic from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia unambiguously depicted Christ. While most probably would agree with Ramsay, what is of interest is not that we agree but *why*

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<sup>160</sup> Boniface Ramsay, 'A Note on the Disappearance of the Good Shepherd from Early Christian Art', *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983), 375-8.

<sup>161</sup> Ramsay, 'A Note on the Disappearance of the Good Shepherd', 376.

<sup>162</sup> On the application of the concept of the 'floating signifier' to Late Antique art, see: Wharton, 'Rereading *Martyrium*', 6.

we agree. It would appear on the basis of our agreement that there are certain ‘rules’ for determining whether or not an image reasonably could have been understood as Christ. Any attempt to systematise the identification of images as Christ must employ one or more of four strictly defined methods.

The first and most straightforward method for identifying Christ is through the use of ‘scriptural citations,’ which is to say, text that refers to scripture and which labels an image (Figure 6). The text in these cases must be immediately adjacent to the image and should explicitly define the figure depicted as Christ through either the use of his proper name or through the use of some other term that could only be used to refer to Christ (e.g., ‘INRI,’ ‘Emmanuel,’ etc.). The depiction of Christ from the Catacombs of Domitilla provides a prime example of the use of a scriptural citation (Figure 55). The painting in question, which is often cited as an example of the influence of Jupiter’s iconography on Christ’s image, includes the letters *alpha* and *omega* on either side of the figure’s head as a reference to *Revelation 22:13* where Christ says, ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.’<sup>163</sup>

The second method of identifying Christ is through the use of ‘scriptural context’—that is, the depiction of an image that corresponds exactly to an episode from Christ’s life as described in the New Testament. While the identity of a bearded image of Christ without any context might be confused for a philosopher or a deity, an image of the same figure entering Jerusalem on an ass unquestionably depicts Christ rather than Jupiter or a holy man (Figure 56). An important sub-class of scriptural context, ‘pseudo-scriptural context,’ implies that an image illustrates Christ if the scene depicts biblical characters and/or theologically important motifs that

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 34-35; S.G.F. Brandon, ‘Christ in Verbal and Depicted Imagery: A Problem of Early Christian Iconography’, in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty, Part Two—Early Christianity* (Leiden, 1975), n. 12. Compare with: Sabine MacCormack, ‘Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: The Ceremony of the *Adventus*’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 21 (1972), esp. 723-24, ns. 15-16.

are clearly identified even if the scene has no precedent in scripture. Often, artworks depicting pseudo-scriptural scenes are derived from apocrypha or oral traditions; one well-known example that we have already seen (and to which we will return) is the giving of the law to Peter and Paul, the so-called *traditio legis* (Figures 57, 58).<sup>164</sup> The central figure of the scene—who without appreciation of context could be understood as a deity, an emperor, or a philosopher—can be identified as Christ by the signifiers in the surrounding image (Peter, Paul, a halo, a book of scripture, etc.).<sup>165</sup>

The third method of identifying Christ is through ‘scriptural symbols’—that is, through symbols that refer to episodes from Christ’s life without fully documenting the episode. The major scriptural symbol for Christ is the cruciform, which is included most often either on a book or in Christ’s halo (Figures 59, 60).<sup>166</sup> While there are other symbols commonly associated with Christ—from a lamb to the *globus mundi*—none of these other attributes are exclusive to Christ; rather, each is often identified with Christ only in conjunction with another, definite scriptural symbol or through the use of the attribute in a (pseudo-)scriptural context. Thus, an image of *agnus dei* is only so-identifiable because it stands beneath a cross, has a cruciform halo, or is inserted in an apocryphal or biblical scene in the place of Christ (Figures 61, 62).

The identifications of scriptural citations, (pseudo-)scriptural context, and scriptural symbols have been used frequently in previous scholarship, albeit not under the same names.<sup>167</sup> Without these three obvious methods, however, the fourth method for identifying Christ, what

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<sup>164</sup> The scene is also sometimes called the *Dominus legem dat*.

<sup>165</sup> On the iconography of the saints, see: Janet M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum: Christian Propaganda at Rome in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, A Study in Early Christian Iconography and Iconology* (Oxford, 1982).

<sup>166</sup> On the cruciform, see: Erich Dinkler, ‘Zur Geschichte des Kreuzsymbols’, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 48 (1951), 148-72; Peter G. Moore, ‘Cross and Crucifixion in Christian Iconography’, *Religion* 4 (1974), 105-15; Paul C. Finney, ‘Cross’, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 303-5.

<sup>167</sup> For an example of scriptural context, see: Herbert Kessler, ‘Pictures as Scripture in Fifth-Century Churches’, in Ahigenbou Kimura, Shuji Takashina, Sahoko Tsuji, Hidemichi Tanaka, Takashi Koezuka, and Shigebumi Tsuji (eds.), *Studia Artium Orientalis et Occidentalis, Volume 2, Fascicle 1: Expansion of Narrative Illustrations* (Tokyo, 1985), 17-31. For an example of scriptural symbols, see: Weitzmann, *The Icons*, 26-27.

we will call ‘interpretive juxtaposition,’ would not be possible.<sup>168</sup> The premise of interpretive juxtaposition is that if an image of Christ is adjacent to an image without clear signifiers but whose physical appearance is otherwise the same, then the ambiguous image plausibly could have been understood as Christ. Interpretive juxtaposition thus works through a kind of transitivity: if an image can be identified as Christ using scriptural citations, (pseudo-)scriptural context, and/or scriptural symbols, then all similar images in the area probably also could be understood as Christ.

A demonstration of interpretive juxtaposition’s application, and the complications that can arise from it, can be found on a fourth-century sarcophagus from the Basilica of Sant’Ambrogio in Milan.<sup>169</sup> The sarcophagus is meant to be ‘read’ counter-clockwise, which we can intuit from the left-to-right orientation of the figures on the sides of the sarcophagus (cf. Figure 63). The longer sides of the sarcophagus depict scenes of Christ preaching to his disciples and, most notably, one of the scenes features an image of Christ as a beardless youth (Figure 64). Christ can be identified through the scriptural symbols of twelve apostles flanking him and the inclusion of Peter and Paul immediately beside him. On one of the short sides of the sarcophagus, however, we are faced with an incongruous image. Along with stories from the

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<sup>168</sup> The method of ‘interpretive juxtaposition’ is related to André Grabar’s observation that the meaning of one figure can derive its theological importance from the other figures and symbols with which it is juxtaposed. Grabar explains that, in addition to ‘direct images that were self-sufficient’ as interpretations of theological subjects, there were ‘themes whose translation into iconographic language necessitated the juxtaposition of two or more figures or scenes.’ See especially *Christian Iconography*, 128-46 (citation from p. 128). On contextual archaeology and its implications for symbolic interpretation, see especially: Ian Hodder (ed.), *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1982); Ian Hodder, ‘The Contextual Analysis of Symbolic Meanings’, in Ian Hodder (ed.), *The Archaeology of Contextual Meanings* (Cambridge, 1987), 1-10.

<sup>169</sup> On the sarcophagus from Sant’Ambrogio, see: Raphael Garrucci, *Storia dell’arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa* (Prato, 1879), 51 f.; Marion Lawrence, ‘Columnar Sarcophagi in the Latin West’, *The Art Bulletin* 14 (1932), 158 and 173 f.; Adolf Katzenellenbogen, ‘The Sarcophagus in S. Ambrogio and St. Ambrose’, *The Art Bulletin* 29 (1947), 249-59; Giuseppe Bovini, *I sarcofagi paleocristiani: Determinazione della loro cronologia mediante l’analisi dei ritratti* (Rome, 1949), 232 ff.; Giuseppe Bovini, *Antichità cristiane di Milano* (Bologna, 1970), 237 ff.; Arne Effner, *Frühchristliche Kunst und Kultur: von den Anfängen bis zum 7. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1986), 184 f. For the most detailed overview and a comprehensive bibliography, see: Jutta Dresken-Weiland, *Repertorium der Christlich-Antiken Sarkophage, Volume 2: Italien mit einem nacht Rom und Ostia, Dalmatien, Museen der Welt* (Mainz am Rhein, 1998), pp. 56-58.

Book of Genesis, at the viewer's left we have a beardless figure in a chariot being drawn by four horses (Figure 65). At first glance seem like a fairly standard scene of Elijah's ascent—a scene we find on other sarcophagi (Figure 66).<sup>170</sup> Whether or not all viewers would have been able to read these subtle iconographical cues is an open question to which we will return in the third section, but for the moment it is of note that to a viewer who did not immediately recognize the scene as a depiction of Elijah's ascension, a number of other interpretive possibilities may have presented themselves. One viewer could have argued that the figure is clearly Christ since the scenes to its right are biblical. Another could have made the equally compelling counterargument, however, that the figure is Helios, representing the sun and the beginning of Genesis where God separates light from darkness. The use of interpretive juxtaposition, however, implies that the youth in the chariot—which shares the centrally-parted, flowing hair and smooth face with the figure clearly denoted as Christ in the preceding scene—probably would have been associated with the Christian saviour (Figures 67, 68). It may even be of note that the charioteer looks back, away from the biblical scenes to the viewer's right and towards the image of Christ with which the viewer probably was meant to associate him. The forms that this association might take were diverse, and we will return to them below. The point though is that even in a seemingly straightforward case, the iconography employed turns out to be ambiguous.

The example of the sarcophagus at Sant' Ambrogio is hardly the only case of a charioteer with an ambiguous meaning; in fact, it is not even the best-known. A more famous vault mosaic from Tomb of the Julii, a sometime non-Christian burial place that was converted around the time that Saint Peter's basilica was constructed (ca. AD 300), depicts a figure in a *quadriga* with

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<sup>170</sup> Cf. Jensen, *Face to Face*, p. 76, esp. ns. 22-23.

a striking solar iconography (Figure 69).<sup>171</sup> The mosaic charioteer is almost universally identified as Christ, an identification that rests in large part on the observation that the rays emanating from the head of the figure appear to form a cruciform, which, as discussed above, is an unquestionable scriptural symbol.<sup>172</sup> However, a closer inspection of the rays shows that there are three rays, not two, radiating from the top of the figure's head. Despite the fact that the horizontal rays to the left and right of the figure's head do appear to form the horizontal bars of a cross, it is not necessarily clear that the rays create a cruciform. It is at least as likely that the image was intended to be interpreted only as Helios who was often depicted with seven rays of light emanating from his head (Figures 3, 70).<sup>173</sup>

As with the sarcophagus from Sant' Ambrogio, however, the image of the charioteer cannot be read in isolation from its context. The Julii charioteer is flanked on one side by a scene of a fisherman and on another by a scene from the narrative of Jonah. The mosaic work of the two scenes in the adjacent lunettes is identical to the mosaic work of the vault, which implies that the three scenes were completed at about the same time and that the scenes were produced *after* the tomb was converted to a Christian burial place. Yet, while the charioteer in the vault may have been intended to carry a Christological meaning, it is not possible to designate the image definitively as 'Christ.' Of course, it is possible that most any Late Antique viewer would have identified this image as Christ instead of, say, Helios through any number of

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<sup>171</sup> On the tomb of the Julii, see especially: Othmar Perler, *Die Mosaiken der Juliergruft im Vatikan* (Freiburg, 1953); Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee and John B. Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (London, 1956). On syncretism therein, see: Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge, 2010), 229-33.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Toynbee and Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter*, 73-74 and 116-17; André Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art (200-395)* (London, 1967), 80-81.

<sup>173</sup> Franz Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (Brussels, 1899), 123; Franz J. Dölger, 'Das Sonnengleichnis in einer Weihnachtspredigt des Bischofs Zeno von Verona. Christus als wahre und ewige Sonne', *Antike und Christentum, Volume 6* (Münster, 1940), 4 ff. More recently, see: Jerzy Miziołek, 'Transfiguratio Domini in the Apse at Mount Sinai and the Symbolism of Light', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990), 42-60.

‘juxtapositions’ no longer available to us—e.g., a gold glass used for funerary feasts on the site, an oral tradition identifying the figure of Christ, a shared appearance with the now-destroyed image of Jonah (who, like Elijah, was thought to be an Old Testamental pre-figuration of Christ), etc.<sup>174</sup> Yet, in spite of the temptation to identify the charioteer as Christ, in the absence of a cruciform shape to the rays, there is no scriptural scene or symbol to identify the image so narrowly. While interpretive juxtaposition may lend a Christian meaning to the charioteer, we cannot conclude with certainty that the image would have been understood by *all viewers* as Christ.

Such an approach may seem overly restrictive and biased towards what we can know in the present and against what must certainly have been more transparent to early Christians. The near-obsession with attributing singular meanings—something that, as we saw above, has a long history within the discipline—obscures an often overlooked truism: the majority of extant images of Christ before AD 500 cannot be clearly identified; that is, most Late Antique Christian images *are ambiguous*. Certain signifiers were used to point viewers towards the intended interpretation—the symbols and juxtapositions discussed above are all that remain available to us—but the very nature of Early Christian iconography, with its reliance on the at that point still-circulating iconographies of the emperor, gods and philosophers ensures that at least some viewers, especially non-Christians, would have had great difficulty isolating a Christian meaning from an image of Christ. Even allowing for the inability to make certain identifications that may have been obvious to early Christians, the quantity of ambiguous images suggests that ambiguity

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. Bezalel Narkiss, ‘The Sign of Jonah’, *Gesta* 18 (1979), 63.

may have been part of the point or, at least, may have been difficult to avoid in creating these images.<sup>175</sup>

Iconographic ambiguity in Late Antiquity, especially among religious images, was hardly confined to Christianity. Between AD 200 and 500, a number of ‘hyphenated’ deities appear in both the literary and visual records. Sarapis is a particularly widely syncretised deity, and we find Helios-Sarapis and Jupiter-Sarapis in several places.<sup>176</sup> Saturn-Baal is preserved in at least one stele and we find syncretisation of Jupiter, Pluto, Asklepios, Helios, Mithras, and Orpheus during these centuries (Figures 71, 72, 73).<sup>177</sup> Christianity evolved in this syncretic religious culture, and it would be odd if the practice of blending the iconographies of different deities were not found in the earliest Christian art as well. As we have already seen, at least in the case of the Tomb of the Julii, there is a plausible case to be made for understanding the vault mosaic as an image of Christ-Helios. Why is it then that, Christ remains conspicuously absent from the Late Antique *mélange* of deities?

One answer to this question might be that the Church Fathers, the same ones that had quite different understandings of Christ’s image, all expressed the belief that Christianity was different from other non-Christian religions. As we saw above, and as we will see in greater detail in Chapter 3, there are good reasons to be sceptical of this position.<sup>178</sup> This is not to say that the Church Fathers did not believe what they were writing. The point instead is that the Church Fathers did not speak for all Christians, and, in all likelihood, were only representative of

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<sup>175</sup> See especially: Murray, ‘The Emergence of Christian Art’, 51-62. Ambiguity also serves an evangelical impulse by allowing potential converts to transpose their own preferences onto a particular message.

<sup>176</sup> Herbert Chayyim Youtie, ‘The Kline of Sarapis’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948), 10-11; C. Bradford Welles, ‘The Discovery of Sarapis and the Foundation of Alexandria’, *Historia* 11 (1962), 271-282.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Eric G. Turner, ‘Egyptian Cults’, *The Classical Review* 5 (1955), 97-98; John G. Griffiths, ‘Inscriptions in the Brooklyn Museum’, *The Classical Review* 26 (1976), 109-110; Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*; Ian G. Tompkins, ‘Helios Megistos’, *The Classical Review* 46 (1996), 286-287; Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 184 and figs. 135-38.

<sup>178</sup> For general arguments advocating scepticism when confronting primary sources, see especially: de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London, 1992).

a small class of co-religionists.<sup>179</sup> In this view, the Church Fathers represented a nascent perspective that became increasingly important over time. If we re-invoke the statistical approach used in the Introduction, this logic implies that we can be sure only that some image producers may have shared the views of the Church Fathers; many and perhaps most did not. Over time, however, the Church Fathers' differentiation of Christianity from non-Christian religions did take hold, and this theology was reflected in Christ's iconography. Such differentiation, however, was overlaid on a foundation of iconographic diversity deeply indebted to the syncretic origins and multiple prototypes of Christ's earliest images. What emerges over the course of our period then is an increasingly standardised methodology for signifying that an image represents Christ without any standardisation in how Christ's facial characteristics were rendered. The next chapter looks more closely at these two trends and attempts to understand what they imply about how Christ's image was understood by Late Antique viewers.

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<sup>179</sup> For a fuller discussion of the issues raised in this paragraph, see Chapter 3 below.

## Chapter II

### The Development of Christ's Image in Late Antiquity

While few would question the conclusion that the image of Christ was ambiguous in Late Antiquity,<sup>180</sup> it is worth probing the nature of this ambiguity further. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how ambiguity in Christ's image manifested itself across our period. In so doing, a new narrative for the development of Christ's image will be proposed that distinguishes between two types of ambiguity that evolved at different paces.

The starting point for this argument is the observation that the three variants of Christ's image identified in the previous chapter—the bearded, beardless, and infant types—were used continuously between AD 200 and 500. As evidence for the co-existence of these types, consider the sixth- and seventh-century wall paintings from the Monastery of Apollo in Bawit, Egypt. Each of Christ's three image types is used in at least two separate paintings from the complex<sup>181</sup>; moreover, different types are used in similar contexts. For example, one apse painting shows a bearded Christ in a golden costume, seated on a throne, and enclosed in a *mandorla* abutted by the four signs of the evangelists at (Figure 74). Christ's right hand is raised in blessing while his left hand holds an open book. An almost identical composition in another apse shows a beardless Christ above a scene probably meant to represent the ascension of the Virgin (Figure 75). In each image, the central figure can be identified as Christ by the cruciform halo behind its head, the signs of the evangelists, and the open codex that each carries.

Both wall paintings share aureoles that appear to be either opaque backdrops that frame Christ or windows onto another space not continuous with the rest of the scene. Whereas in

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Murray, 'The Emergence of Christian Art', 51 ff. For a related argument formulated somewhat differently, see: Averil Cameron, 'Art and the Early Christian Imagination', *Eastern Christian Art* 2 (2005), esp. 4 f.

<sup>181</sup> For Bawit, see especially: Jean Maspero, *Fouilles exécutées à Baouît* (Cairo, 1931); Jean Clédât, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouît* (Cairo, 1999).

other compositions that depict a *mandorla*, such as the transfiguration mosaic from the apse of the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai (Figure 76) in which the halo seems continuous with the space of the scene (notice in the Sinai mosaic that the rays of light and Christ's right foot ever so slightly extend beyond the frame of the body-halo and into the landscape populated with other figures), the abrupt truncation of the scenes within the roundels at Bawit make it appear as if Christ exists on a different plane (notice especially the cropped thrones at the bottom of the circular enclosure). The iconography has parallels to the *imago clipeata* (Figure 77), the shield-portrait that we saw in the previous chapter and which was associated with the emperor.

The clipeate iconography recurs again and again throughout the Bawit monastery. In one example, a bearded Christ is shown with a jewelled cruciform halo and within a polychrome tondo being held aloft by two angels (Figure 78), while in another an infant Christ is shown in purple and gold imperial garb, with a cruciform halo, and with the lettering 'IC' and 'XC' flanking his head to his left and right respectively (Figure 79). The infant Christ holds a scroll in his left hand, perhaps signifying philosophical virtue or complementing his imperial attire as a possible allusion to the emperor's *mappa circensis*. The oval in front of which Christ's image appears is being held by the Virgin Mary, a juxtaposition that suggests that the image, whether seen as a meditation on imperial power or philosophical prowess, was at its core a *religious* image showing the Son of God.

Though the frescos from Bawit post-date the period on which this dissertation focuses, the co-existence of the different images of Christ demonstrates that, at least iconographically, the image of Christ was not standardised over the course of Late Antiquity. In fact, the diversity of Christ's image types continued to increase even after our period; in Early Byzantium two different variants of Christ's image—the so-called Ancient of Days and Syro-Palestinian types

(Figures 80, 81)—first appear in the archaeological record.<sup>182</sup> Although a full discussion of these images extends beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note that both Early Byzantine additions, where they appear, probably depict Christ.<sup>183</sup> The Ancient of Days, the Syro-Palestinian type, and any other image of Christ can be identified through the inclusion of the signifiers and juxtapositions introduced in the previous chapter. How the use of these signifiers developed over the course of Late Antiquity and replaced the ambiguous syncretism that, as we saw above, typified the earliest Christian art is the subject of this chapter.

More specifically, this chapter attempts to resolve the counterintuitive implication of the observations that over the course of Late Antiquity images of Christ became easier to identify despite an increase in the iconographic diversity. How is it that, on the one hand, we seem to have evidence for increasing ambiguity materialised by divergent depictions of Christ, while on the other the broader use of scriptural citations, symbols, and context seems to indicate decreasing ambiguity? It stands to reason that the amount of ambiguity in Christ's images would fluctuate over time, but how could ambiguity both increase and decrease at the same time?

The answer, it would appear, is that at least among Late Antique images of Christ there were two different forms of ambiguity. The first, which we will call 'ontological ambiguity,' concerns ambiguity over the concept of 'Christ.' The ontology of Christ corresponds closely to Christology, and, despite the terminological shift, it is this subject that historically has most

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<sup>182</sup> On the Ancient of Days see: Weitzmann, *The Icons*, 41-42; Kathleen Corrigan, 'Visualizing the Divine: An Early Byzantine Icon of the "Ancient of Days" at Mt. Sinai', in Sharon E.J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson (eds.), *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai* (Turnhout, 2011), 285 ff. On the Syro-Palestinian type, see especially: Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*. For more summary treatments, see also: Gilbert Dagron, *Décrire et Peindre: Essai sur le Portrait Iconique* (Paris, 2007), 184-189; Nicole Thierry, 'Sur un Double Visage Byzantin du Christ du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle au VIII<sup>e</sup>', in Giuseppe Bovini (ed.), *Studi in Memoria di Giuseppe Bovini: Volume 2* (Ravenna, 1989), 639-657. The Syro-Palestinian image appears earlier than the Ancient of Days, but even the earliest appearance—a fresco from Abu Girgeh—is normally dated to the early sixth century and thus after the period focused upon here.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. André Grabar, *L'Iconoclasme Byzantin: Dossier Archéologique* (Paris, 1957), 36 ff.; Weitzmann, *The Icons*, 26-27; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 134-39.

dominated discussions of Christ's image. The second form of ambiguity, which we will call 'epistemological ambiguity,' concerns ambiguity over how Christ was understood by individuals.<sup>184</sup> In other words, while any number of people may agree with a certain ontological position—say that Christ has two natures, one human and one divine—the methods of expressing that ontology in art (or otherwise) could vary within that same group. The continuation of existing typologies and the creation of new ones in Early Byzantium suggest that epistemological ambiguity increased over the course of Late Antiquity as the individual interpretations of the concept 'Christ' continued to evolve; but the proliferation of signifiers that facilitated the identification of images as 'Christ,' however divergent in appearance, suggests that the concept of 'Christ' also became more clearly defined. As we saw at the close of the last chapter, the image of Christ and its substantial iconographic overlap with non-Christian 'prototypes' is entirely consistent with a broader, empire-wide culture of syncretism—recall that the vault mosaic in the tomb of the Julii could have been understood as an image of Christ-Helios just as readily as it could have been seen as an image of Christ in the guise of Helios. As odd as it may sound, over the three centuries investigated here the concept of Christ, at least as materialised in his iconography, becomes more explicitly 'Christian.'

The difference here is a subtle but important one. The attributes that Christ shared with his prototypes—imperial, religious, or philosophical—were not erased by AD 500, but none of these proved to be Christ's *defining* attribute. Christ's identifying characteristics by the end of Late Antiquity were the scriptural citations, scriptural context, and/or scriptural symbols used to unify an otherwise very diverse corpus of images. Christ retained the powers and virtues conferred on him by the iconography of whatever guise he assumed, but it was Christ's

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<sup>184</sup> The two forms of nebulosity do not exist in isolation from one another; ontological ambiguity is the substrate for epistemological ambiguity, and epistemological ambiguity can further muddy the waters around any ontology.

*scriptural* significance which emerged as paramount. Christ was the Christian Saviour first and some combination of a philosopher, emperor, and syncretised Roman deity second.

What differentiated Christ from his prototypes was his unique theological significance as the Word of God, the *Logos*, made flesh. As the debates of the Church Fathers underscore, the central theological argument concerning Christ in Late Antiquity was over how Christ's dual nature should be defined.<sup>185</sup> The eventual 'orthodox' position was but one of many discrepant Christianities, a number of which had varying views on whether Christ had two natures and, if he did, how they were reconciled. Over the course of Late Antiquity, however, the theological consensus that emerged over Christ's nature was that Christ was both human and divine, and he was made Incarnate in order to suffer and redeem mankind for its sins. While the 'orthodox' position was never and never will be wholly uncontested, the majority of Christians came to hold this conception of Christ.

At its core then, the *concept* of Christ came to be defined by his sacrifice and his salvation of mankind. The residue of this soteriology finds its way into Christian art through several routes,<sup>186</sup> and the remainder of this chapter will trace the movement from a syncretic to an orthodox conception of Christ. The iconographic trend explored here was not a smooth, gradual change; it proceeded in fits and starts and, throughout the period in question, ontologically ambiguous images are impossible to avoid. Nevertheless, the proportion of these ontologically ambiguous images diminishes over time. The budding agreement on what the concept of 'Christ' meant brought with it the concomitant formalisation of a visual 'language' of

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. John N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, 1978[1960]), esp. 138 ff.; Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Wilmington, 1987); Richard Lim, 'Christian Triumph and Controversy', in Glen W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, 2000[1999]), 196 ff.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Mary Charles Murray, 'Artistic idiom and doctrinal development', in Rowan Williams (ed.), *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge, 2002[1989]), 288 ff.

signifiers that could identify an image as Christ. That is, as the ‘definition’ of ‘Christ’ became more standardised the components of the definition—i.e., the ‘rules’ for how to depict Christ—became more standardised as well.

One effect of this emerging iconographic consensus was that any image, however discrepant, could be identified as Christ. The standardisation of signifiers may have provided the basis for the elaboration of Christ types, or, put in the terms above, decreasing ontological ambiguity may have actually increased epistemological ambiguity. For example, one could argue that the discrepant images of the Ancient of Days and the Syro-Palestinian types were able to be introduced because an ‘ontological’ consensus had emerged on what ‘Christ’ meant, and this consensus materialised itself in signifiers such as the cross. Put plainly, if, as this chapter will demonstrate, signs like the cross eventually became unambiguous signifiers for Christ, then the inclusion of a cross in, say, a halo would provide a way to identify any image, from an old man to a middle-aged Semitic one, as Christ. Whereas the increasing standardisation of signifiers establishes Christ’s unique theological importance, the increasing diversity of image types is a testament to the desire to understand his significance in novel ways.<sup>187</sup>

The remainder of the chapter proceeds in three sections, one dedicated to each of the Late Antique variants of Christ’s image. Each section will demonstrate both the increased use of Christological signifiers and the unabated use of multiple depictions over the course of our period. Although a rough trajectory will be sketched, the lack of secure dates for much of the material culture from this period as well as the difficulty of any comprehensive treatment of the subject (if only because of the incredible ambiguity among the earliest extant examples discussed in the Introduction) means that what follows can only provide a schematic overview.

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<sup>187</sup> On the Ancient of Days in particular see: Corrigan, ‘Visualizing the Divine’, 285 ff. On theophanies more generally, see: Angela Russell Christman, “*What Did Ezekiel See?*” *Christian Exegesis of Ezekiel’s Vision of the Chariot from Irenaeus to Gregory the Great* (Leiden, 2005), esp. 63 ff.

Nonetheless, the trend that clearly emerges is one in which a consistent iconography associated with Christ's theological significance develops alongside continued diversity in Christ's image types.

### **I. Christ's Bearded Image**

Exactly where and when the first bearded image of Christ emerged remains an open question, but the standard story holds that the bearded image appeared only around the time that Constantine legalised Christianity.<sup>188</sup> Although the bearded image sometimes appears reminiscent of imperial iconography—a wall painting from the Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus provides perhaps the earliest such example (Figure 82)—if the bearded iconography did develop under Constantine, then it is clear that the beardless emperor was not the model for Christ's facial type (Figure 83). To this end, some scholars have suggested that Jupiter's facial features served as the prototypes for Christ's bearded image,<sup>189</sup> an argument that derives support from what some consider the earliest extant example of the type: the so-called 'polychrome plaques' that show Christ performing miracles (Figure 84).<sup>190</sup>

If not for the scriptural context of the scenes—the central scene shows Christ multiplying the loaves and the flanking scenes show an identical figure performing other of Christ's acts—one could be forgiven for thinking the images depict Jupiter himself. In the central image, a muscled figure, clothed only in a toga, bares his upper abdomen and chest. Curly, centrally-parted hair falls to the figure's shoulders where similarly curly facial hair branches out to cover the figure's face with a beard and a moustache. The similitude to contemporaneous images of

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<sup>188</sup> Cf. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 109.

<sup>189</sup> See especially: Mathews *The Clash of Gods*; Spieser, 'The Representation of Christ', 63-73.

<sup>190</sup> On the 'polychrome plaques', see: Gerke, *Die Christlichen Sarkophage*, 207 f.; Reiner Sörries and Ulrike Lange, 'Die polychromen Fragmente im Thermenmuseum zu Rom', *Antike Welt* 17 (1986), 3 ff..

Jupiter is uncanny (cf. Figure 85). Indeed, this iconography for Jupiter is retained well into the sixth century, a fact attested to by leaves preserved from several illuminated manuscripts (cf. Figure 86). A closer look at the polychrome plaques, however, turns up problems with the identification of Jupiter as the prototype for Christ's image. Although Christ's facial features appear to be more or less the same in each of the scriptural scenes, only two of the scenes show a bare-chested Christ whose iconography explicitly parallels Jupiter's. In the other two scenes, which show the healing of the paralytic (at the viewer's far right) and the healing of the woman with an issue of blood (at the far left just before the breakage), Christ is shown wearing a *tunica* under his toga. What, if anything, might the change of Christ's costume signify?

The key to answering this question may be the *rotulus* (i.e., scroll) that Christ holds in his left hand while healing the woman with the issue of blood. The scroll, a symbol of learning, was associated with philosophers and philosophical virtues. Moreover, as we discussed briefly in the previous chapter, the Late Antique notion of the 'holy man' intertwined the philosopher and the miraculous healer into a single concept. Christ may not have actually held a scroll while performing the miracle in question, but the inclusion of the *rotulus* provided an iconographic marker of Christ's intellect as well as his miraculous healing abilities. Perhaps the *rotulus* in this context was even an allusion to the wand, a topic to which we will return below. Although the image of Christ healing the paralytic does not feature a scroll, by the process of interpretive juxtaposition (facilitated by the use of the *tunica*), the point would not have been lost on the viewer: Christ was as much a holy man as he was a deity. This reading not only exemplifies the overlap of the different conceptions of Christ; it also underscores how early Christian iconography attempted to reconcile its non-Christian iconographical precedents with Christian

theology. The use of two different iconographies that proclaim Christ as both a god and a man provided signifiers that could guide the viewer to an understanding of Christ's dual nature.

It is worth pausing to note that while the consensus among scholars that subscribe to the 'religious theory' (described in the previous chapter) is that Christ's bearded image derives from Jupiter's iconography, the polychrome plaques have been discussed by Erich Dinkler as evidence that Christ borrows his facial features from Asklepios, the god of healing and medicine.<sup>191</sup>

Dinkler's argument is compelling for several reasons, not least that some of the scenes on the polychrome plaques show Christ healing. A painting from the catacombs under Via Latina depicts a philosopher/medical teacher with the same bare chest leading a dissection, which is an indication that the iconography that we initially associated with Jupiter was more adaptable (Figure 87).<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, Asklepios in particular was associated with holy men,<sup>193</sup> an association that we have already seen applied to Christ as well.

Despite the affinities between Christ and Asklepios, the iconography of the latter is not *more* similar to Christ's than Jupiter's, and in the syncretic centuries on which we are focusing, the idea that Christ's prototype was either Jupiter or Asklepios is probably misguided.<sup>194</sup> After all, why could an image of Christ be at once interpreted as a deity and a philosopher but not at the same time as an allusion to Jupiter's supreme power and Asklepios' healing ability? Jupiter may not have been associated with medicine, but Asklepios was not omnipotent; these power

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<sup>191</sup> Erich Dinkler, *Christus und Asklepios* (Heidelberg, 1980), 3 ff.

<sup>192</sup> On the Via Latina catacomb, see: Antonio Ferrua, *Le pitture della nuova catacomb di Via Latina* (Vatican City, 1960); Pierre Boyancé, 'Artistole sur une peinture de la Via Latina', in Eugène Tisserant (ed.), *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant, Volume 4* (Vatican City, 1964), 107-24.

<sup>193</sup> For an excellent and recent treatment, see: Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, *Truly Beyond Wonders: Aelius Aristides and the Cult of Asklepios* (Oxford, 2009), esp. 132 f. See also: Michael B. Walbank, 'The Family of Philagros Erchieus and the Cult of Asklepios at Athens', *American Journal of Ancient History* 4 (1979), 186 ff. On Christ as a healer, see also: Rudolph Abersmann, 'The Concept of "Christus Medicus" in St. Augustine', *Traditio* 10 (1954), 1-28.

<sup>194</sup> Admittedly, the perceived relationships between an image and some prototype would have varied across geography. An image that signified 'Jupiter' in Rome may have signified 'Sarapis' in Egypt or 'Asklepios' in Asia Minor. The underlying point, however, is the same: The 'meaning' of an object was not fixed and varied from individual to individual.

relations were made clear in the mythology around the interaction of the two gods. According to the first century BC philosopher Philodemus, Jupiter killed Asklepios for his resurrection of Hippolytus. Whatever the origins of the bearded iconography on the polychrome plaques, the key point for us is that the imagery, however muddled, was clearly identifiable as Christ because of the scriptural scenes in which the otherwise ambiguous figure is embedded. Said differently, the identification of an image as Christ was determined by Christ-specific signifiers of which the beard was not one.

To illustrate this point, consider the central scene of a strigillated sarcophagus from Sant' Agnese Fuori le Mura (Figure 88).<sup>195</sup> A bearded figure with long, centrally-parted hair is shown with an open book making a gesture with his right hand that would later become associated with benediction. Although some scholars identify the image as a carving of Christ,<sup>196</sup> there is no clear marker that the image should be so-interpreted. The open book lacks the biblical verse that later codices will feature (cf. Figure 89) and the figure lacks any other scriptural citation or symbol. The setting of the scene only adds to the ambiguity since the figure, cloaked in a toga and flanked by a *calpus* (i.e., a chest of scrolls), clearly employs iconographical formulae used in depictions of philosophers even while the curtains that bound the space find parallels in depictions of the emperor, such as the roughly contemporaneous illustrations of Constantine II from the Codex of 354 (Figure 90). Even the figure's hand gesture finds iconographical parallels among imperial images (cf. Figure 91). Layered on top of the philosophical and imperial connotations of the iconography is another strange feature: the figure's beard seems to separate into at least three forks.

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<sup>195</sup> On the sarcophagus from Sant' Agnese Fuori le Mura, see: Wilpert, *I sarcofagi*, 57; Deichman, *Repertorium*, Volume 1, 303; Dinkler, *Christus und Asklepios*, 36.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, 303-4.

The iconography of a forked beard is not unique to this strigillated sarcophagus. An *opus sectile* mosaic from the Roman port town of Ostia shows a figure, usually presumed to be Christ, with a halo, a *toga praetexta*—identifiable by the purple stripe running down the figure’s right shoulder—and a hand gesture quite like the one from the Sant’Agnese Fuori le Mura sarcophagus (Figure 92).<sup>197</sup> Again, if we are as rigorous as we ought to be, there is nothing here that definitively signals the image to be Christ. The halo, while largely a Christian motif, was not exclusive to Christian art (cf. Figures 93, 94).<sup>198</sup> As was the case on the strigillated sarcophagus,<sup>199</sup> the absence of any scriptural symbol on the mosaic leaves us without a definitive signal that the figure in the mosaic should be understood as an illustration of Christ. All we can say with certainty is that the figure wears a toga that signifies a certain status as either a priest or magistrate and that the figure sports a forked beard.

The forked beard shared by the sarcophagus and mosaic maps most closely onto the iconography of Sarapis, the Egypto-Roman deity sometimes syncretised with Jupiter and other times identified in place of Jupiter as the supreme deity of the Roman pantheon (cf. Figure 72). Sarapis’ pre-eminence was greatest during the Severan dynasty, a fact captured by portrait busts commissioned by Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla that showed them ‘in the guise of Sarapis,’ sporting forked beards (of two to four points), centrally-parted hair, and, just as frequently, forelocks (cf. Figures 36, 37).<sup>200</sup> Of course, in the same way that the polychrome

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<sup>197</sup> On the Ostian mosaic, see especially: Giovanni Becatti, *Scavi di Ostia 6: Edificio con opus sectile Fuori Porta Marina* (Rome, 1969). See also: Alfred Frazer, ‘A Critical Review’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 75 (1971), 319 ff.

<sup>198</sup> On the nimbus, see: Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements, Volume 1* (Princeton, 1947), 289; Kurt Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art* (Princeton, 1951), 46-68.

<sup>199</sup> The detail on which we are focusing is part of a larger composition that features good shepherds as well as orant figures. Although these images have Christological significance in certain contexts, there is not enough unambiguous iconography to allow us to say with certainty that our sarcophagus is necessarily Christian.

<sup>200</sup> On the ‘Sarapis type’ of Severus’ portrait, see especially: McCann, *The Portraits of Septimius Severus*, 109 ff. However, see: Dora Baharal, ‘Portraits of Emperor L. Septimius Severus (193-211 A.D.) as an Expression of His Propaganda’, *Latomus* 48 (1989), 566 ff.

plaques may have conflated Asklepios, Jupiter, and Christ, it is possible that the *opus sectile* mosaic from Ostia and the strigillated sarcophagus from Sant' Agnese may have melded, intentionally or not, elements of philosopher portraits with attributes of Christ and Sarapis. The *Historia Augusta* records an instance of such Christian-Sarapean syncretism:

Those who worship Sarapis are, in fact, Christians, and those who call themselves bishops of Christ are, in fact, devotees of Sarapis. There is no chief of the Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian presbyter, who is not an astrologer, a soothsayer, or an anointer. Even the Patriarch himself, when he comes to Egypt, is forced by some to worship Sarapis, by others to worship Christ.<sup>201</sup>

The point here is not to argue that the image of Christ is derived from a Sarapean iconography *per se*, but it is to suggest that the story is sufficiently more complicated than the standard narrative given for the emergence of the bearded image. Perhaps no source better encapsulates this complexity than Tacitus who writes the following, also of Sarapis:

Many identify the god himself with Aesculapius, because he heals the sick; some with Osiris, a very ancient divinity of those peoples; many again identify him with Jupiter, for his power over all things; but most identify him with Dispater, from the emblems that are manifest in him, or through arcane reasoning.<sup>202</sup>

How then are we to interpret the sarcophagus from Sant' Agnese and the mosaic from Ostia? If Tacitus is to be believed, the image could have been seen as Christ, Sarapis, any one of the associated deities, or *some combination* of many deities. The primary sources, textual and visual, thus speak to a certain level ontological ambiguity in the depiction of Christ's bearded image that persisted at least throughout the fourth century. Although Christ's salvific significance was communicated through these early examples (Sarapis, after all, was associated with death and rebirth), the mechanism through which this soteriology was articulated remained

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<sup>201</sup> 'The Lives of Firmus, Saturninus, Proculus and Bonosos', VIII.2-4, in Anthony Birley (ed.), *Lives of the Later Caesars with Newly Compiled Lives of Nerva and Trajan* (Baltimore, 1976), 400-1.

<sup>202</sup> Tacitus, *Historia Augusta*, IV.84.5, cited in Clifford Ando, 'Interpretatio Romana', *Classical Philology*, 100 (2005), 45.

ambiguous. One class of bearded image, however, proved more adept at dealing with this ambiguity, and this iconographic sub-group, which concerned itself with Christ's victory over death and was materialised by the cross on which Christ was crucified, would at once provide an articulation of Christianity's central mystery and an unambiguous signifier that an image depicted Christ.

A 3<sup>rd</sup> century magical amulet probably from modern-day Syria provides an early and especially relevant example of the development of this iconography (Figure 95). The engraved bloodstone shows Christ—who can be identified from the inscription, which refers to the figure as, 'Father, Son, Jesus Christ' as well as 'Emmanuel'—crucified on the cross. Though the amulet unmistakably depicts Christ, the other inscriptions on the surface of the stone include a number of 'magical' names, which indicates that the earliest extant example of the crucifixion scene derives from the same syncretic cultural matrix as the other bearded images of Christ discussed above.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, the amulet relates nicely to the polychrome plaques since the hematite on which the crucifixion was engraved has a red grain (analogised in antiquity to blood) that was associated with ritual healing and thus was a particularly popular medium for magical amulets.<sup>204</sup> In this respect, the amulet provides another interesting interface between early conceptions of Christ, Asklepios, and holy men.

Although our amulet is not mentioned in most discussions of early Christian imagery, it should not be surprising that crucifixion scenes appeared relatively early in the history of

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<sup>203</sup> Cf. Philippe Derchain, 'Die älteste Darstellung des Gekreuzigten auf einer magischen Gemme des 3.(?) Jahrhunderts', in Klaus Wessel (ed.), *Christentum am Nil* (Recklinghausen, 1964), 109 ff.; Simone Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum* (London, 2001), 283-84. On the use of magic among early Christians, see especially: David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (Tübingen, 2006). On early Christian gems, see especially: Jeffrey Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems* (Wiesbaden, 2007).

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Gary Vikan, *Sacred Images and Power in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2003), 140.

Christian art.<sup>205</sup> Whether seen as another syncretic composite or, more likely, as a visual invective against Christianity, the roughly contemporaneous Alexamenos graffito, which shows a man with the head of an ass crucified on a cross accompanied by the inscription: ‘Alexamenos, worship[s] God,’ demonstrates the centrality of the crucifixion to the Christian religion (Figure 96).<sup>206</sup> This centrality is also reflected in early appearances of the cross, usually blended with an anchor or the chi-rho monogram (cf. Figure 97).<sup>207</sup>

The fusion of the chi-rho and the cross is in fact central to the story of the development of Christ’s iconography, bearded and otherwise, between AD 200 and 500. While our amulet demonstrates that the idea of the crucifixion was a part of the Christian iconographic repertory from a fairly early date, the crucifixion nevertheless posed the problem of depicting Christ’s death. Of course Christ’s human corpus died—how else could he overcome death and rise three days later?—but Christ the Son of God never died, which made the crucifixion a difficult subject to illustrate. Although there were ways to circumnavigate this problem (e.g., leaving Christ’s eyes open as was done on the amulet), the hybridisation of the cross and the chi-rho, which was associated with Constantine’s labarum and thus with victory,<sup>208</sup> created a composite that

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<sup>205</sup> The crucifixion is normally thought to appear later in the history of Christian art. As Ernest J. Tinsely puts it, there is ‘...no gainsaying the fact that until a surprisingly late date the death of Christ was not taken in mainstream Christian tradition to be the kind of death that human beings normally endure. Not only the way he was born but also the way he died was miraculous.’ Excerpted from: ‘The Coming of a Dead and Naked Christ’, *Religion* 2 (1972), 26.

<sup>206</sup> On Alexamenos graffito, see especially: Heikki Solin and Marja Itkonenkailla, *Graffiti del Palatine, I: Paedagogium* (Helsinki, 1966), 209-12. For the earliest treatment, see: Raffaele Garrucci, *Un crocifisso graffito da mano pagana nella casa dei Cesari sul Palatino* (Rome 1857).

<sup>207</sup> On the symbol of the anchor, see especially: Charles A. Kennedy, ‘Early Christians and the Anchor’, *The Biblical Archaeologist* 38 (1975), 115 ff.; Marco Bonino, ‘Barche, navi e simboli navali nel cimitero di Priscilla’, *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 59 (1983), 277 ff.; Paul C. Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (Oxford, 1994), 235-40.

<sup>208</sup> On labarum and chi-rho, see: Angelo Lipinsky, ‘Labarum’, in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie, Volume 3* (Rome, 1970), 1 f.; Dorottya Gaspar, ‘When Has the Chi-Rho Become a Christian Symbol?’, in Javier Arce and Fabienne Burkhalter (eds.), *Bronces y Religión Romana: Actas del XI Congreso Internacional de Bronces Antiguos. Madrid, Mayo-Junio 1990* (Madrid, 1993), 207 f.; Alan Dearn, ‘The Coinage of Vetraino: Imperial Representation and the Memory of Constantine the Great’, *Numismatic Chronicle* 163 (2003), 169 ff.

signified ‘triumph’ over death. It follows then that the blended chi-rho-cross became an alternative method for illustrating Christ’s role as Saviour.

The development from the chi-rho to the cross was a gradual one with a well-known intermediate step that featured a cross with the loop of the rho at the top of the vertical arm (the so-called *staurogram*; Figure 98). As if to further emphasise Christ’s triumph over death, the chi-rho and cross are at times flanked by an *alpha* and an *omega*, which, as the previous chapter noted, alludes to verses from the Book of Revelation. Apart from the fact that the source of the scriptural citation is a book concerned with the apocalypse (and thus with Christ’s redemptive power), the actual verses referred to, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,’ could also be interpreted as an expression of Christ’s eternal existence and thus his conquest of death.<sup>209</sup>

The Greek letters, of course, were not confined to images of either the chi-rho or the cross and sometimes flank Christ’s image without other symbols. The earliest extant example, which we saw in the previous chapter, is the vault painting of Christ from the Cubiculum Leonis in the Catacomb of Commodilla, but other examples such as the wall painting from the Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus exist as well (Figure 16). It is unclear why the *alpha* and *omega* proved an insufficient identifier for Christ, but by the end of Late Antiquity, even where the letters flanked a bearded image of Christ, there was also a chi-rho, cross, or both in either the figure’s halo or, as in the particularly stunning example from ca. AD 500 now in the Christian Schmidt collection (Figure 99),<sup>210</sup> as appendages to processional crosses with figural decoration.

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<sup>209</sup> Cf. John Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek, ‘Apocalyptic Themes in the Monumental and Minor Art of Early Christianity’, in Robert J. Daly (ed.), *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, 2009), 35-36.

<sup>210</sup> On the cross from the Schmidt collection, see: Galit Noga-Banai, ‘Workshops with Style: Minor Art in the Making’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 97 (2004), 536-39.

The point of this brief digression on the development of the iconography of the cross is that the image of the cruciform developed the same soteriological significance as images of Christ's crucifixion. While we find an occasional crucifixion scene that post-dates our amulet—the fifth century wood-carved doors from Santa Sabina in Rome provide another bearded example (Figure 23)—the crucifixion proved a less compelling method of depicting Christ's salvific importance than the use of the cross.<sup>211</sup> The cross, after all, could be used in any setting to not only identify a figure as Christ but also proclaim a certain theological point; a crucifixion scene, by contrast, provided much less flexibility.

The adoption of imagery that situated Christ 'in heaven' (so to speak) provided yet another strategy that was used to articulate Christ's transcendence of death. One intriguing example of this iconography is preserved in the leftmost scene of the upper register of the so-called 'Dogmatic' sarcophagus, a meticulously carved fourth-century marble coffin now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Figure 100).<sup>212</sup> The scene in question shows the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, but, in what seems to be a novel example among extant sarcophagi, the scene appears to show the Trinity overseeing the creation. Each of the three figures—one enthroned, another cupping Eve's head, and the other truncated by the first's throne—look virtually identical. In an odd twist, while one of these three bearded figures must be Christ, in a Trinitarian reading of the scenes on the sarcophagus that depict Christ's acts show him without a beard. This sarcophagus, it would appear, seems to suggest that Christ's bearded image was

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<sup>211</sup> On the crucifixion scene of the Santa Sabina doors, see especially: Allyson Everingham Scheckler and Mary Joan Wynn Leith, 'The Crucifixion Conundrum and the Santa Sabina Doors', *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010), 67 f.

<sup>212</sup> See especially: Robin Margaret Jensen, 'The Economy of the Trinity and the Creation of Adam and Eve', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999), 527 ff.

meant to be associated with his ‘heavenly’ nature whereas his beardless image is meant to be associated with his ‘human’ nature.<sup>213</sup>

The Dogmatic Sarcophagus is not the only instance in which the bearded and beardless images of occupy the same space. A number of spaces contain juxtaposed images of Christ’s bearded and beardless types, including the Cubiculum Leonis from the Catacomb of Commodilla.<sup>214</sup> Beneath the bearded image in the room’s vault, an arcosolium shows a beardless Christ standing between the Roman saints Felix and Adauctus (Figure 101). Likewise, mosaics from the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore show both bearded and beardless images of Christ hovering above ladders of clouds (cf. Figure 102), and mosaics from Santa Costanza in Rome show bearded and beardless images of Christ above orbs (Figures 25, 26).<sup>215</sup>

The motif of Christ above an orb, an emblem associated with power over the heavens in non-Christian iconography,<sup>216</sup> may have been another device capable of conveying Christ’s divinity. In addition to the scene from Santa Costanza, another mosaic from the baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte in Naples shows a bearded Christ at rest above an orb (Figure 58).<sup>217</sup> Although in the former Christ is seated and in the latter he is standing, the two share a number of attributes, including: (1) ornate togas (purple in Santa Costanza and gold in San Giovanni), (2) scrolls in their left hands (wound and unwound respectively), and (3) the depiction of pseudo-

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<sup>213</sup> The Arian/quasi-Nestorian idea that the beardless and bearded images of Christ were associated with different natures has a long history in the scholarship concerning mosaics from Ravenna. For a good summary of the various arguments, see: Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2010), esp. 156-57.

<sup>214</sup> On the Cubiculum Leonis, see especially: Johannes G. Deckers, Hans R. Seeliger, and Gabriele Mietke, *Die Katakomben ‘Commodilla’: Repertorium der Malereien, Volume 1* (Vatican City, 1994), 89-104.

<sup>215</sup> On Santa Costanza, see especially: Henri Stern, ‘Les mosaïques de Sainte-Constance a Rome’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958), 160-218; Adele A. Amadio, *I mosaici di S. Costanza. Disegni, incisioni e documenti dal XV al XIX secolo* (Rome, 1986); David J. Stanley, ‘New Discoveries at Santa Costanza’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994), 257-261. A beardless Christ is also included in a scene illustrating the story of Joshua from the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore.

<sup>216</sup> For the best overview of the so-called *orbis terrarum* (lit. ‘orb of the world’), see: Hans Peter Laubscher, *Der Reliefschmuck des Galeriusbogen in Thessalonike* (Berlin, 1975), 75 f.

<sup>217</sup> On San Giovanni in Fonte, see: Jean Louis Maier, *Le baptistère de Naples et ses mosaïques: Étude historique et iconographique* (Freiburg, 1964), esp. 78 ff.

scriptural scenes (the *traditio clavium* and the *traditio legis*). In other words, despite their differences, both images employ certain iconographical and compositional formulae to claim Christ's divinity while at the same time depicting investitures of power resultant from his human relationships.

It is overly simplistic to imagine that the different iconographic attempts to depict Christ's salvific importance were reconciled into some grand synthesis. It is equally reductive to imagine there was some 'evolution' by which 'better' or 'more effective' methods for identifying Christ and his theological significance 'won out.' However, by the end of the AD 200 to 500 period considered here, a look at some of the most visible Christian artworks, apse mosaics, suggests that a degree of consensus had been reached on how to depict Christ to emphasise his salvific function while maintaining the possibility for viewers to interpret the image in a number of different ways.

Perhaps the most famous Late Antique apse mosaic comes from Santa Pudenziana in Rome (Figure 103).<sup>218</sup> The original mosaic, dated to ca. AD 400, was heavily restored in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There are good reasons to suspect that, however the object has been modified stylistically, the iconography remains true to the original.<sup>219</sup> The scene shows a central and frontal Christ in a resplendent golden toga. Sporting a halo and seated on a massive high-backed and jewelled throne, Christ holds an open codex in his left hand with text that reads 'Lord and preserver of the church of Pudenziana.' Christ's right hand is extended towards Paul who, along with other apostles, flanks Christ to his right while Peter and another entourage of apostles flank

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<sup>218</sup> On Santa Pudenziana, see: Antonio Petrucci, *La Basilica di S. Pudenziana in Roma secondo gli scavi recentemente eseguiti* (Rome, 1934), 227 ff.; Otto Feld, 'Das Apsismosaik in S. Pudenziana als Bild der Gemeinschaft mit Christus', in Bernhard Casper and Josef Müller (eds.), *Gemeinsam Kirche sein: Theorie und Praxis der Communio* (Freiburg, 1992), 253 ff.; Frederic W. Schlatter, 'Interpreting the Mosaic of Santa Pudenziana', *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992), 276 f.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Frederic W. Schlatter, 'The Text in the Mosaic of Santa Pudenziana', *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989), 155-56.

Christ to his left. Both Peter and Paul receive wreaths placed on their heads by veiled women and gesture towards Christ who is set before a cityscape of what is presumably Jerusalem. We can identify the city shown since, directly above Christ, a large, golden, bejewelled cross rests on a multi-coloured mound; the cross, it would seem, is a reference to the monument commissioned by Constantine's mother, Helena, for the site where Christ was thought to be crucified on Golgotha. Rolling clouds of intense colours rise above the city and encircle images of the four beasts of the apocalypse.

The iconography of the clouds and floating images within them scripturally recalls verses from the Book of Matthew and iconographically echoes the mosaics from Santa Maria Maggiore mentioned above.<sup>220</sup> The ethereal setting communicates Christ's divinity as does the first word of the text inscribed in the open book, '*Dominus.*' Yet, Christ's humanity is also encoded by the large cross that emerges directly above his head. Indeed, the cross seems to act as a sort of *axis mundi* connecting Christ and the congregation he represents as lord of the church of Pudenziana with the heavenly realm in which the four beasts of the apocalypse hover. In this reading, Christ is the Redeemer and bringer of salvation. Whatever his beard may have once communicated, the apse of Santa Pudenziana overwhelms the viewer with references to salvation—of Christ through crucifixion and resurrection, of the apostles some of whom are crowned, and of the congregation who is directly invoked in the text of Christ's codex.

It has been tempting to see the apse mosaic from Santa Pudenziana as an important step in the development of what would come to be known as the figure of Christ *Pantokrator* (lit. 'Ruler of All').<sup>221</sup> Later images, especially in Byzantium, look like facsimiles of the Pudenziana

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<sup>220</sup> 'And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory' (Matthew 24:30).

<sup>221</sup> For a typical discussion, see: Charles Rufus Morey, 'The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 3 (1944), 202-3.

figure Christ from the waist up (with the exception that Christ's codex is closed in the standard *Pantokrator* image). Towards the end of our period, examples like a relief from Saint Polyeuktos in Constantinople and a painting from the Pontian Catacomb in Rome show some formalisation of this iconography (Figures 104, 105),<sup>222</sup> but the development of one class of images did not eliminate the development of other image types.

Indeed, in spite of the almost crystal-clear Christology of the Santa Pudenziana apse mosaic, there was still ambiguity in how Christ is meant to be understood *other* than as a saviour. After all, Christ could have been shown as a naked infant and, in this setting, most viewers would have still understood the theological message of the apse. What other claims are being made of Christ? The sheer majesty of the scene, with Christ's golden toga and ornate throne would seem to suggest the possibility that Christ could be seen as an emperor of sorts surrounded by his court. Conversely, Christ's so-called 'court' could have also been seen as a group of his students, which would have made Christ more of a philosopher. His open book and hand gesture, which could easily have been associated with an oratorical performance or lesson, further support such a reading.

The multiplicity of meanings continues even after our period proper with examples like the apse mosaic from the basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian (Figure 106), whose iconography recalls that of Santa Pudenziana in its composition.<sup>223</sup> A central, frontal, and elevated Christ is flanked by Peter to his left and Paul to his right, both of whom are presented with a wreath. Christ holds a scroll instead of a book in one hand (his left) and makes an overtly

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<sup>222</sup> On St. Polyeuktos, see: Lawrence Nees, 'The Iconographic Program of Decorated Chancel Barriers in the pre-Iconoclastic Period', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 46 (1983), 15 ff. On the painting from the Pontian Catacomb, see: Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 68 and 133.

<sup>223</sup> For Saints Cosmas and Damian, see: Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 39; Guglielmo Matthiae, *Mosaici medievali delle chiese di Roma, Volume 1* (Rome, 1967), 233. As with Santa Pudenziana, the mosaic at Saints Cosmas and Damian has been restored in modern times. Whatever changes may have been made to the iconography, the composition probably remains largely unchanged.

rhetorical gesture with the other. While the scene takes place on the fields of paradise rather than in the city of Jerusalem, the two locations were actually thought to be the same; Christ was thought to have been crucified directly above the remains of Adam. Likewise, while the mosaic from Saints Cosmas and Damian lacks the massive jewelled cross or beasts of the apocalypse, both scenes include the billowing, variegated clouds that allude to Christ's second coming and thus articulate Christ's salvific importance.

All of these similarities notwithstanding, Christ's image displays two important changes in the later apse mosaic: (1) Christ's open book is replaced by a *rotulus*, and (2) Christ no longer sits enthroned—instead he stands with his hand aloft in a form frequently associated with the delivery of an oration. Whereas the open codex from Santa Pudenziana was used as a device to explicate Christ's role in the Salvation of the congregation, the scroll from Saints Cosmas and Damian is more ambiguous in meaning; while Christ's salvation may still be alluded to obtusely, the *rotulus* was also a symbol of erudition and learning that remained associated with philosophers and rhetors.<sup>224</sup> Of course, as we saw in the previous chapter, a greater emphasis on a philosophical interpretation does not nullify any reading of Christ as an emperor. The point is that even by the end of our period, while a shared ontology of 'Christ as Saviour' had emerged that was encoded by definite signifiers, the possibility to use that ontology in the service of novel epistemologies remained. This same trend is observable among Christ's other image types as well, and it is to Christ's beardless image that we turn next.

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<sup>224</sup> On interpretations of the *traditio legis*, see: Walter N. Schumacher, 'Dominus legem dat', *Römische Quartalschrift* 54 (1959), 1 ff.; Caecilia Davis-Weyer, 'Das Traditio-Legis-Bild und seine Nachfolge', *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 17 (1961), 7-45.; Manuel Sotomayor, 'Zur Herkunft der traditio legis', *Römische Quartalschrift* 56 (1961), 215 ff.; Franz Nikolasch, 'Zur Deutung der "Dominus-legem-dat"-Szene', *Römische Quartalschrift* 64 (1969), 35 ff.; Franke, 'Traditio Legis und Petrusprimat', 263 ff.; Klaus Berger, 'Der traditionsgeschichtliche Ursprung der "traditio legis"', *Vigiliae Christianae* 27 (1973), 104 ff.; Bas Snelders, 'The Traditio Legis on Early Christian Sarcophagi', *Antiquité Tardive* 13 (2005), 321-33.

## II. The Beardless Youth

Although the bearded image in general and the *Pantokrator* image in particular would dominate Byzantine apses, during Late Antiquity we have examples that attest to an active experimentation with other types in the same context. A beardless Christ from the fourth-century chapel of San Aquilino in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Milan provides a particularly well-preserved example (Figure 29).<sup>225</sup> The central figure of the composition—flanked by Peter and Paul, holding a partly unwound scroll, and adorned with a nimbus that circumscribes a chi-rho as well as an *alpha* and *omega*—unmistakably depicts Christ. Set against a glittering gold background, Christ’s soft features are framed by voluminous, wavy hair. Elevated on an unbacked seat, a *calpus* of scrolls similar to the one from the Sant’Agnese sarcophagus sits at Christ’s feet. Coupled with the rhetorical gesture that the figure makes (the same one from the apse of Saints Cosmas and Damian), the message of the scene is clear: Christ is a philosopher, a teacher of the gospel. Yet, even in the guise of a philosopher, careful attention was given to the inclusion of signifiers proclaiming Christ’s salvific significance. The *alpha* and *omega* in his halo and the occurrence of a worldly scene in a seemingly heavenly setting both suggest that Christ’s philosophical, human nature was wedded to his divinity.

Although much less discussed, there was probably yet another reason to suspect Christ’s divine nature would have been as obvious as his human nature to visitors of the chapel. In the adjacent apse mosaic, a scene in a terrible state of preservation would have shown a figure being pulled in a *quadriga* across the sky (Figure 107). While the bucolic setting and the horizon line

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<sup>225</sup> On San Lorenzo, see: Aristide Calderini, Gino Chierici, and Carlo Ceccheli, *La Basilica di San Lorenzo Maggiore in Milano* (Milan, 1951); W. Eugene Kleinbauer, “‘Aedita in turribus’”: The Superstructure of the Early Christian Church of S. Lorenzo in Milan’, *Gesta* 16 (1976), 1 ff. For issues surrounding the date of the mosaics, see: Dale Kinney, ‘The Evidence for the Dating of S. Lorenzo in Milan’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 31 (1972), 92 ff.; Suzanne Lewis, ‘San Lorenzo Revisited: A Theodosian Palace Church at Milan’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 32 (1973), 197 ff.; Laura Fieni, ‘The Art of Building in Milan During Late Antiquity: San Lorenzo Maggiore’, in Luke Lavan, Enrico Zanini, and Alexander Sarantis (eds.), *Technology in Transition, A.D. 300-650: Late Antique Archaeology, Volume 4* (Leiden, 2007), 407 ff.

separating it from a golden firmament are fairly well preserved, only a portion of the charioteer's clothing and the midsections of two galloping horses retain their tesserae. Nevertheless, the extant portions, with the aid of the outlines for the figures found on the wall itself, are more than sufficient to identify the scene as a charioteer being pulled across the golden sky.

One might wonder why it is worth spending any time discussing the mosaic of the charioteer from the Chapel of San Aquilino since we can never know whether the figure wore a beard. However, the fact that the charioteer in this mosaic is shown traversing the sky constrains the number of possible prototypes for the image to the figures of Elijah, some non-Christian deity, or some hybrid. Each of these potential interpretations will be explored, but the important point is that whatever the prototype for this image, each one was beardless. In juxtaposition with the image of Christ teaching the gospel, it is entirely possible that the charioteer would have been associated with Christ in the same way as the image of the charioteer from the sarcophagus in Sant' Ambrogio that we encountered in the previous chapter.

To understand how Christ could have been conflated with Elijah, consider the wooden relief carvings from the church of Santa Sabina in Rome (Figure 108).<sup>226</sup> The cypress doors consist of four vertical bands of scenes, each of which consists of two larger scenes as well as at least two smaller scenes. Roughly three times the size, these larger scenes each contain at least two registers. The ascension of Elijah is the lower of the two large scenes in its band, and its compositional division into two 'registers' (separated by the wheel of Elijah's *biga*) is echoed by the larger scene above it which shows a beardless, ascended Christ (Figures 109, 110). The individual in the upper scene is clearly designated as Christ by the *alpha* and *omega* on either side of the figure as well as the wording, 'IXΘYS' inscribed on the unfurled *rotulus* that the he

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<sup>226</sup> For a discussion of the organisation of the doors, see: Richard Delbrueck, 'Notes on the Wooden Doors of Santa Sabina', trans. Ursula Stechow, *The Art Bulletin* 34 (1952), 139 f.

holds. Although the ascension of Elijah does not feature analogous textual signifiers, the image has a better-defined scriptural context: the lower register illustrates a scene from the Book of Kings that records Elisha, Elijah's brother, grabbing hold of his sibling and mentor's mantle.<sup>227</sup> Although the identities of the central figure in each scene are unambiguous, their juxtaposition and their beardless facial types strengthen the perceived relationship between the two scenes, especially since, as we saw in the previous section, the doors from Santa Sabina also featured images of a bearded Christ. The proximity of the scenes, their beardless subjects, and the common theme of the ascension implies a close connection between them.

Such an association makes good sense since, among the Church Fathers, Elijah was commonly seen as an Old Testament forerunner of Christ, and it is perhaps for this reason that the mosaic from the Chapel of San Aquilino is often imagined, like the door from Santa Sabina, to have depicted the ascent of Elijah.<sup>228</sup> Yet, upon close inspection of the remaining sections of mosaic, the apse from San Lorenzo shows itself to be very different from unambiguous representations of the ascent of Elijah. None of the key signifiers mentioned in the passage from the Book of Kings and carved on the Santa Sabina relief are depicted. The absence of clear signification suggests that the charioteer from the Chapel of San Aquilino probably had more in common with the ambiguous sarcophagus from Sant' Ambrogio discussed in the previous chapter than it did with more transparent images such as those on the Santa Sabina doors. While the

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<sup>227</sup> 'And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.' (Kings 2:11-14)

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Jensen, *Face to Face*, p. 76, esp. ns. 22-23. See also: Ernst Kitzinger, 'Studies on Late Antique and Early Byzantine Floor Mosaics: I. Mosaics at Nikopolis', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 6 (1951), 119 esp. n. 155. For the continuation of this typology into later centuries, see: Robert A. Koch, 'Elijah the Prophet, Founder of the Camelite Order', *Speculum* 34 (1959), esp. 550-51.

juxtaposition of a beardless charioteer with a beardless figure unambiguously identifiable as Christ would have facilitated the association of the two images, and while we know that beardless images of Elijah in a chariot were sometimes adjacent to beardless images of Christ, it does not necessarily follow that the figure in the *quadriga* from San Lorenzo depicted Elijah. After all, as we saw in the case of the tomb of Julii, Christ also may have been associated with a non-Christian deity, such as Helios.

As we have already discussed, the tendency to depict Helios in a chariot would have been well-known to early Christians.<sup>229</sup> The potential syncretism of Christ with solar deities is particularly intriguing in part because the theology of Christ's dual nature was firmly grounded in Plotinus' Neo-Platonic concept of 'Emanation,' a theory whose logic derived from an analogy with the sun.<sup>230</sup> Plotinus argued that there was a supreme, transcendent 'One' that constantly emanates parts of itself without ever diminishing in strength, a fact true both of the rays of the sun as well as the Christian Trinity (three separate entities that are all undiminished parts of God). Plotinus' analogy between the One and the sun would become a leitmotif of early Christian theology as well. As early as the second century, Justin Martyr writes: 'But some teach that [His] power is indivisible and inseparable from the sun in the skies...'<sup>231</sup> Only decades later, Clement of Alexandria exhorts:

For just as 'if the sun were not, the world would have been in perpetual night, for all the other heavenly bodies could do'; so, unless we had come to know the Logos, and had been enlightened by His rays, we should have been in no way different from the birds who are being crammed with food, fattening in darkness and reared for death. Let us admit the light, that we may admit God. Let us admit the light and become disciples of the Lord... Hail, O God.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Alan F. Segal, 'Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and Their Environment', in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung, Volume 2* (Berlin, 1980), 1333 ff. On the cross-cultural association of solar deities with chariots, see: Mario Bussagli, 'The "Frontal" Representation of the Divine Chariot: Similarities between the figurative arts in the East and West', *East and West* 6 (1955), 9 ff.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Arthur H. Armstrong, "'Emanation" in Plotinus', *Mind* 46 (1937), 61-66.

<sup>231</sup> Justin Martyr, 'Dialogue with Trypho', CXXVIII, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1*, 264.

<sup>232</sup> Clement of Alexandria, 'Exhortation to the Greeks', XI, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2*, 203.

Some commentators supplanted analogies to the sun with a more general equivalence between God and light. Ambrose is able to explain the Trinitarian application of Emanation in this manner when he writes: ‘But why should I add that just as the Father is light, so, too, the Son is light, and the Holy Spirit is light?’<sup>233</sup> More generally, Irenaeus writes: ‘For [God] is rightly called all-embracing Mind, but unlike the human mind; and most justly called Light, but Light in no way resembling the light we know.’<sup>234</sup> Origen continues in *The Principles*: ‘The only-begotten Son, therefore, is the glory of this light, proceeding inseparably from [God] Himself, as brightness does from light, and illuminating the whole of creation.’<sup>235</sup> Augustine also comments on the indivisible, infinite light of God in his *Soliloquies* when he writes: ‘O God, intelligible Light, in whom and by whom and through whom all those things which have intelligible light have their intelligible light.’<sup>236</sup> The equivalence between light and God continued through to the end of our period where Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite writes: ‘[God] is the Cause of harmony and splendour in all things, flashing forth upon them all, like light, the beautifying communications of its original ray.’<sup>237</sup> The textual and visual evidence, therefore, complement one another and suggest that Christ may have been associated with the iconography of non-Christian solar deities as an expression of Trinitarian theology.<sup>238</sup> What this means in practical terms for us is that it is certainly conceivable that the charioteer mosaic from San Lorenzo may have been another example of a conflation of Christ with Helios.

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<sup>233</sup> Ambrose of Milan, ‘On The Holy Spirit’, I.14, in Roy J. Deferrari (ed.), *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works* (Washington, D.C., 1963), 86.

<sup>234</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, II.13.4, 374.

<sup>235</sup> Origen, ‘De Principiis’, in Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti (eds.), *Origène: Traité des Principes, Volume 1*, I.2, (Paris, 1984), 93.

<sup>236</sup> Augustine of Hippo, ‘Soliloquies’, I.2, in Gerard Watson (ed.), *Augustine: Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul*, I, 2 (Warminster, 1990), 25.

<sup>237</sup> Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, IV.10, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee, 1980), 142.

<sup>238</sup> Note that this is true of bearded deities with a solar association, such as Sarapis, as well.

Although there are compelling reasons to connect Christ with Sol, Helios, Mithras, or some other deity with a solar association,<sup>239</sup> there were other possible non-Christian models that may have had some influence on beardless images of Christ. One possible influence may have been Dionysiac ‘biographical cycles,’ a point made by André Grabar and supported by the ‘Antinoë veil’ (Figure 111), a fourth century Egyptian textile.<sup>240</sup> Dionysos and Christ exhibit other iconographical similarities, including the occasional inclusion of halos in the former’s image (cf. Figure 94). Muddying the waters, however, the most compelling parallel between Christian and Dionysiac imagery may relate to images of Christ in a chariot. Although images like the mosaic from the Tomb of the Julii provide clear examples of Helian influence and/or syncretism, it is not trivial to note that most images of Christ (or Elijah) in a chariot from our period do not depict the charioteer as a source for emanating rays of light. Another model for chariot-related iconography, one which never featured rays of light behind the main figure, could have been the so-called ‘Triumph of Dionysos,’ which often showed the beardless god processing in a chariot pulled by either panthers or, occasionally, tigers (Figure 112).<sup>241</sup> The triumph of Dionysos would have been an especially appropriate prototype for Christian imagery since the scene was associated with triumph over death. According to one form of his mythology, Dionysos was devoured by the Titans at the behest of a jealous Hera. Zeus (i.e., Jupiter) stopped the Titans only before they had eaten the infant deity’s heart, but he was able to

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<sup>239</sup> On the relationship between Mithras and Christ, see especially: Gary Lease, ‘Mithraism and Christianity: Borrowings and Transformations’, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, Volume 2*, 1306 ff.; Luther H. Martin, ‘Roman Mithraism and Christianity’, *Numen* 36 (1989), 2 ff. See also: Walter O. Moeller, *The Mithraic Origin of the Rotas-Sator Square* (Leiden, 1973).

<sup>240</sup> Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 101-3 and 128-29. Dionysiac imagery may have also influenced images of an infant Christ, although, as we shall see below, the direction of the influence may have also gone the other way.

<sup>241</sup> On artistic representations of the triumph of Dionysos, see: Victor F. Lenzen, *The Triumph of Dionysos on Textiles of Late Antique Egypt* (Berkeley, 1960); Katherine Dunbabin, ‘The Triumph of Dionysos on Mosaics in North Africa’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 39 (1971), 52 ff.; Guadalupe López Monteagudo, ‘The Triumph of Dionysos in Two Mosaics in Spain’, *Assaph* 4 (1999), 35 ff. More generally on the influence of Dionysos’ iconography, see: Wolfgang Liebeschuetz, ‘Pagan Mythology in the Christian Empire’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 2 (1995), 193 ff.

insert this one remaining body part into his thigh and regenerate Dionysos, thereby associating the ‘God of wine’ with death-and-rebirth. It is not altogether surprising then that objects showing the triumph of Dionysos are largely preserved in sepulchral settings, including on a number of ornate sarcophagi (cf. Figure 113).<sup>242</sup> It is also of note that Christian charioteer images that lack solar iconographical attributes also mostly come from sarcophagi. There are yet other reasons to assume that a connection between Dionysos and Christ existed, including the shared importance of the vine in the iconography of each,<sup>243</sup> but in terms of Christ’s *figural* representation, Dionysos’ triumph and its complementarity with Christ’s theology offers one of the strongest parallels between the two.

A final but equally important potential influence for Christ’s beardless image may have been the iconography of Orpheus, the shepherd-hero associated with music, his own set of mysteries, and, like Dionysos, death-and-rebirth.<sup>244</sup> Orpheus’ link to resurrection is derived from the story that he descended to Hades to retrieve his beloved Eurydice. Although Orpheus’ attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, his descent to and return from the underworld is an obvious metaphor for the theme of triumph over death. Despite this association, however, Orpheus’ iconography is dominated by depictions of his musical prowess rather than his trip to Hades. Most images of Orpheus show the hero with his lyre surrounded by animals, an allusion to the beauty of his songs which were so attractive that they were able to tame savage beasts (cf. Figure 114). This iconography was transmuted into Christian imagery, but instead of depicting a multitude of different animals, Christian imagery showed a central musician usually flanked by

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<sup>242</sup> Cf. Karl Lehmann and Erling Charles Olsen, *Dionysiac Sarcophagi in Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1942); Friedrich Matz, *Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Denkmäler 246-385* (Berlin, 1975); Anna Marguerite McCann, ‘Two Fragments of Sarcophagi in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Illustrating the Indian Triumph of Dionysus’, *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 36 (1977), 123 ff.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 59-61.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Eisler, *Orpheus the Fisher*; Huskinson, ‘Some Pagan Mythological Figures’, 70-73; Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, *Orphism and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (Berlin, 2010), esp. 219-250 and 358 ff.

sheep (cf. Figure 115). Orphic imagery thus appears to have been overlaid on the Christian notion of the Good Shepherd,<sup>245</sup> which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was both an important and ambiguous soteriological symbol in fairly wide use until the fifth century.

Whether the origins of Christ's beardless image are traced to Helios, Dionysos, Orpheus, or some non-religious figure (for which see the discussion of the imperial and philosopher theories in the preceding chapter), each prototype informed a fundamentally ambiguous iconography. Images of a charioteer could be equally indebted to Helian or Dionysiac iconography, and the figure shown could have been interpreted as either Christ, Elijah, or some syncretic hybrid depending on the context. The same holds for an image of the so-called Good Shepherd, which could have been understood as Christ, Orpheus, a fusion of the two, or some generic saviour. As with the bearded depictions of Christ, multiple prototypes facilitated many possible interpretations. In order to clarify Christ's *theological* significance, it was necessary to more clearly define a series of attributes unique to his image.

The development of Christological signifiers for Christ's beardless images ran roughly in parallel to the development within the bearded type. The earliest identifiable depictions of a beardless Christ, which date from the very beginning of the third century and are found in the so-called 'House-Church' at Dura-Europos, show a him performing some of his acts (Figures 13, 14). No signifiers are needed to identify Christ beyond the scriptural scenes depicted; images of a figure walking on water and healing the paralytic, especially in juxtaposition with other scenes carrying clear Christological meanings, would have been understood as depictions of the Christian god. The scene of Christ healing the paralytic in particular proved to be extremely

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<sup>245</sup> Cf. Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, 39 ff.

popular and features prominently among many scenes of Christ's acts (cf. Figures 116, 117).<sup>246</sup> Scenes that showed Christ performing miracles like the healing of the paralytic were probably popular at least in part because they unambiguously depicted him without any of the confusion of imagery like the Good Shepherd or the charioteer. Nevertheless, scenes of Christ's miracles also must have been appealing for the opportunity that they provided to frame Christ's acts through the lens of 'magic,' which was particularly popular in Late Antiquity.<sup>247</sup> Of particular note here is the inclusion of a wand in some scenes, including Christ's raising of Lazarus and Jairus' daughter, his healing the paralytic and the woman with an issue of blood, as well as other miracles such as the multiplication of loaves or the miracle at Cana (cf. Figures 118, 119). The iconography of the wand proved so popular among Christians that it spilled over into images of Peter and Moses (cf. Figures 120, 121) and was sufficiently popular among non-Christians to appear on a number of 'pagan' sarcophagi from Rome (cf. Figure 122).<sup>248</sup> The wand apparently was used widely enough that in one gold glass depicting the raising of Lazarus, the artist and/or patron felt compelled to include an inscription identifying the figure as 'Jesus Christ' (Figure 123). A sense of *horror vacui* may be at work here as well since the inscription fills an otherwise empty space; however, the gold glass would have been meticulously designed before it was created, and the artist could have easily altered the scene or filled the space with something else. It seems plausible that the label was included intentionally, perhaps as a means of identifying what would be an otherwise ambiguous image.

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<sup>246</sup> On Dura-Europos, see: chap. 1 n. 57. On the depiction of Christ's biblical acts, see especially: Celia Chazelle, 'Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles', *Word and Image* 6 (1990), 138 ff.; Herbert L. Kessler, 'Pictures as Scripture in Fifth-Century Churches', in Herbert L. Kessler (ed.), *Studies in Pictorial Narrative* (London, 1994), 357 ff.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington, 1986[1984]), 103 ff.; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Brian McNeil (Minneapolis, 2003[2000]), esp. 97-102; Andy M. Reimer, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (London, 2002), 116 f.

<sup>248</sup> See especially: Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 116-27; Lee M. Jefferson, 'The Staff of Jesus in Early Christian Art', *Religion and the Arts* 14 (2010), 221 ff.

More important here is that the use of the wand across scene types implies that, at least in a Christian context, the instrument was probably associated with the power to affect the will of God rather than the narrower power to heal or to resurrect. In this reading, the wand, while it derives from ‘magical sources,’ is an instrument of *religion*. Seen in such a way, two prototypes for the iconography present themselves. First, the *caduceus* may have served as a model (cf. Figure 124).<sup>249</sup> The serpent-encircled staff was a primary attribute of Hermes, the beardless messenger deity. An association between the wand and the *caduceus* may have facilitated an understanding of the wand as an attribute that was used in Christ’s role as a messenger of God’s will. A more compelling reason to think that Hermes may have served as a model is that, as we discussed in the previous chapter, Hermes was the *psychopomp* who conveyed the dead to the afterlife. Although one manifestation of this legacy came in the form of the iconography of the Good Shepherd, another may have come in the form of the wand. After all, the use of the wand occurs almost exclusively in a sepulchral setting, either on catacomb wall paintings or on sarcophagi; and in many of these cases the scenes of Christ with a wand are juxtaposed with a beardless image of the Good Shepherd.

Another possible interpretation of Christ’s wand may be that it is derived from real-world non-Christian religious paraphernalia, such as the *fasces* held by Roman priests or, more compellingly, by the *Camillus*—that is, the young acolyte who participated in various rituals. Most extant images of *Camilli* do not preserved what the figures held, but the reliefs from the Ara Pacis suggest that the figures could have held a wide variety of things, including the bundle of sticks with an axe-blade (Figure 125). The youthful, boyish appearance of a *Camillus*—consider the remarkably well-preserved bronze sculpture in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 126)—may explain why nearly all images of Christ with a wand are

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<sup>249</sup> Cf. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 57-59.

beardless; it may also explain why the label ‘Jesus Christ’ was needed to identify the figure on the abovementioned gold glass.<sup>250</sup>

By the late fourth century, the image of Christ with a wand appears to have been fairly widespread. Consider as an example the well-known Brescia Casket (Figure 127), a typologically complicated and ornately carved ivory box that dates from the late fourth century.<sup>251</sup> The program of the iconography has been subject to several interpretations, most of which situate this casket in the midst of on-going religious debates about Christ’s nature; in particular, the casket is sometime seen as a response to Arian theology.<sup>252</sup> The nature of these debates and the way that objects interacted with them will be returned to in much greater detail, but for our purposes here the key point is that on one side of the casket, Christ is shown holding a wand and raising Lazarus (Figure 128). The identification of the figure is secure since, although there is no inscription to identify the figure, many other scenes around the casket show an identical character doing everything from walking on water to teaching the gospels. Through interpretive juxtaposition then, we can be sure that the figure raising the dead is in fact Christ raising Lazarus.

But what would happen if only the image illustrating the resurrection of Lazarus were depicted? Would it still be so clear that the image were Christ and not some magus or holy man? A fifth century sarcophagus from Ravenna suggests otherwise. In the sepulchral relief we again see Lazarus being raised by Christ (wand in hand), but in this scene Christ is shown with a halo

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<sup>250</sup> On the *camillus* statue, see: Gisela M.A. Richter, *Handbook of the Classical Collection* (New York, 1930), 307, esp. fig. 217.

<sup>251</sup> On the casket, see especially: Johannes Kollwitz, *Die Lipsanothek von Brescia* (Berlin, 1933); Richard Delbrueck, *Probleme der Lipsanothek in Brescia* (Bonn, 1952); Catherine Brown Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket: Typology and the Early Christian Imagination* (South Bend, 2002).

<sup>252</sup> Cf. Carolyn Joslin Watson, ‘The Program of the Brescia Casket’, *Gesta* 20 (1981), 283 ff. For a more nuanced perspective on the formal qualities of the casket vis-à-vis other roughly contemporaneous examples, see: Jaś Elsner, ‘Framing the Objects We Study: Three Boxes from Late Roman Italy’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 71 (2008), 21 ff.

that inscribes a chi-rho monogram (Figure 129). The wand, whatever its origin and significance, was not an attribute that allowed a viewer to determine a figure's exact identity. As we will see in the remainder of our discussion on the beardless image, it appears then that the 'beautiful youth's' iconography evolved along a trajectory similar to that of the bearded type. Over time the means for clarifying Christ's identity appears to have moved from interpretive juxtaposition and explicit labelling to the simpler and less space-intensive method of including unambiguous signifiers that alluded to Christ's salvific significance.

Although it is frequently overlooked, one particularly successful method for articulating Christ's soteriology was the Late Antique practice in both the East and the West of depicting a beardless image of Christ on the cross (rather than only carrying a cross). From the East, we have a carnelian engraved gem that shows a crucified Christ surrounded by the twelve apostles (Figure 130).<sup>253</sup> Above Christ's head we find the identifying inscription 'IXΘYS.' On another engraved gem with a similar composition we find the even more explicit inscription 'EHCO XRECTOC'—i.e., 'Jesus Christ' (Figure 131).<sup>254</sup> Although evidence for beardless crucifixion scenes is scant, the rings nonetheless attest to the beginning of an iconographic tradition that would continue straight through our period, a fact established by a 6<sup>th</sup> century Monophysite manuscript now in the British Library (Oriental Manuscript 6796) that identifies a beardless crucified man as 'IC XC' ('Jesus Christ').<sup>255</sup>

In the West, the Maskell ivories depict scenes of Christ's passion along with the most naturalistic rendering of the crucifixion in any Late Antique representation (Figure 24).<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Cf. Derchain, 'Die älteste Darstellung', 110.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, no. 445.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, 1999), 290-92.

<sup>256</sup> See especially: Felicity Harley, 'Ivory Plaques with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ (the "Maskell Ivories")', in *Picturing the Bible*, 229-32. See also: Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters, Volume 3* (Mainz, 1976), 82-83.

Almost entirely naked except for a loincloth, the visible nails in Christ's hands hold him rigidly against the cross alongside a hanged Judas. His halo is obstructed by a plank inscribed with the words 'REX IUD' ('King of the Jews') to unequivocally identify the open-eyed figure. Unlike the seemingly syncretic Eastern use of the crucifixion, on the Maskell ivories the scene is juxtaposed with Christ's empty tomb. The decorated doors, one of which is adorned with a scene of the Raising of Lazarus, swing ajar to display a lidless sarcophagus. Two women and two sleeping soldiers flank the tomb, which is topped by a rotunda, perhaps as an allusion to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Figure 132). The message here is obvious: Christ's open eyes suggest that he will not succumb to death, and his empty tomb provides 'proof' of his triumph. The crucifixion, in other words, was conceptualised on these ivory plaques as a symbol of Christ's resurrection and thus of Christianity's central mystery.

This same symbolism is articulated in a different way but no less clearly on a fourth-century passion sarcophagus (*Repertorium* I, 49; Figure 133).<sup>257</sup> Christ is shown bearing the cross in the leftmost intercolumniation. Above the cross, a wreath hangs down from the gabled arch and just barely touches the top of the cross. In the scene immediately to the right, Christ is crowned with a wreath of thorns. Both Christ and the cross are 'crowned.' Are we to think of Christ and the cross as one and the same? The answer to this question can be deduced from the central scene of the coffin, which shows the cross surmounted by a wreathed chi-rho. The cross here recalls the Constantinian *labarum*, the imperial victory standard, which itself was adorned with the monogram (Figure 134). Two soldiers seem to sleep beneath the cross, which suggests that this scene is a conflation of the crucifixion and Christ's resurrection. Although the cross

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<sup>257</sup> For discussions of the sarcophagus, see: Gerke, *Die Christlichen Sarkophage*, 71-75; Anna Saggiorato, *I sarcophagi paleocristiani con scene di Passione* (Bologna, 1968), esp. 81-93; Jaś Elsner, 'Image and Rhetoric in Early Christian Sarcophagi: Reflections on Jesus' Trial', in Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson (eds.), *Life, Death, and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berlin, 2011), 378-80.

may have been the instrument of Christ's death, its meaning was reconfigured into a sign of his resurrection and salvific significance. The cross may not stand for Christ *per se*, but it certainly stands for his death-and-rebirth without the ambiguity inherent in the use of non-Christian imagery (Helian, Dionysiac, Orphic, or otherwise).

The inclusion of a full-scale cross, however, limits the types of scenes that can be illustrated.<sup>258</sup> In the same way as with bearded images, the chi-rho and cruciform eventually become incorporated into Christ's halo, a move that allows Christ to be shown in more diverse scenes. An oddity confined to beardless representations of Christ is that there appears to be an example of a saint with a nimbus circumscribing a chi-rho symbol as well as an *alpha* and an *omega* (Figure 135).<sup>259</sup> A close inspection of the image in question, a wall painting of from the Catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples, suggests that the image does in fact depict Christ. The inscription ('*Santo Martyri Ianuario*') is in the dative, and can thus be translated 'To Saint Januarius.'<sup>260</sup> In this reading, the inscription is not a label so much as it is an indication that the image of Christ was a votive to Saint Januarius made at his burial place.

The adoption of the cross as Christ's defining attribute manifests itself in several important examples from the end of Late Antiquity. In some, such as the roundel from the chapel of Saint Andrew (now in the Archiepiscopal Museum) in Ravenna, a fairly standard image of Christ is complemented by a cruciform nimbus (Figure 136).<sup>261</sup> Christ's purple and gold *toga picta* was an imperial garb worn by generals celebrating their triumphs.<sup>262</sup> The same theme of victory was articulated in another Ravennan mosaic in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia. Christ

<sup>258</sup> Unless the space were less constrained, as is the case for apse mosaics. Consider the full-sized cross that we have already discussed from Santa Pudenziana as an example of the flexibility afforded by larger spaces.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Giovanni Brusin and Paolo Lino Zovatto, *Monumenti paleocristiani di Aquileia e di Grado* (Udine, 1957), 81. See also: Jensen, *Face to Face*, 50-51.

<sup>260</sup> My thanks to Thomas Mathews for pointing this out.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Luisa Ottolenghi, 'La cappella arcivescovile in Ravenna', *Felix Ravenna* 72 (1956), 5 ff.; Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 189-96.

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, 2007), 273-74.

is shown in a decorative cuirass, a cross slung over his arm as if it were a weapon held at ease, and with a lion and a snake beneath his feet (and again with a cruciform halo; Figure 6). Christ's open book reads 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' perhaps a choice meant to echo Julius Caesar's famous dictum 'I came, I saw, I conquered' (note the alliterative play on the 'v' in the Latin for each—Christ's 'via, veritas, vita' and Caesar's 'veni, vidi, vinci').

In other examples, such as the mosaic from the apse of the monastery of Hosios David in Thessalonike (Figure 137),<sup>263</sup> the cruciform was used to help identify what at the time may have been a fairly novel depiction of Christ. In this mosaic, Christ, who can be identified through the jewelled cruciform in his halo and his unwound scroll with a self-identifying inscription that paraphrases the Book of Isaiah 25:9 ('Behold our God in whom we hope, our salvation in whom we rejoice. He will give us rest and hospitality in this house.'), sits atop a rainbow enclosed in a *mandorla*. The body-halo is supported by four beasts, each of which holds a jewelled codex. The curvature of the apse is exploited to depict a bucolic landscape with four rivers issuing forth from beneath Christ's feet as well as two figures in the corners of the mosaic. These two figures have been variously identified as Ezekiel and Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zachariah, Ezekiel and Saint John the Evangelist, Isaiah and Saint John the Evangelist, Peter and Paul, and Ezekiel and Habakuk,<sup>264</sup> yet, despite this ambiguity, the scholarly consensus is that the central scene depicts the vision of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:4-28).

Hosios David has been discussed extensively, not least because it is may provide the earliest extant example of a *maiestas domini* (lit. "Majesty of the Lord")<sup>265</sup>—that is, as a scene

<sup>263</sup> See especially: Laura Nasrallah, 'Early Christian Interpretation in Image and Word: Canon, Sacred Text, and the Mosaic of Moni Latomou', in Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J. Friesen (eds.), *From Roman to Early Christian Thessalonike* (Cambridge, 2011), 361 ff. See also: Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 115 ff.

<sup>264</sup> Nasrallah, 'Early Christian Interpretation', 378.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Frederik van der Meer, *Maiestas Domini: théophanies de l'Apocalypse dans l'art chrétien* (Rome, 1938), 21-24; James Snyder, 'The Meaning of the "Maiestas Domini" in Hosios David', *Byzantion* 37 (1967), 143 ff.;

that shows a prophetic vision of Christ seated on a heavenly throne (i.e., in majesty) as the ruler of the universe. The important point for us, however, is that the novelty of the scene was made possible by the emergence of signifiers that allowed the central figure to be unambiguously identified as Christ. A fourth-century mosaic from the Catacombs of Domitilla provides an example of an earlier iteration of this iconography that was forced to designate Christ using less efficient methods since a formal ‘language’ of signification had not yet developed (Figure 138).<sup>266</sup> The mosaic shows a beardless figure, right hand aloft, seated on what appears to be a high-backed throne in the middle of a brilliant green aureole. The central figure is bordered by two others both of whom overlap with the *mandorla* and thus ‘share’ the central figure’s light (this reappears any early icon of Saints Sergius and Bacchus [Figure 139]). A *calpus* at the feet of the central figure identifies him as a philosopher, implying perhaps that the ‘light’ he shares with the flanking figures is knowledge of some sort.

Although there is no signifier in this mosaic that allows us to identify the figure as Christ, there is an inscription that reads ‘You who are called the Son are found to be the Father.’<sup>267</sup> The identification is made more secure by the juxtaposition of the mosaic with another that shows Christ raising Lazarus and which depicts Christ with a halo made of the same aqua tesserae. Again we have an example of interpretive juxtaposition used to help us identify the enthroned figure. Despite the ability to securely identify the Domitilla figure as Christ, the point for us is that the act of doing so was significantly more complicated than it was for Hosios David.

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Annemarie Weyl Carr, ‘Majestas Domini’, in Alexander P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Volume 2 (Oxford, 1991), 1269-70.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Antonio Ferrua, ‘“Qui filius diceris et pater inveneris” mosaico novellamente scoperto nella catacomba di S. Domitilla’, *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 33 (1961), 209-24.

<sup>267</sup> This inscription has been discussed in the context of Arian and Modalist religious debates. See: Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 117-18; David M. Gwynn, ‘Archaeology and the “Arian Controversy” in the Fourth Century’, in David M. Gwynn, Susanne Bangert, and Luke Lavan (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2010), 238-40. See, however: Bryan Ward-Perkins, ‘Where is the Archaeology and Iconography of Germanic Arianism?’, in *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, 265-89.

Whereas in the case of the former, two juxtaposed scenes and an inscription were necessary, in the latter only a single symbol was needed.

Alongside the mosaic from the Catacombs of Domitilla, a related tradition shows Christ enthroned on an orb representing the world. The message of the iconography is roughly equivalent to that of the mosaic from Hosios David. Although such images may not be *maiestates domini* strictly defined, both clearly proclaim Christ as sovereign of the world. The image of Christ atop an orb appears at least as early as the mid-fourth century, and the earliest extant beardless examples include a mosaic from Santa Costanza and several of sarcophagi that show Christ seated atop a personification of Caelus, the god the heavens (cf. Figures 7, 140). In each instance, Christ is able to be identified by either the (pseudo-)scriptural context of the scene itself or of the adjoining scenes. A fourth century sarcophagus from Algeria shows a beardless figure enthroned above the celestial Roman deity without any signifiers in its central scenes, but the adjacent intercolumniations show scenes of Christ's miracles being performed by an individual identical to the enthroned potentate (Figure 141).<sup>268</sup> The earliest images of Christ in Majesty thus appear to rely on scriptural context, sometimes in conjunction with interpretive juxtaposition, to identify the figure as Christ.

By the end of our period, however, the nature of these depictions had changed and, even in pseudo-scriptural scenes, Christ was identifiable by the standard signifiers that stood for his crucifixion. Consider for example the mosaic from the Presbytery of San Vitale in Ravenna (Figure 142).<sup>269</sup> Here we see a beardless Christ with his cruciform halo seated above an orb and flanked by angels. The scene incorporates some elements found in the mosaic at Hosios David,

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<sup>268</sup> *Repertorium*, 593. For an argument that the sarcophagus is of Gallic origin, see: Guntram Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (Mainz, 2000), 309, 321, 330, 471-72, 486, 535-36, 538.

<sup>269</sup> For the interesting use of inscriptions in this scene, see: Karen Boston, 'The Power of Inscriptions and the Trouble with Texts', in Antony Eastmond and Liz James (eds.), *Icon & Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2003), 39.

including a rainbow (overhead rather than acting as Christ's seat), a paradisiacal landscape replete with Eden's four rivers, and clouds of variegated colours, which, as we have seen, allude to Christ's Second Coming. The point here is not that the mosaic from Ravenna and the one from Thessalonike are intimately connected; rather, both were attempts to illustrate the same *concept*, and the ability to experiment with this scene without reverting to ambiguous iconography was a direct product of a set of widespread and mutually agreed upon signifiers for depicting Christ.

As a final note to our discussion of Christ's beardless image, it is worth briefly discussing Thomas Mathews' incisive argument that the *maiestas domini* terminology skews the scholarship by framing such images as 'imperial' illustrations of 'majesty.'<sup>270</sup> Mathews lambasts this approach, which sees the *mandorla* as derivative of the imperial *imago clipeata*, for good reasons; as Mathews goes to great lengths to demonstrate, Christ's *mandorla* in a number of cases, such as the apse from Hosios David, seems to be translucent—that is, composed of light—whereas the *imago clipeata* was by definition a depiction of an individual on an opaque shield. According to Mathews, the aureole encircling Christ undermines the claims of the imperial theory since the billow of light is probably borrowed from religious imagery.

Mathews' recognition that the aureole in the mosaic of Hosios David is substantively different from the *imago clipeata* is an important one, and there are other reasons to be sceptical of arguments that imperial iconography was adopted wholesale here or anywhere. Even so, the fact that the correspondence between the *imago clipeata* and Christ's *mandorla* was not exact does not preclude the possibility that there was some influence. For example, Christ's scarlet chiton and purple himation at Hosios David may have reminded viewers of an imperial outfit, in which case the iconography could imply Christ as a sort of emperor. Recall from the previous

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<sup>270</sup> Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 116-17. See also n. 81 above.

chapter that this interpretation need not exclude other readings of the image, but if the image of Christ as Hosios David were understood in any capacity as an emperor, a viewer may have gone on to associate the *mandorla* with the *clipeus*, however translucent the aureole may appear. The argument will not be resolved here, but yet again we see that even at the end of our period and even in a scene that unequivocally shows Christ, there is still significant uncertainty about how Christ should be depicted. Ontological clarity may have developed but epistemological consensus remained elusive.

The debate over the possible prototype(s) for the *mandorla* is even more complicated in the context of images of Christ as an infant since certain images, like the one from Bawit with which this chapter opened, would seem to be a clear allusion to the *clipeus* whereas other images, such as a sixth century icon probably from Egypt (Figure 143), seem to depict a translucent aureole that would imply, according to Mathews, a different iconographical origin.<sup>271</sup> A survey of infant images will not settle the debate, but by turning to this third variant appearance for Christ we can see that the same sorts of ambiguity that we have seen for the other image types persist among this subset as well.

### III. The Infant Christ in Late Antiquity

The earliest identifiable images of the infant Christ seem to appear at some point in the third century and take two different forms. In one, Christ is held by his mother, the Virgin Mary, and usually is approached by the three magi (cf. Figure 144). In the other, Christ is wrapped in swaddling clothes and at rest in a manger (cf. Figure 145). Although there are some ambiguous cases that may have intended to depict the infant Christ and the Virgin outside of either of the

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<sup>271</sup> Richard Temple and Robin Cormack, *Masterpieces of Early Christian Icons: Exhibition, the Temple Gallery, 15 June – 30 July 2004* (London, 2005), no. 3.

two contexts mentioned above—the wall painting from a lunette in the Coemeterium Maius is a notable example (Figure 146)<sup>272</sup>—almost all of the earliest identifiable images of an infant Christ are embedded in one of the two scriptural scenes already mentioned. The theological significance of a child Christ would not have been lost on the Christian viewer; the very fact that Christ was born of a human mother speaks to his human nature and thus to his Incarnation.<sup>273</sup> As we have seen with the bearded and beardless images, however, the iconography employed usually alluded both to Christ's humanity and his divinity, and the image of the infant Christ was no different. One well-noted example of this phenomenon is the close parallel between the image of Christ on Mary's lap and the image of Isis holding her son, Harpokrates (i.e., Horus).<sup>274</sup> The latter image, which often shows Isis nursing her son, is typically referred to as an *Isis lactans* scenes (cf. Figure 147).

The cult of Isis was extremely popular across the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity, especially during the second and third centuries—a period that coincides with the emergence of the infant Christ image. The point of course is not that the image of Christ on Mary's lap was necessarily interchangeable with images of Isis nursing Harpokrates; after all, Isis was a god and Mary was not.<sup>275</sup> Nevertheless, the iconography of the two is markedly similar, especially among the earliest extant images. For example, in the two third-century Marian wall paintings from the Catacomb of Priscilla, Christ is held in a way that is much more similar to a nursing

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<sup>272</sup> Cf. Fabrizio Mancinelli, *Catacombs and Basilicas: The Early Christians in Rome* (Florence, 1981), 44. The painting from the Coemeterium Maius is comparable with others, also from Roman catacombs, that show elite women. For example, see: Pasquale Testini, *Le catacombe e gli antichi cimiteri cristiani in Roma* (Rome, 1966), 117-20. Most scholars have concluded that the painting from the Coemeterium Maius depicts an elite woman rather than the Virgin, for which see: Chris Maunder, *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London, 2008), 48-49.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, 2006), 117.

<sup>274</sup> See especially: Lucia Langener, *Isis lactans—Maria lactans: Untersuchungen zur koptischen Ikonographie* (Altenberge, 1996). See also: Dora Zuntz, 'Eine Vorstufe der "Madonna Lactans"', *Berliner Museum* 50 (1929), 32 ff.; Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, 2003[1987]), 266 ff. See, however: V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Isis Lactans* (Leiden, 1973), 40 ff.

<sup>275</sup> For a discussion of which, see: Sharon Kelly Heyob, *The Cult of Isis among Women in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, 1975), 76.

scene than to later depictions of a frontal Virgin and Child. In the first, a painting from a lunette in the Cubiculum of the Velatio depicts a woman holding an infant to her breast in a position highly reminiscent of *Isis lactans* images (Figure 148).<sup>276</sup> Other, less obvious signifiers may have facilitated the association between Mary and Isis. For example, the high-backed throne on which the Virgin and Child are often depicted may allude to Isis, whose primary attribute was a throne.<sup>277</sup> Likewise, the association between Isis and Mary also may have been strengthened by the inclusion of the three magi since their ‘oriental’ origins, signified by their Phrygian caps, may have brought to mind the eastern origins of Isis.

Images of Christ in the manger at first glance would seem to contain none of the syncretic religious allusions of the mother-and-child iconography. However, where the scene of the manger is depicted, one of two formulae tends to be used to allude to Christ’s divinity. On the one hand, several sarcophagi preserve examples that conflate the scene with the adoration of the magi (cf. Figures 145, 149). Although the iconography of the magi operates differently here than it does when juxtaposed with the Virgin and Child, the inclusion of biblical figures who acknowledged Christ’s divinity firmly establishes the infant’s identity as the *Logos*. In scenes without the presence of the three magi, scriptural symbols are replaced by the use of interpretive juxtaposition. For example, consider a sarcophagus, now in the Museo Pio Cristiano, that shows Christ in the manger, his baptism, and the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Figure 150).<sup>278</sup> Of particular note here is the similitude between Christ wrapped in swaddling clothes and Jairus’ daughter, who is elevated out of the sarcophagus in which she is buried. Although both images

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<sup>276</sup> Cf. Lasareff, ‘Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin’, 27 f. For theological readings, see: Gail Paterson Corrington, ‘The Milk of Salvation: Redemption by the Mother in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity’, *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), 393 ff.; Beth Williamson, ‘The Virgin Lactans as Second Eve: Image of the Salvatrix’, *Studies in Iconography* 19 (1998), 105-138.

<sup>277</sup> In fact, the association was so strong that the hieroglyph for Isis’ name also means ‘throne.’ Cf. Thomas Mathews and Norman Muller, ‘Isis and Mary in early icons’, in Maria Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2005), 9.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 167-68.

are scriptural scenes, which make it hard to avoid the obvious difference that Christ and Jairus' daughter were different sexes, the iconographic affinity of the two would facilitate an association between them. The visual message of the juxtaposition in this reading would be fairly straightforward: the infant Christ will die and be resurrected. Christ's birth thus foreshadows both his death and his triumph over death, which in turn presages the salvation of mankind. As if to punctuate this interpretation, the intervening scene on the sarcophagus shows Christ's baptism, his symbolic death and rebirth.

It is important to differentiate the image of Christ shown in scenes of baptism with the infant Christ. Christ was baptised well after his infancy, and images of the baptism, even those that show a youthful image with a diminutive stature, should be understood as images of the beardless youth (cf. Figure 151).<sup>279</sup> This is not as trivial as it may seem since the bathing of a child was a *topos* used with relative frequency in non-Christian art. Although images of the infant Christ in a bath would appear in later Christian art, throughout Late Antiquity the image of Christ was shown in the water only in scenes of his baptism. While non-Christian sarcophagi and elite art like the mosaic floor now in the Baalbek Museum in Beirut, which shows the birth of Alexander, depict bathing scenes, these images likely exerted little influence on early Christian iconography (cf. Figures 152, 153).<sup>280</sup> In fact, if anything, the iconography of the Virgin and Child may have been formalised so quickly and adopted so widely that non-Christian images borrowed from the Christian repertory. Thus, for example, a fourth century mosaic from Nea Paphos, Cyprus that shows the birth of Dionysos depicts the infant god of wine on Hermes'

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<sup>279</sup> On Christ's baptism, see especially: Robin Margaret Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Settings, and Symbols of Early Christian Baptism in the West* (Leiden, 2010).

<sup>280</sup> See especially: D.J.A. Ross, 'Olympias and the Serpent: The Interpretation of a Baalbek Mosaic and the Date of the Illustrated Pseudo-Callisthenes', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26 (1963), 1 ff.

lap in a scene entirely reminiscent of contemporaneous images of the Virgin and Child (Figure 154).<sup>281</sup>

*Post hoc*, it is easy to understand why the image of the Virgin Mary holding Christ would become so popular: the inclusion of two figures, both of whom were central to the religion's theology, provided the opportunity to explore the Christological role of each. Although the scene of Christ in the manger would never be fully eradicated from the visual record—it exists even today in annual nativity installations—the image of the Virgin holding Christ would emerge as the more popular of the two infant types. In the same way that depictions of Christ in swaddling clothes become increasingly scarce over the course of Late Antiquity, so too do illustrations of the three magi. The image of the Virgin and Christ not only emerges as the preferred representation of an infant Christ, but the image is increasingly decoupled from its (pseudo-)scriptural context.

The choice to depict the Madonna and Child without any scriptural context coincided with two important changes in the iconography of the infant God and his mother. On the one hand, the removal of the signifier that identified the scene as Christ and the Virgin as opposed to Isis and Harpokrates (or as a more quotidian non-Christian mother and child) necessitated the introduction of other signifiers (or else the image would be left ambiguous). On the other, with the erasure of the magi from the scene, the Madonna and Child are no longer forced to 'receive' a procession of guests, which allows them to rotate their posture and face the viewer frontally (Figure 155).

The moment of these transitions cannot be pinpointed exactly, especially since scenes showing the adoration of the magi continue straight through our period as evidenced by an early sixth century sarcophagus from Sant' Apollinaire Nuovo in Ravenna (Figure 156), but the

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<sup>281</sup> See especially: Glen W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 49-53.

appearance of a (quasi-) frontal Virgin and/or Child seems to begin at some time in the fourth century. Identifying the ‘intermediate stage’ is always an unfair game to play, but there is something to be said for the fresco of the adoration from the Catacomb of Mark and Marcellinus (Figure 157). Christ still appears to be shown in profile, but the Virgin turns towards the viewer and meets our gaze in what up until that point was an almost unprecedented way.<sup>282</sup>

This shift to frontality and the corresponding use of scriptural symbols to identify Christ and encode his soteriological significance are complete by the end of our period, a point illustrated by the apse mosaic from Poreč, Croatia (Figure 158).<sup>283</sup> In this image, which dates to the second quarter of the sixth century, Christ is shown on the Virgin’s lap flanked by angels in a scene with no scriptural basis. Christ wears a gold-and-white toga, is seated with his mother on an ornate throne and has his head surrounded by a jewelled cruciform halo. The Virgin holds her son with her left hand while Christ’s grasps a *rotulus*; his right is lifted in a sign of benediction. The inclusion of the cruciform halo and the juxtaposition of the most explicitly human of Christ’s guises with the celestial angelic court combine to allude to the theology of Christ’s dual nature. Yet, in spite of the overt religious interpretation, the imperial and philosophical implications of the scene are also unmistakable. The ornate setting and flanking figures echo the characteristic imperial and consular iconography (cf. Figure 159), while the inclusion of a *rotulus* is a hold-over from the iconography of philosopher images.

In spite of the replacement of the adoration’s iconography with the more majestic iconography of Poreč, we have very little evidence from the intervening centuries about how the evolution of this image type occurred. Given the paucity of evidence, generalisations are

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<sup>282</sup> See especially: Fabrizio Bisconti, ‘La Madonna di Priscilla: Interventi di restauro ed ipotesi sulla dinamica decorative’, *Rivista di archeologia Cristiana* 72 (1996), 7-34.

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Hans Henrik Lohfert Jørgensen, ‘Cultic Vision—Seeing as Ritual: Visual and Liturgical Experience in the Early and Medieval Church’, in Nils Holger Petersen, Mette Birkedal Bruun, Jeremy Llewellyn, and Eyolf Østrem (eds.), *The Appearances of Medieval Rituals: The Play of Construction and Modification* (Turnhout, 2004), 173 ff.

difficult, but a useful reference point comes from the triumphal arch mosaics in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.<sup>284</sup> The iconography of the scene here is unique: Christ is shown *alone* on the throne while Mary sits immediately to his left (Figure 22). There can be no doubt that the figure is meant to show Christ since we can see a small cross wedged between the top of the figure's head and the edge of his halo.

Like this atypically rendered cross, other elements of the scene are abnormal but not without precedent; for example, the separation of the magi so that they are split on either side of Christ is a rare formula that is also used on the late fourth century silver reliquary from San Nazaro Maggiore in Milan (Figure 160).<sup>285</sup> As on the silver reliquary, both Christ and the Virgin face forward, and the number of flanking figures recalls an imperial entourage such as the one depicted one century later at San Vitale in Ravenna (Figure 161). In the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaic, Christ is dressed in the *toga praetexta*, which also carried imperial connotations as the garment associated with the Kings of Rome. The composition, enthroned infant, and iconography of the figure thus seem intent to depict Christ as an infant emperor. This is not a trivial point. Although there is little evidence to support what can only be a speculative observation, at the time that Santa Maria Maggiore was completed, Valentinian III, the Western Roman Emperor, would have been a teenager. Valentinian was one of a number of late fourth and early fifth century 'child-emperors,' and Valentinian, who acceded to the imperial seat at

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<sup>284</sup> On the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore, see: Suzanne Spain, "'The Promised Blessing': The Iconography of the Mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore", *The Art Bulletin* 61 (1979), 518 ff.; Margaret R. Miles, 'Santa Maria Maggiore's Fifth-Century Mosaics: Triumphal Christianity and the Jews', *The Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993), 155 ff. On Santa Maria Maggiore more generally, see: Richard Krautheimer, 'The Architecture of Sixtus III: A Fifth-Century Renaissance?', in Millard Meiss (ed.), *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (New York, 1961), 291 ff. On the restorations, see: Suzanne Spain, 'The Restorations of the Sta. Maria Maggiore Mosaics', *The Art Bulletin* 65 (1983), 325 ff.

<sup>285</sup> On the San Nazaro reliquary, see especially: Gemma Sena Chiesa and Fabrizio Slavazzi, 'La capsella argentea di San Nazaro: Primi resulti di una nuova indagine', *Antiquité Tardive* 7 (1999), 187 ff.

Rome at the age of six, was the youngest among them.<sup>286</sup> The point here is not to suggest that Valentinian exerted any direct influence on the iconographical program, but it is to suggest that viewers of the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics would have comprehended the notion of a child-emperor.<sup>287</sup> Other scenes on the arch depict the childhood of Moses (Figure 162), making the emphasis on infancy suspicious if only for its conspicuousness. Whether the images were intended to be associated with Valentinian III is less important than the fact that such an interpretation was available and that, even if some relationship between the sitting emperor and Christ were posited, the signifiers chosen for the infant Christ made it impossible to imagine that the mosaic shows a child-ruler like Valentinian.

The evidence for the infant Christ, as for the other types of Christ images, thus suggests that over the course of Late Antiquity scriptural scenes and complicated juxtapositions were replaced by scriptural symbols. At least as important, Christ's infant image adopted the same set of signifiers as the bearded and beardless types to articulate Christ's identity and soteriology. The change in strategy facilitated the introduction of novel iconographic formulae like the mosaics from Santa Maria Maggiore, Hosios David and Saints Cosmas and Damian. Yet, no matter how discrepant an image appeared in Late Antiquity, it could always be claimed as 'Christ' through the use of unambiguous signifiers. Over the three centuries investigated here, images of Christ generally developed from ambiguous and syncretic images to clearly defined theological arguments. Christ's identity was eventually materialised in a codified set of signifiers that were specific to the Son of God. Although each of the four mechanisms discussed

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<sup>286</sup> On the emergence of child-emperors in Late Antiquity, see especially: Meaghan McEvoy, 'Rome and the Transformation of Imperial Office in the Late Fourth—Mid Fifth Centuries AD', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 78 (2010), 151 ff.

<sup>287</sup> For the connection of this scene with imperial iconography, see: Rainer Warland, 'The Concept of Rome in Late Antiquity Reflected in the Mosaics of the Triumphal Arch of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome', *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia* 17 (2003), 134 f.

in the previous chapter ([1] scriptural citations, [2] scriptural scenes, [3] scriptural symbols, and [4] interpretive juxtaposition) remained in use throughout Late Antiquity and beyond, scriptural symbols emerged as the favoured method for identifying Christ. A large part of the widespread adoption of these symbols, especially the cruciform halo, probably had to do with the fact that the relatively unobtrusive and fungible sign(s) provided an opportunity to retain the diversity that had developed in Christ's iconography without the ambiguity that previously accompanied it.

Although the conception of Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of mankind had taken root among Christians, the nature of Christ's soteriology was still hotly debated; ontological consensus did not map neatly onto a shared epistemology. These divergent interpretations manifested themselves in distinct iconographies, not only of bearded, beardless, and infant images of Christ, but also as variant types of each. The 'narrative' of Christ's iconographical development is neither linear nor gradual; it is a set of overlapping and competing interpretations of Christ's theological importance. Christ was central to Christianity, but in Late Antiquity the nature of his centrality and what he represented was still very far from agreed upon. In this respect, the development of Christ's image during our period is a story less about convergence on some standard set of signifiers than it is a story about how syncretic messiness was replaced by epistemological complexity.

Instead of continuing to investigate the development of Christ's images to an emergent ontological consensus, we will continue to explore the epistemological messiness surrounding Christ's image. Said differently, we will attempt to trace how different interpretations of objects could be actualised by different individuals. In order to achieve this aim, it is necessary develop a methodology capable of more granular, individual-level analysis. It is to this project that the

next section turns by consciously stepping away from the material culture and exploring the methods and theories that form the substrate for most approaches to Late Antique (art) history.

## Section II

### The Context of Interpretation: Late Antique Religion and the Second Sophistic

Most studies related to our subject have been concerned with the emergent ontological consensus rather than the continued epistemological ambiguity among Late Antique images of Christ. Such a focus is not only absolutely legitimate; it also helps to identify very important trends. Nonetheless, the macroscopic approach to art history does nothing to elucidate the highly individualised responses that Late Antique viewers would have had to images of Christ. As we saw in Section I, any given image of Christ was open to multiple interpretations. This interpretive variability ought to be explored more deeply since the types of interpretations that could have been generated may provide new insights into the objects on which this dissertation focuses. What we need then is a method that bridges the diachronic, high-level narrative that was provided in the first section with a synchronic, detailed reading of a limited number of objects, which will be the focus of the third section. That is, we need to replace the idea that one interpretation can be applied to five objects with the realisation that a single object may have been subject to five different interpretations at any given time. In order to build this bridge we must consciously move away from objects—from ‘art history in fact’—and towards an engagement with the method and theory that underpin art historical frameworks of analysis.

In simple terms, this section proceeds from two observations. The first, made in Chapter 1 (but also implied in Chapter 2), is that individuals can generate their own interpretations. The second, which will be explored in the next two chapters at some length, is that individuals do not create their understandings *de novo*; rather, individuals are socialised with certain thought structures, embedded within certain cultures, and party to certain group affiliations all of which modulate how they interpret anything, including an image of Christ. All of this is to say that if

images of Christ were interpreted by Late Antique individuals, and if Late Antique interpretations were conditioned by their culture, then we need to better understand the historical context(s) in which interpretations were generated.

The first chapter of this section (Chapter 3) looks at the religious context in which Christianity developed. A critical assessment of the scholarship on Roman religion reveals that almost all discussions of Late Antique religion share the same dualistic metanarrative. Put simply, almost all histories of religion between AD 200 and 500 divide the landscape into pairs that compete until one of the two entities emerges victorious. Although the notion of Christianity's 'triumph' over 'paganism' is the most popular version of this paradigm, others include the dichotomisation of the 'East' and the 'West' as well as the differentiation between the 'Core' and the 'Periphery.' An exploration of each of these suggests that despite the shifting identities attributed to the competing dyads, each of these models share an underlying belief that the process of inscribing difference drives history.

There is nothing in itself wrong with this theory and on the basis of its adaptability alone (note its ability to be applied to pairings as diverse as those described above) it has much to recommend it. Dualities very effectively help to anchor any two poles, but they run into problems in that, given the huge quantities of individuals alive at any one time, the division of them into two groups cannot possibly capture all the variation within their interactions. Put another way, the model of religious history that Chapter 3 critiques envisions a single type of interaction—differentiation—at work between only two groups; what we need is a model of religious history that allows for multiple interactions among multiple individuals. After all not all 'Christians' are the same, religiously or in other respects. 'Paganism' is an even more reductive term. We can imagine an interaction between a Christian, perhaps a Manichean, and a

non-Christian, perhaps a Mithraist, that is not characterised solely or even largely by ‘differentiation.’ Such a case, exceptional or not, goes a long way towards unravelling the idea that religious development is something that occurs on the group level. As with the interpretation of images, a broad brush may allow the historian to identify long-term trends, but it greatly diminishes sensitivity to the operational dynamics of any given period.

In place of the dualistic model of history, Chapter 3 presents the alternative model of the ‘network.’ The network model differs from others primarily in its view that religious groups were non-exclusive entities, a fact corroborated by the primary sources. What that means in practical terms was that each individual related to religions in different ways. This may seem obvious, but it is a position entirely at odds with the model of religious history that we are critiquing. Instead of having a single affiliation whose primary relationship with its alternative is antagonistic, an individual can have multiple affiliations characterised by multiple forms of interaction. In the terms that the third chapter will use, each individual contains multiple ‘identities,’ religious and otherwise. While some or many of these identities may be shared with other individuals, each individual is a unique composite of so-called ‘micro-identities.’<sup>288</sup> It is in this way that multiple interpretations of Christ images are possible: different identities actualise different possible readings.

Chapter 4 shifts from the religious to the social context of interpretation and narrows the focus of the dissertation to the interpretation of artworks by members of the elite. The emphasis placed on elite interpretation mostly has to do with the nature of the evidence available to us today. Many of the extant images of Christ were created for members of the upper class and would have been seen by members of the upper class. Moreover, the elite culture from the period with which this dissertation is concerned is well-documented. While a different social

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<sup>288</sup> Tim Whitmarsh (ed.), *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World* (Cambridge, 2010).

context might have been chosen, the decision to emphasise elite interpretation reflects the possibility for the richest development of potential interpretive strategies.

Within these constraints, the fourth chapter picks up where the third left off by looking at interactivity. Whereas Chapter 3 opened up the possibility for multiple types of interaction (above and beyond differentiation), Chapter 4 fingers some of these interactive methods. The identification of these ‘modes of interaction’ is based in the argument that the centuries between AD 200 and 500 featured an elite culture that emphasised an educational regime known as *paideia*. Among other things, *paideia*, which is normally associated with the Second Sophistic, stressed the learning of rhetorical techniques. A number of extant manuals elaborate a great many rhetorical tropes; however, of chief concern to us here is the use of rhetoric in religious discourse since the image of Christ, whatever else it may have been, was at its core a religious image. Three primary modes of interaction are identified—panegyric, polemic, and apologetic—which are unified by their purpose: to convince a listener that the speaker’s position is correct (to ‘convert’ so to speak). The implication of this model is that interaction is by nature dialogic, and, therefore, groups do not exist *a priori*; rather, groups emerge from the give-and-take of an interaction on the basis of the persuasiveness of an argument (visual or verbal). Meaning, in other words, is produced by the receiver of the argument. The relocation of meaning away from the ‘author’ accords with theoretical developments in art history, particularly in the field of semiotics. In order to link the rhetorical thought-structures associated with *paideia* and the visual culture of our period, it is necessary to engage with the semiotic literature, and the result of this engagement is the conclusion that the model of the network can be generalised to the interpretation of images.

The manoeuvres undertaken in this section are the most complicated of the dissertation. The purpose of these two chapters is to move from the ontological or 'realist' model for Christ's images developed in the first section to the epistemological or 'rhetorical' model of hermeneutic play that typified the responses that members of the Late Antique patrician class would have had to images of Christ. Only once the details of this model have been worked out can they be applied; so while this section loses touch with material culture, it does so deliberately to develop a new framework for understanding how viewers would have interpreted the images of Christ they confronted between AD 200 and 500.

## Chapter III

### Religion in Late Antiquity

Religion in Late Antiquity has proven difficult to categorise in its totality.<sup>289</sup> Valuable contributions have been made, particularly in recent years, to the understanding of the practice of religion, the interplay of different cults, and the socio-political dynamics of religious institutions in the later Roman Empire.<sup>290</sup> Despite the complementarity of these sharpened insights into the various roles of Roman religion, a complete picture of how religion operated between AD 200 and 500 remains elusive. Perhaps the single greatest impediment to a ‘unified’ theory of Roman religion is a practical one: models, which are inherently generalising heuristics, do not map neatly onto the complex Late Antique religious landscape. A number of narratives and frameworks for understanding Late Roman religion have greatly advanced the understanding of field, but it is always worth remembering the obvious: no model will ever capture the entirety of its subject.

The study of Late Antique religion also has been handicapped by its chronological position in the history of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. Since Late Antiquity emerged as its own period of study, it has been seen as a transitional phase in almost everything from political governance and economic policy to artistic styles and religious practice.<sup>291</sup> With

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<sup>289</sup> Although ‘religion’ in the singular will be used for convenience to refer to all Late Antique cults, it is not my contention that there was a single ‘type’ or ‘form’ of religion in Late Antiquity. See, for example, Jörg Rüpke, ‘Hellenistic and Roman Empires and Euro-Mediterranean Religion’, *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3 (2010), 197-214.

<sup>290</sup> Cf. Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton, 2007), 255 ff; Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge, 2007); Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2008); Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>291</sup> On political governance, see: Ralph W. Mathiesen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin, 1993); on the economy, see: Chris Wickham, ‘The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism’, *Past and Present* 103 (1984), 3-36; on artistic styles, see: Jens Fleischer, ‘Style as a Bearer of Meaning: The Transition from Late Antique Mummy Portraits to Early Icons’, in Jens Fleischer, Marjatta Nielsen, John Lund, and Niels Hannestad (eds.), *Late Antiquity: Art in Context* (Copenhagen, 2001), 53-70; and on

regards to religion, the scholarship traditionally emphasizes the emergence of Christianity as the state cult of the Roman Empire. The study of Late Antique religion has tended towards a teleological narrative of Christian triumph over ‘paganism.’<sup>292</sup> The aim here will be to reframe our picture of the religious landscape between AD 200 and 500 so that we can sharpen our insights into the milieu in which Late Antique religious images were produced. The chapter will proceed in two parts. First, previous scholarship on Late Antique religion will be reviewed and catalogued; once the structure of the discourse has been mapped (albeit schematically), the chapter will turn to its second and main goal: to introduce a framework for understanding the operation of Late Roman religion.

It is important to note that while the ‘structure’ of the discourse will be described,<sup>293</sup> no pretensions will be made to outline a ‘structure’ of Roman religion. It is my contention, following in the footsteps of others, that Late Roman religiosity was too dynamic and, indeed, mutable, to apply the fixity of a term like ‘structure.’<sup>294</sup> Instead, ‘operation’ and other words like it that convey flux and emphasise process and interaction (between people, cities, and deities) are better-suited for describing religion between AD 200 and 500.

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religion, see: Glen W. Bowersock, ‘From Emperor to Bishop: The Self-Conscious Transformation Political Power in the Fourth Century A.D.’, *Classical Philology* 81 (1986), 298-307.

<sup>292</sup> For a good overview of the term ‘paganism’ in the literature, see: Pierre Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, trans. B.A. Archer (Cambridge, 1990), 7-13.

<sup>293</sup> On the structure of discourses, see especially the following works by Michel Foucault: *Les Mots et Les Choses* (Paris, 1966); *L’Archéologie du Savoir* (Paris, 1969); *L’Ordre du discours* (Paris, 1971). On a linguistic-phenomenological critique of the discursive structures discussed below, see: Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978), esp. 51-120.

<sup>294</sup> Cf. Angelos Chaniotis, ‘The Dynamics of Rituals in the Roman Empire’, in Oliver Hekster, Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner, and Christian Witschel (eds.), *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Eighth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Heidelberg, July 5-7, 2007)* (Leiden, 2009), 3-30.

## I. An Overview of Late Antique Religious Scholarship

Late Antiquity has proven a compelling laboratory for religious scholarship for at least two reasons. First, the complicated dynamics of religion during the period resist easy classification and, therefore, provide a fertile ground for scholarly debate. Second, and more crucially, Late Antiquity witnessed the emergence of Christianity as the state cult of the Roman Empire. There was no inherent reason for Christianity's adoption by Constantine or its subsequent growth.<sup>295</sup> That Christianity went on to become arguably the most important force in world history and to provide the religious framework within which most scholars of Late Antiquity have worked only adds to the interest in the early centuries of Christianity.<sup>296</sup> These two reasons have contributed to an odd feature of the scholarship on Roman religion: the various analytical frameworks employed in the literature share the same fundamental structure. Although the foci of these models have shifted from a comparison of discrete religious entities towards an interest in the interaction between cults, each approach to Roman religion has dichotomised the religious landscape into competing pairs that work towards some usually Christian *telos*.<sup>297</sup> In what follows, each model of Roman religion will be introduced with a brief history of its scholarship. No claims are made to the encyclopaedism of this catalogue; however, an overarching dualistic metanarrative endemic to the study of Late Antique religion will

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<sup>295</sup> The contingency of Christianity's triumph is best materialised in the resurgence of paganism under Julian the Apostate. See: Glen W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, 1978), esp. 79-93. See also: Polymnia Athanassaidi-Fowden's *Julian and Hellenism: an Intellectual Biography* (Oxford, 1981).

<sup>296</sup> For a historiographical critique focused mainly on the Christian subtext to the scholarship, see: Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago, 1990). Jewish scholars also are at least somewhat informed by the 'Judaean-Christian' tradition, for which, see: Daniel R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tübingen 1992), 1-26; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford 1999), 127-130.

<sup>297</sup> Hegel's influence looms large. See 'Deconstructing Dualism' below.

emerge, and that metanarrative suggests, if nothing else, that the methodologies used in the study of Roman religion are in need of reassessment.<sup>298</sup>

### Christianity and Paganism

None of the foregoing is meant to suggest that Late Antique religious history is only a consequence of modern historians' reading the inevitability of Christianity's triumph into the period between AD 200 and 500. During Late Antiquity the growth of Christianity and the speed with which the religion was adopted both speak to the 'success' that Christianity experienced in the last centuries of the Roman Empire, and much of the scholarship on Late Antique religion attempts to explain—or historically situate—Christianity's emergence and the 'demise' of other non-Christian religions.<sup>299</sup> Complications to the narrative of Christian success, however, begin to emerge when the concept of 'Christianity' and the alternative(s) against which Christianity emerged 'victorious' are placed under a microscope. 'Christianity' was far from a unified religious movement in Late Antiquity; nevertheless, much of the secondary literature on Late Roman religion continues to conflate discrepant Christianities into a monolithic entity, despite the fact that some of earliest studies of Late Antique religion recognised the immense variation within the category.<sup>300</sup> The non-Christian, non-Jewish religious cults of the Roman Empire, historically reduced to the term 'paganism,' are even more thoroughly homogenised

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<sup>298</sup> Given the vastness of the literature on Late Roman religion, any discussion of the models used to characterise the cultic landscape between AD 200 and 500 will fail to consider every significant development in the scholarship. For the purposes of an art history dissertation, a move *towards* a historiography of Late Antique religious scholarship is all that can be accomplished; it must be left to more able historians of religion to continue the examination of their scholarly origins with greater nuance than can be captured here.

<sup>299</sup> For a recent and thoughtful review see: Clifford Ando, 'Decline, Fall, and Transformation', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1 (2008), 31-60.

<sup>300</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur alone published on Manichaeism, Gnosticism, and what he viewed as proto-Catholic and proto-Protestant early Christians (although he did not use those terms). On Manichaeism, see: *Das manichäische Religionssystem* (Tübingen, 1831); on Gnosticism, see: *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Tübingen, 1835). On divergent 'orthopraxy,' see: 'Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom', *Tübingen Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831), 61-206.

than the different types of Christianity.<sup>301</sup> In effect, Late Antique cults often are abstracted to only two conceptual categories, (Judaeo-)Christian and pagan.<sup>302</sup>

Alternatives to the Christian/pagan framework have been offered in the past two decades, but even those attempts to break out of the normative model reify Christianity and oppose it to a set of non-Christian, non-Jewish Roman religions. Most new suggestions simply are changes in the terminology used to describe the ‘pagan’ half of the equation.<sup>303</sup> The persistence of the Christian/pagan dichotomy invites two questions. First, why does the use of such a dualistic approach to Late Antique religions continue? And second, how have more recent approaches elaborated or complicated the traditional Christian/pagan model (if at all)?

In response to the first question, there are at least three reasons that contribute to the persistence of the Christian/pagan dichotomy. First, ‘paganism’ remains a useful category for demarcating non-Christian, non-Jewish religions. In addition to the history of using ‘paganism’ in Late Antique religious scholarship, the term was used by early Christians to describe non-Christians, even if in a derogatory manner.<sup>304</sup> Also, and somewhat anachronistically, though paganism does totalise a great variety of non-Christian, non-Jewish cults, in the mid-fourth century under Julian the Apostate there emerged a unified ‘paganism’ that explicitly juxtaposed itself with the newly dominant Christianity. The difficulties of replacing paganism with another

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<sup>301</sup> Cf. On paganism as a term, see: Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, ‘Introduction’, in Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001), 1-20; James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, 2007), 15-53.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. Harold Remus, ‘Does Terminology Distinguish Early Christian from Pagan Miracles?’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982), 531-551; Benko, *Pagan Rome and Early Christians*; Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1987); Timothy D. Barnes, ‘Pagan Perceptions of Christianity’, in Ian Hazlett (ed.), *Introduction to the Early Church* (London, 1991), 231-243.

<sup>303</sup> Cf. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*; John A. North, ‘Pagans, Polytheists and the Pendulum’, in William V. Harris (ed.), *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries: Essays in Explanation* (Leiden, 2005), 125-44.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. Harold Remus, ‘The End of “Paganism”?’, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 33 (2004), 191-208; Isabella Sandwell, ‘Outlawing “Magic” or Outlawing “Religion”? Libanius and the Theodosian Code as Evidence for Legislation against “Pagan” Practices’, in *The Spread of Christianity*, 87-124. For a critique, see Fowden, ‘Constantine’s Porphyry Column’, 119.

term have been well-documented,<sup>305</sup> so on one banal level the continued use of the pagan/Christian dichotomy has to do with precedent, historical and scholarly.

Second, the scholarly literature on Late Antiquity often describes Christianity's success by invoking rhetoric of 'triumph.'<sup>306</sup> A degree of the 'triumphal' description in all likelihood has much to do with the knowledge that Christianity would emerge the state cult of the Eastern and Western Roman Empires by AD 500; moreover, that most scholars of Late Antique religion have been Christian (or at least have identified with a Judaeo-Christian religion and/or culture) certainly biases scholarship towards such triumphal rhetoric.<sup>307</sup> A narrative of triumph, however, needs both a victor and a vanquished, and in the story of Christianity's ascent—which posits Christianity as the victor—'paganism' has been the term most often applied to the adversary against which Christianity succeeded. More often than not, Christianity's emergence is seen in relation to the decline of paganism,<sup>308</sup> when in fact, as we saw at the close of the first chapter with our brief discussion of syncretic deities, the earliest centuries of Christianity coincided with an efflorescence of pagan cults across the Roman Empire.<sup>309</sup> The Christian/pagan dichotomy

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<sup>305</sup> Cf. Garth Fowden, 'Religious Communities', in Glen W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, 1999), 82-85; John A. North, 'Religions in the Roman Empire', in John R. Hinnells (ed.), *A Handbook of Ancient Religion* (Cambridge, 2006), 318-25; David M. Gwynn and Susanne Bangert, 'Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity: An Introduction', in David M. Gwynn and Susanne Bangert (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2010), 6-7.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*; Lim, 'Christian Triumph and Controversy', 196-218; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christianity: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000* (Malden, 2003[1996]), esp. 35-141.

<sup>307</sup> For a critique of Christian triumph, see: John R. Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital: Rome in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 2000), vi-vii. For the Judaeo-Christian tradition, see n. 295. The topic of 'Jewish-Christianity,' which has been a part of the discourse since at least Baur (cf. 'Die Christuspartei'), has been the focus of several recent publications. For characteristic examples, see: Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, 2004); Matt Jackson-McCabe (ed.), *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis, 2007); Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, 2007); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2007[2004]), esp. 1-36.

<sup>308</sup> Cf. James B. Rives, 'Graeco-Roman Religion in the Roman Empire: Old Assumptions and New Approaches', *Currents in Biblical Research* 8 (2010), 244-51.

<sup>309</sup> See especially Ando, *The Matter of the Gods*, 43-58. See also: David Frankfurter, 'The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt: Religious Worlds and Actors', in *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 2 (2000), 162-94; Clifford Ando, *Roman Religion* (Edinburgh, 2003), 45-6. It is also of note that a body of sociological and historical literature has demonstrated that religious traditions tend to flourish in the context of competition. On the 'Industrial

persists, therefore, because as a model for Late Antique religions it is self-fulfilling. Foreknowledge of Christianity's triumph (however conceptually oversimplified) allowed scholars to develop models that fit the evidence. All other 'pagan' religions were destined to fail by the same logic. The dualistic framework of Late Antique religion, in other words, purposively works towards a Christian *telos* that is empirically observable in the historical record.

The narrative of Christianity's division from paganism and its ascendance at the expense of paganism's demise is firmly entrenched within the discipline of Late Antique religious studies. In perhaps the foundational work of Late Roman history, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon argues that 'The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosophers as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful.'<sup>310</sup> In one deft move Gibbon conflates all pagan religions as functional socio-political devices that operated in maintaining the Roman *status quo*. In opposition to this functional paganism, Gibbon argues that the Christian faith hastened the demise of Roman 'modes of worship' through its indifference towards the material world.<sup>311</sup>

A different argument with a similar conclusion was suggested later by John Bagnell Bury, a figure of seminal importance in the Anglophone study of Late Antiquity. In *History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene*, Bury, the son of a rector, argued that

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Age,' see: Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, and Laurence R. Iannoccone, 'Pluralism and Piety: England and Wales, 1851', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (1995), 431-44; Roger Finke, Avery M. Guest, and Rodney Stark, 'Mobilizing Local Religious Markets: Religious Pluralism in the Empire State, 1855 to 1865', *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996), 203-18. For a more recent case study, see: Eva M. Hamberg and Thorleif Pettersson, 'The Religious Market: Denominational Competition and Religious Participation in Contemporary Sweden', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994), 205-16.

<sup>310</sup> Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Volume 1* (London, 1909-14), 31, cited in Harold A. Drake, 'Lambs into Lions: Explaining Early Christian Intolerance', *Past and Present* 153 (1996), 7 n. 7.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. Seth Schwartz, 'Roman Historians and the Rise of Christianity: The School of Edward Gibbon', in *The Spread of Christianity*, 145-160.

Christianity brought the benefits of fraternity, aversion to sin, and the attribution of value to human life.<sup>312</sup> These values were widely adopted as a means to combat the economic, political, and demographic disintegrative forces of the Late Roman Empire.<sup>313</sup> Christianity, in other words, was adopted as a type of spiritual adaptation to a difficult socio-political environment.<sup>314</sup> Implicitly, of course, Bury is arguing that Christianity's values were better-suited to the needs of Late Roman society than those of 'paganism.' Christianity's ascent, therefore, was at the expense of pagan cult practice.

The third reason for the continued dichotomisation of Late Antique religions into Christian and pagan follows from the first two: the differentiation of Christianity from paganism that Gibbon and Bury adopted has proven convenient and productive. Christianity *is* in large measure different from pagan religions and, on the whole, the different forms of Christianity were more similar to one another than they were to the various 'pagan' cults.<sup>315</sup> In addition to the comparisons between Christianity and paganism that one would expect from such a dichotomy,<sup>316</sup> the division between Christianity and paganism more recently has provided the impetus for some scholars to look at discrepancies among different types of Christianity and among different pagan cults. The focused approach on either Christianity or paganism has brought about a more textured understanding of the variegated traditions within each. As diversity emerged within 'Christianity' and 'paganism,' similarities between variants of each

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<sup>312</sup> John B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene, Volume 1* (New York, 2008[1889]), 17-24.

<sup>313</sup> Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 25-36.

<sup>314</sup> A version of this argument would become popular among those attempting to explain the cult of the icons as a replacement for the cult of the relics and as a response to barbarian incursions into Byzantium. See especially: Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images', 83-150.

<sup>315</sup> Cf. Barbara Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World* (Philadelphia, 2008), 170-72.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1964); J.N. Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism, 350 to 750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (College Park, 1986[1969]); Fox, *Pagans and Christians*. For a comparison that critiques the dichotomy, see: Timothy E. Gregory, 'The Survival of Paganism in Christian Greece: A Critical Essay', *The American Journal of Philology* 107 (1986), 229-242.

presented themselves, particularly on a local level.<sup>317</sup> In a somewhat ironic way then, the division of Christianity from paganism undermined itself by drawing out affinities between what were at first considered discrete entities.

With the realisation of these affinities over the past half-century, the strict divide between paganism and Christianity was replaced with a spectrum that features Christian monotheism on one end and pagan polytheism on the other.<sup>318</sup> Dozens of cults have been studied and placed somewhere between those two poles.<sup>319</sup> The answer to the second question posed above—i.e., how has the Christian/pagan division been elaborated or complicated—is that a spectral model for Christianity’s relationship to paganism has been advanced as an alternative to the traditional dichotomy. The most important consequence of this ‘spectral’ approach to Late Antique religion has been a more nuanced view of the connections between pagan cults and Christian theology, philosophy, and liturgy. Christianity did not develop in opposition to and triumph over paganism; it developed with and grew out of the Roman religions that flourished contemporaneously.<sup>320</sup> Although the spectral model provides a more dynamic framework for the

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<sup>317</sup> Cf. Peter Brown, ‘Christianity and local culture in late Roman Africa’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1968), 85-95; Fergus Millar, ‘Paul of Samosata, Zenobia and Aurelian: The Church, Local Culture and Political Allegiance in Third-Century Syria’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 1-17. For a less nuanced account, see Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley, 1987), 163-77.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Raymond Van Dam, ‘From Paganism to Christianity at Late Antique Gaza’, *Viator* 16 (1985), 1-20; Martin L. West, ‘Towards Monotheism’, in *Pagan Monotheism*, 21-39; Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of monotheism in late antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 100-137; David Frankfurter, ‘Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003), 339-385.

<sup>319</sup> Richard Gordon argues that the proliferation of cults was the result of a process of structural differentiation precipitated by the broader socio-political context of the Roman Empire. See especially: Richard Gordon, ‘Mithraism and Roman Society: Social Factors in the Explanation of Religious Change in the Roman Empire’, *Religion* 2 (1972), 92-121; Richard Gordon, *Image and Value in the Graeco-Roman World: Studies in Mithraism and Religious Art* (Aldershot, 1996), esp. 94 ff.

<sup>320</sup> See especially: Mark Edwards, ‘Romanitas and the Church of Rome’, in Simon Swain and Mark Edwards (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 194-200; Mark Edwards, ‘Pagan and Christian Monotheism in the Age of Constantine’, in *Approaching Late Antiquity*, 224 ff. For a slightly more recent collection of essays, see: Ralph Haeussler and Anthony C. King (eds.), *Continuity and Innovation in Religion in the Roman West* (Portsmouth, 2007), esp. volume 2.

operation of Late Antique religions in the spiritual ‘marketplace,’<sup>321</sup> the continuum of paganism and Christianity still presupposes a Christian *telos* towards which the blended, intermediate religious states develop.<sup>322</sup>

The notion that Christianity and paganism were more interrelated than a strict division would allow is not a new concept in the study of Late Antique religion. As early as Adolf von Harnack, scholars were arguing for a ‘Hellenistic’ influence on Christianity,<sup>323</sup> and, although not concerned exclusively with Late Antiquity, no later than 1890 a similar argument had been made, at least for the iconography and symbolism of the ‘Lamb of God,’ by Sir James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*.<sup>324</sup> In both the Anglophone and Germanic traditions, specific analyses of the relationships between paganism and Christianity (and the slippage between those categories) were penned in the 1920s by William R. Halliday and Franz Joseph Dölger.<sup>325</sup> Many works have attempted to dissect the complicated relationship between Christianity and paganism, and to suggest otherwise would be a disservice to those scholars who from the foundations of the discipline recognised the difficulties of a clean division between the two.<sup>326</sup> In spite of these

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<sup>321</sup> On the concept of the religious marketplace, see: Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak, ‘Introduction’, in Judith Lieu, John North and Tessa Rajak (eds.), *The Jews among Pagans and Christians* (London, 1992), 1-8. See also: Rodney Stark and James C. McCann, ‘Market Forces and Catholic Commitment: Exploring the New Paradigm’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32 (1993), 111-124.

<sup>322</sup> Although the exact influence has not been studied systematically, Darwin’s theory of evolution may have contributed to the shift towards a spectral model among some of its earlier proponents (for which see the following paragraph of the main text). See, for example: Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity* (London, 2006), 59. Although many of the (largely Christian) scholars of Late Antiquity may have been hostile to Darwinism, it cannot be assumed that all were. For a description of the range of responses to Darwinian evolution within the Church, see: John Hedley Brooke, ‘Darwin and Victorian Christianity’, in Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin* (Cambridge, 2003), 202-7.

<sup>323</sup> Cf. Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte: Die Entwicklung des Kirchlichen Dogmas*, 1 (Freiburg, 1886), 37-42.

<sup>324</sup> James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, Volume 3* (New York, 1900), 189.

<sup>325</sup> William R. Halliday, *The Pagan Background of Early Christianity* (Liverpool, 1925); Dölger, Ichthys; Dölger, *Antike und Christentum*, 6 Volumes (Münster, 1929-40).

<sup>326</sup> In addition to the scholars already mentioned, see: Arthur D. Nock, ‘Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background’, in A.E.J. Rawlinson (ed.), *Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation* (London, 1928), reproduced in Zeph Steward (ed.), *Arthur Darby Nock: Essays on Religion and the Ancient World, Volume 1* (London, 1972), 49-133; Arthur D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*

exceptions, a survey of the literature overwhelmingly leaves the impression that the operating model for scholars of Late Antique religion is that of a dichotomy rather than a continuum. Perhaps the best way of assessing the degree to which paganism and Christianity are considered separate entities is to look at the volumes produced on the religions of Rome that include sections on the later Empire. Even while scholars like Halliday, Dölger, Nock, and Dodd were publishing and lecturing on the interrelationships between Christianity and paganism, most authoritative surveys of Roman religion fail to include Christianity.

In his Gifford lectures at Oxford on ‘The Religious Experience of the Roman People,’ William Warde Fowler argued in 1909 for ‘the essential difference between Christianity and all that preceded it.’<sup>327</sup> Slightly earlier, Georg Wissowa published *Religion und Kultus der Römer*,<sup>328</sup> which would become the authoritative work on Roman religion for decades. Wissowa’s text provides a near-encyclopaedic catalogue of Roman religions, and although it might be forgiven that Wissowa was primarily interested in earlier Roman religion (in particular its origins and its relationship to Greek cults), the fact that there is no section dedicated to Christianity is telling.

The exclusion of Christianity from surveys of Roman religion continued under Franz Altheim whose *Römische Religionsgeschichte* does not mention Christianity despite ending its third volume ending with the Severi.<sup>329</sup> One year later, Cyril Bailey published his Sather lectures under the title *Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome*. In his concluding lecture, titled

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(Oxford, 1933); Eric R. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge, 1990[1965]), 102 ff.

<sup>327</sup> William Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People: From the Earliest Times to the Age of Augustus* (London, 1911), 10.

<sup>328</sup> Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (Munich, 1902). See also: Georg Wissowa, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur römischen Religions—und Stadtgeschichte* (Munich, 1904).

<sup>329</sup> Franz Altheim, *Römische Religionsgeschichte, 3 Volumes* (Leipzig, 1931-1933). Altheim would put forward a study of paganism and Christianity more than two decades later. See: *Der unbesiegte Gott. Heidentum und Christentum* (Hamburg, 1957).

‘Syncretism and Superstition,’ Bailey explicitly rejects the obvious possibility of comparing Christianity and paganism and, instead, opts to differentiate them. He writes:

It is not part of my purpose, even if I were competent for the task, to attempt any comparison between Christianity and the contemporary religions and philosophies. But there are two salient points of contrast, more marked than the resemblances, to which I feel bound to draw attention.<sup>330</sup>

More important than the two differences, which Bailey goes on to explain,<sup>331</sup> is his apparent unwillingness to discuss the similarities between Christianity and pagan religions.

The inclusion of Christianity among Roman religions generally has become accepted only in the past two decades, a trend that was given its fullest expression by the publication in 1998 of the now-authoritative text on Roman religion, *Religions of Rome*.<sup>332</sup> It was still the norm until quite recently, however, to find paganism sequestered from Christianity.<sup>333</sup> What should emerge then is that although several scholars at any moment have appreciated that the relationship between paganism and Christianity is not as dichotomous as often assumed, most Late Antique religious scholarship has nonetheless adopted the framework that Christian and pagan cults were fully separate. The situation in discussions of Christian iconography, as we saw in previous chapters, is strikingly similar. Christian images are posited to have appeared as a separate, discrete entity around AD 200, and almost no attention has been paid to the syncretic possibilities of the multivalent imagery that early Christians employed.

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<sup>330</sup> Cyril Bailey, *Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1932), 271.

<sup>331</sup> The two differences, according to Bailey, were: (1) Christianity’s deity was a man, and (2) Christianity was derived from Judaism and thus from a monotheistic religion.

<sup>332</sup> Mary Beard, John A. North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge, 1998). For more recent examples, see: Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans* (Cambridge, 2007); Stefan Heid, ‘The Romanness of Roman Christianity’, in Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion* (Malden, 2007), 406-426; John A. North and Simon Price (eds.), *The Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Robert Turcan, *Les Cultes orientaux dans le monde romain* (Paris, 1992); Denis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs* (Cambridge, 1998). For a succinct historiographical discussion, see: John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Edinburgh, 2003), 5-9.

One could argue that there were scholars who appreciated the overlap between Christianity and paganism without an adequate framework for explaining their position. Ramsay MacMullen may be just such a scholar. His *Paganism in the Roman Empire* provides a fairly nuanced discussion of paganism's interaction with Christianity but, nevertheless, closes with an epilogue on 'The Manner of Death of Paganism' that implies a neater division of paganism and Christianity than intimated elsewhere in the book.<sup>334</sup> More recently, MacMullen has attempted to reshape his arguments and locate Christianity on a continuum with pagan cults.<sup>335</sup>

The spectral model of Late Antique religion, despite its openness to intra-category variation and inter-category hybridity, is still plagued by the same shortcoming as the more dichotomous approach: Christianity and paganism are still reified as the major subsets of Roman religion. Placing Christianity and paganism on a continuum may have exploded the notion of monolithic and 'pure' categories, but such a framework nonetheless retains the categories as termini of the religious sliding scale. Spectral models thus have developed a gradualist theory of Christian 'triumph' in which Christianity first 'blends' with 'paganism' before ultimately emerging victorious.<sup>336</sup> The transition to Christianity may be slower and more interactive than once envisioned, but the spectral model nonetheless retains a triumphal teleology.

One interesting manifestation of the aforementioned gradualism is that the triumph of Christianity is attributed a later date under the spectral model. Unlike the more dichotomous framework, placing Christianity and paganism on a continuum necessarily builds in the possibility of hybrid religious practices and, therefore, the contemporaneity of pagan and Christian cults. Whereas earlier scholarship tended to discuss Christianity's victory as an early

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<sup>334</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, 1982), 131-38.

<sup>335</sup> Cf. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, AD 100-400* (New Haven, 1986); Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, 1999).

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Laura Salah Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 2003), 1-26.

4th century phenomenon bound up with the adoption of the religion by Constantine, some recent scholarship argues that Christianity's ultimate 'triumph' occurred in the late 4th or early 5th century.<sup>337</sup>

A related product of the shift towards the spectral model has been the adoption of a notion of 'Christianisation,' which sees the gradual emergence of Christianity as a more accommodative process that blends with and adopts elements of pre-existing pagan traditions.<sup>338</sup> 'Christianisation' as a concept is certainly better-suited to the hybrid cults and cult practices that emerged in Late Antiquity, but the word itself encodes the ultimate triumph of the Christian religion. The term 'Christianisation' implies that the agency of change is seated with Christianity, which 'appropriates' elements of pagan theology, philosophy, and liturgy. The process of religious change in Late Antiquity was likely more symbiotic. Jaś Elsner puts it well when he observes: 'Just as the Roman Empire would eventually be Christianized, so—through borrowings and references of many kinds—Christianity was itself profoundly Romanized.'<sup>339</sup>

Elsner's observation is important for its attempt to complicate the overly simplified 'rhetorical fantasies' surrounding Late Antiquity. Elsner's conception of a complex religious landscape is lucidly and convincingly articulated,<sup>340</sup> but in his closing remarks, cited above, he nevertheless juxtaposes two processes that closely map onto the pagan/Christian dichotomy. Of course, the appendage of '-isation' shifts the focus from entities or groups to processes, which better captures the dynamism of Late Antiquity (and, more generally, better accords with the

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<sup>337</sup> Cf. A.D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London, 2000), 132-144.

<sup>338</sup> Cf. Peter Brown, 'Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 51 (1961), 1-11; Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), xi-xiii; Richard M. Rothaus, *Corinth: The First City of Greece—An Urban History of Late Antique Cult* (Leiden, 2000), 1; Jaclyn L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and Communication in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2006), 145-168.

<sup>339</sup> Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 259.

<sup>340</sup> Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 199-235.

anthropological understanding of culture and its fluidity).<sup>341</sup> The replacement of ‘pagan’ with ‘Roman’ also opens up the possibility to understand Christianity in relation to Late Roman society in general rather than Late Roman religion in particular. Yet, there is an inherent dualism that, in Elsner’s final analysis, leads to the ‘Christian triumph’ cited in his book’s title. Elsner is not alone in retaining a dualistic framework. Late Antique scholarship, particularly religious scholarship, seems to follow a specific metanarrative: two entities compete with one another until a victor emerges. Although Christianity is posited as the victor in its struggle against paganism, other dualistic frameworks have emerged to categorise and attempt to explain the (Late) Roman religious landscape. The three most prevalent dualistic such frameworks—‘the East and the West’, ‘the Core and the Periphery’, and ‘the Periphery and the Core’—are discussed below.

### The East and the West

One framework for the analysis of Late Antique religions has been to differentiate pagan religious practices between the east and the west, a distinction which rests largely on the use of the term ‘oriental’ to describe cults that derived from the eastern half of the empire. Whether or not an oppositional ‘occident’ is made explicit, the use of the term ‘oriental’ by definition creates a western set of pagan religions against which the oriental cults are juxtaposed.<sup>342</sup> The so-called ‘oriental cults’ include: the Alexandrian triad (Isis, Sarapis, and Harpokrates), Cybele (sometimes referred to as Magna Mater and sometimes paired with Attis), Demeter at Eleusis,

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<sup>341</sup> See especially: Clifford Geertz, ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1993[1973]), 3-33.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome, Volume 1*, 246-247.

Dionysos and Mithras.<sup>343</sup> Any discussion of these oriental cults must deal with both the history of labelling the east with the term ‘oriental’ and with the so-called oriental cults themselves.

That the term ‘oriental’ is now viewed as problematic is due in large part to Edward Saïd’s *Orientalism*, which adopts a Foucauldian framework to argue that the Orient has been constructed as the imperial West’s ‘other.’<sup>344</sup> Saïd’s argument has been extremely influential; however, the problems with orientalist terminology, particularly in Late Antiquity, have a longer and perhaps more sinister history. In 1901, Josef Strzygowski, whose racial positions we encountered briefly in the first chapter, published *Orient oder Rom*, a work notable as much for its art historical importance as for its racist and anti-Semitic agenda.<sup>345</sup> Strzygowski’s thesis was that ‘oriental’ artistic traditions from the east corrupted the ‘pure’ classical traditions of the west. Strzygowski historically situated his arguments by drawing on philological and epigraphic evidence, much of which was being marshalled simultaneously by other scholars to flesh out understandings of the eastern ‘Aryan’ race.<sup>346</sup> Max Müller was particularly influential in establishing this form of text-based argument,<sup>347</sup> but another equally important influence was Franz Cumont. As Talinn Grigor explains:

Inspired by migration theories proposed by philologists and archaeologists—for instance, Franz Cumont, who had mapped the migration of Mithraism and Manichaeism from Iran to Roman territories during the first two centuries of Christianity—Strzygowski proposed a genealogy of Aryan forms trailing the diffusion of Indo-European languages and religions.<sup>348</sup>

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Kurt Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1960), 361-64.

<sup>344</sup> Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

<sup>345</sup> Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom* (Leipzig, 1900). See especially Jaś Elsner, ‘The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901’, *Art History* 25 (2002), 358-379. See also: Eva Frodl-Kraft, ‘Eine Aporie und der Versuch ihrer Deutung: Josef Strzygowski und Julius v. Schlosser’, *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 42 (1989), 7-52; Suzanne Marchand, ‘The Rhetoric of Artifacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski’, *History and Theory: Theme Issue* 33 (1994), 106-30.

<sup>346</sup> Talinn Grigor, ‘“Orient oder Rom?” Qajar “Aryan” Architecture and Strzygowski’s Art History’, *The Art Bulletin* 89 (2007), 562-90.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago, 1999), 47-75 (esp. 66-68).

<sup>348</sup> Grigor, ‘“Orient oder Rom?”’, 564

Although Cumont did not share Strzygowski's racism, it would be revisionist to see the influence as strictly unidirectional. Cumont drew on Strzygowski's work as well, in part because the latter's scholarship (particularly that concerning Armenia), supported Cumont's.<sup>349</sup> Corinne Bonnet, moreover, has demonstrated how Cumont, a secular Catholic, aligned himself with the Protestant scholarship of which Strzygowski was a part.<sup>350</sup> Strzygowski's and Cumont's relationship, however, is often passed over by discussions of the scholarship on the oriental cults in favour of a focus on the latter's *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*.<sup>351</sup> Published in 1906, *Les religions orientales* was the first systematic attempt to create a unified theory of the oriental religions of Late Antiquity. Cumont argued that the oriental cults were unified by their focus on personal devotion, their desire to for individual salvation, and their liturgical 'mysteries'.<sup>352</sup> Only one year after the first edition of *Les religions orientales*, Jules Toutain published the first instalment of his three-volume *Les cultes païens dans l'Empire romain*.<sup>353</sup> While the first and third volumes focused on the 'Latin' provinces, the second volume, published in 1911, was dedicated to the 'oriental cults.'

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<sup>349</sup> Cf. Christina Maranci, 'Armenian Architecture as Aryan Architecture: The Role of Indo-European Scholarship in the Theories of Josef Strzygowski', *Visual Resources* 13 (1999), 361-78.

<sup>350</sup> On Cumont's diffusionism and its parallels to Strzygowski's idea of an 'oriental' influence, see: Corinne Bonnet, 'Les mystères de l'Orient et la lecture évolutionniste', in Franz Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romaine*, eds. Corinne Bonnet and Françoise van Haepere (Turin, 2006), xxx-xliii. On Cumont's belief in the orient as a 'mystical' place, see: Corinne Bonnet, 'Die "Orientalischen Religionen" im Laboratorium des Hellenismus: Franz Cumont', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 8 (2006), 181-205. On Cumont's relationship to Protestant scholarship, see: Corinne Bonnet, 'Franz Cumont et les risques du métier d' historien des religions', *Hieros* 5 (2000), 22-24; David Frankfurter, 'Ritual as Accusation and Atrocity: Satanic Ritual Abuse, Gnostic Libertinism, and Primal Murders', *History of Religions* 40 (2001), 364; Volkhard Krech, *Wissenschaft und Religion: Studien zur Geschichte der Religionsforschung in Deutschland 1871 bis 1933* (Tübingen, 2002), 259-65.

<sup>351</sup> In the same year James G. Frazer published *Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion* (London, 1906); however, the work, in Frazer's (by that point unfashionable) comparative sociological style, proved less popular. For example, in discussing the similarities between Mithraism and Christianity (while citing Cumont's earlier work), Frazer analogizes the perception of the former as a 'diabolical counterfeit' to the Spanish Christian experience of the indigenous Peruvians in the new world.

<sup>352</sup> Franz Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (Paris, 1906), see especially chaps. 2 and 3. See also: Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le manichéisme: La cosmogonie manichéenne d'après Théodore bar Khôni, Volume 1* (Brussels, 1908), 53.

<sup>353</sup> Jules Toutain, *Les Cultes païens dans l'Empire romain, 3 Volumes* (Paris, 1907-1920).

In between Toutain's first and second volumes, Richard August Reitzenstein completed *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen: ihre Grundgedanken und Wirkungen*, which advocated a 'Hellenistic' (by which he meant eastern or, literally, 'oriental') origin for the mystery religions.<sup>354</sup> Eduard Norden in the 1920s (mistakenly) differentiated 'Oriental' from Greek religions on the basis that only the former partook in mysteries,<sup>355</sup> and Josef Bidez, another giant of the field, co-wrote *Les Mages Hellénisés* in 1938 with Cumont in an attempt to isolate the influence eastern religion on Greek thought.<sup>356</sup>

The use of 'oriental cults' as a category of Late Antique religious experience and practice has remained an important part of the discourse through to the present day. In 1961 Maarten Vermaseren published the first volume of *Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain*, and the name of the series was only changed to remove 'oriental religions' from its title in 1990.<sup>357</sup> Although the change in name reflected a growing concern over the validity of the 'oriental' category,<sup>358</sup> in the past decade a number of studies have retained or defended the 'orientalist' framework.<sup>359</sup> While the attack on an 'oriental' paradigm has been launched on a general theoretical front,<sup>360</sup> more important here are the targeted critiques of what

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<sup>354</sup> Richard A. Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen: ihre Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Leipzig, 1927[1910]).

<sup>355</sup> Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos. Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (Berlin, 1913), 143 ff.; Andrew R. Dyck, 'Review: *Der Altertumswissenschaftler Eduard Norden (1868-1941): Das Schicksal eines deutschen Gelehrten jüdischer Abkunft. Mit den Briefen Eduard Nordens an seinen Lehrer Hermann Usener aus den Jahren 1891 bis 1902*', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (2001), <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2000/2000-01-03.html>.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. Josef Bidez and Franz Cumont, *Les Mages Hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la Tradition Grecque* (Paris, 1938). Bidez, who as a junior colleague of Cumont's at Ghent was deeply influenced by the older scholar, presented similar arguments in his Gifford lectures at St. Andrews University on 'Plato and the Orient' in the same year *Les Mages Hellénisés* was published.

<sup>357</sup> Martin J. Vermaseren, *Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain* (Leiden, 1961-1990), cited in 'Graeco-Roman Religion in the Roman Empire', 257.

<sup>358</sup> Cf. John A. North, *Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2000), 68.

<sup>359</sup> Cf. Antonia Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age* (Grand Rapids, 2002), 16-35; Jaime Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, trans. Richard Gordon (Leiden, 2008[2001]); Giovanni Casadio and Patricia A. Johnston, *Mystic Cults in Magna Graecia* (Austin, 2009).

<sup>360</sup> Cf. Olu Oguibe, 'In the "Heart of Darkness"', *Third Text* 23 (1993), 3-4; Daniel M. Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle, 2007), 237 ff.

supposedly unified the mystery cults. Of particular note is Jonathan Smith's *Drudgery Divine*, which expertly demonstrates that the conception of oriental cults interested in salvation and, particularly, in salvation through rebirth after death has been informed by a transposition of Christian beliefs onto the oriental cults. Smith explains the logic:

We have learned from the more recent studies of Late Antique religious figures, once classified as 'dying and rising' deities, the sorts of questions that might be brought, as well, to the early Christian data. Given the central conclusions of these studies, conclusions celebrated by so many students of early Christianity, we might seek, within the foreshortened period of time represented by the Christian data, evidence for an analogous process to that found in the Late Antique documents, that is to say, we might seek evidence of a shift from a figure clearly located in the sphere of the dead...<sup>361</sup>

In effect, oriental religions—insofar as they constitute a meaningful unity—have been identified as the 'missing link' between paganism and Christianity. Of all the oriental cults, Mithraism has been the one that has received the most attention and has been most often analogised to Christianity.<sup>362</sup> Mithraism, which seems to have become the banner under which the other oriental cults have been conflated, has been inserted in the spectral model as a step in the gradual evolution of paganism to Christianity. The Mithraic scholarship thus provides an excellent case study to help understand both how the oriental cults have been elided into a single entity and how that entity was ultimately associated with early Christianity.

As with the persistence of the pagan/Christian dichotomy, the presumed relationship between Mithraism and Christianity has much to do with the history of Late Antique religious scholarship. Franz Cumont, who we have seen was the first major scholar to advocate for the existence of oriental religions, was also, not coincidentally, the father of Mithraic studies. Cumont's theories on the Anatolian origins for the Mithraic cult as well as his assumptions about

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<sup>361</sup> Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 109.

<sup>362</sup> Cf. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome, Volume I*, 247. One important reason for the parallel drawn between Mithraism and Christianity is that both developed contemporaneously; the deities worshipped in many of the other so-called mystery cults, by contrast, often had histories of worship preceding Christianity.

the religion's theology and liturgy have been problematized in recent years; specifically, it has become popular to trace the origins of Mithraism to Rome or Ostia, although most studies argue for an Anatolian presence in these two cities that helped translate a collection of Eastern religious practices into a single cult.<sup>363</sup> Nevertheless, in the preamble to one of his critiques, Roger Beck could not help but note only one decade ago that Cumont's work. '...remains the "default" account to which we tend to return...'<sup>364</sup> Cumont's first discussions of Mithraism predate his more general investigations of the oriental cults by a full decade; indeed, Mithraism in many ways was posited by Cumont as an archetype for other oriental mystery cults.<sup>365</sup> Since, according to Cumont, the mystery cults were sufficiently similar, he could generalise his expertise of Mithraism in order to make certain assumptions about the other mystery cults.

Cumont explains his 'universalist' assumption as follows:

All the Oriental religions assumed the form of mysteries. Their dignitaries were at the same time pontiffs of the Invincible Sun, fathers of Mithra, celebrants of the taurobolium of the Great Mother, prophets of Isis; in short, they had all titles imaginable. In their initiation, they received the revelation of an esoteric doctrine strengthened by their fervor. What was the theology they learned? Here also a certain dogmatic homogeneity had established itself.<sup>366</sup>

The assumed uniformity among the mystery cults—from Sol Invictus and Mithras to Cybele and Isis—allowed Cumont to exploit his expertise of Mithraism and read certain of his conclusions from *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* and *Les Mystères de Mithra* into the practice of oriental religions more generally; and, in a brilliant tautologous

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<sup>363</sup> Cf. Martin J. Vermaseren, 'Mithras in der Römerzeit', in Martin J. Vermaseren (ed.), *Die orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich* (Leiden, 1981), 96-103; Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras: Ein persisch-römischer Mysterieskult* (Berlin, 1994[1984]), 146-9; Manfred Clauss, *Cultores Mithrae: Die Anhängerschaft des Mithras-Kultes* (Stuttgart, 1992), 253-5. For a critique, see: Richard L. Gordon, 'Who worshipped Mithras?', *The Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7 (1994), 459-74.

<sup>364</sup> Roger Beck, 'The Mysteries of Mithras: A New Account of Their Genesis', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 88 (1998), 115.

<sup>365</sup> Cumont, *Textes et monuments*.

<sup>366</sup> Franz Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, trans. Grant Showerman (New York, 1956[1911]), 6. Note the implicit syncretism among oriental religions in the excerpt.

turn, Cumont looked to the other mystery cults in his earlier works to generate many of his assumptions about Mithraism's dogma and liturgy.<sup>367</sup> Such an argumentative strategy afforded Cumont a great deal of flexibility in interpretation since Mithraism lacks any documented liturgy. In spite of the paucity of textual evidence, Cumont nonetheless developed a theology for Mithraism that placed an emphasis on the Christian virtue of salvation and a liturgy based on personal worship. The oriental cults became the currency for constructing a Christianising narrative for Late Antique religion, and Cumont was the lead architect.

In addition to his comparisons between Mithraism and the other oriental mysteries, Cumont based his arguments on archaeological and art historical evidence, the first of which was being found during his life. Cumont participated in the excavations at Dura-Europos that located that city's Mithraeum, a site that was at the centre of many of his thoughts on the cult.<sup>368</sup> It is of course also at Dura-Europos that remains of a Jewish synagogue and a Christian baptistery, both with figural decoration, were found (Figures 1, 13, 14, 15). That the styles and iconographies of the wall paintings in all three buildings were similar and that the buildings stood at the same time provided the preliminary grounds for Cumont's connection of Christianity with Mithraism. Cumont wrote of the artistic similarities: '...[Mithraic] art, extremely refined despite its imperfections, exercised a lasting influence. It was united to Christian art...'<sup>369</sup> He likewise wrote of the presumed liturgical similarities:

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<sup>367</sup> Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithras*, trans. T.J. MacCormack (Chicago, 1903), 150-208. For critiques of Cumont's universalising assumptions, see especially: Richard Gordon, 'Franz Cumont and the Doctrines of Mithraism', in John R. Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies, Volume 1* (Manchester, 1975), 215-48.

<sup>368</sup> Franz Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos (1922-1923)* (Paris, 1926). See also: Franz Cumont, 'The Dura Mithraeum', trans. E.D. Francis, in *Mithraic Studies, Volume 1*, 151-214.

<sup>369</sup> Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithras*, 227.

On the other hand, the orthodox and heretical liturgies of Christianity, which gradually sprang up during the first centuries of our era, could find abundant inspiration in the Mithraic Mysteries, which of all the pagan religions offered the most affinity with Christian institutions.<sup>370</sup>

Cumont's arguments effectively accomplish two ends. First, under the banner of Mithraism, the eastern mystery cults are conflated into a single 'oriental' entity, juxtaposed with the 'occident.'<sup>371</sup> Second, through this act of conflation, Cumont is able to fit the 'mystery religions' within a gradual evolutionary trajectory that ultimately culminates in Christian triumph. The oriental mystery religions thus become an intermediate step from paganism towards a Christian *telos*. Although a number of works in the past several decades have greatly complicated Cumont's history of early Christian religious development,<sup>372</sup> these studies retain the same dualistic and teleological discursive strategy for interpreting Late Antique religion.

### The Core and the Periphery

In the past half-century a different framework has emerged for the study of Late Antique cult practice, one that replaces the 'personal piety' emphasised in the East/West framework with a statist notion of 'popular piety.'<sup>373</sup> Similarly dualistic, the alternative model analyses Late Roman religion through the relationship between 'core' and 'periphery.' Various other terms have been used in place of those chosen here but with largely the same effect. 'Core' has been

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<sup>370</sup> Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithras*, 195.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. Franz Cumont, 'Le Natalis Invicti', *Comptes rendue des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions Belles-Lettres* 55 (1911), 294-96; Franz Cumont, 'Review: *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Preliminary report of second Season Work*', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 11 (1932), 236; Franz Cumont, 'Rapport sur une mission archéologique à Doura-Europos', *Comptes rendue des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions Belles-Lettres* 78 (1934), 90-111.

<sup>372</sup> Cf. Roger L. Beck, 'Mithraism since Franz Cumont,' *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, Volume 3* (1984), 2002-114. For more recent work, see: John H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, 'The Expansion of Mithraism among the Cults of the Second Century', in John R. Hinnells (ed.), *Studies in Mithraism* (Rome, 1994), 195-216; Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, 1996); Richard L. Gordon, 'The end of Mithraism in the North-western provinces', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 12 (1999), 682-8.

<sup>373</sup> For an important example focusing on 'personal piety' in an earlier period, see: André-Jean Festugière, *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (Berkeley, 1954).

variously replaced with ‘centre,’ ‘capital,’ or, more generally, ‘city’; ‘periphery’ has been most often associated with the ‘provincial.’ More recently, ‘global’ and ‘local’ have emerged as a similar terminology, albeit one that is employed in a different strategy of argumentation.<sup>374</sup> The terms ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ were chosen over the alternatives for their explicit association with ‘world-systems theory,’ a Marxist framework developed in the 1970s, most notably by Immanuel Wallerstein.<sup>375</sup> Although Wallerstein does not feature in many bibliographies, the legacy of world-systems theory remains unmistakably part of the scholarship on Late Antique religion.<sup>376</sup> Marxism, it should be said though, has served as the framework for some scholarship for political rather than functional reasons.<sup>377</sup>

The reason for the adoption of a world-systems perspective may be attributable largely to the attractiveness of the model. As Wallerstein conceived of it, a world-system is:

... a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence. Its life is made up of the conflicting forces which hold it together by tension and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage. It has the characteristics of an organism, in that it has a life-span over which its characteristics change in some respects and

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<sup>374</sup> Cf. Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* (London, 2005); Mark Humphries, ‘The Shapes and Shaping of the Late Antique World: Global and Local Perspectives’ in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, 97-109; Simon Goldhill, ‘What is local identity? The politics of cultural mapping’, in *Local Knowledge and Microidentities*, 46-68; Greg Woolf, ‘Afterword: the local and the global in the Graeco-Roman east’, in *Local Knowledge and Microidentities*, 189-200. See also ‘The Periphery and the Core’ sub-section below.

<sup>375</sup> See especially: Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York, 1974-89). See also: Greg Woolf, ‘World systems analysis and the Roman empire’, *The Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3 (1990), 44-58; John Rich and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (eds.), *City and Country in the Ancient World* (London, 1992); Andreas Bendlin, ‘Peripheral Centres—Central Peripheries: Religious Communication in the Roman Empire’, in Hubert Cancik and Jörg Rüpke (eds.), *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion* (Tübingen, 1997), 35-68; Penelope Goodman, *The Roman City and Its Periphery: From Rome to Gaul* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>376</sup> As Robert Browning writes on the opening page of *The Emperor Julian* (Berkeley, 1976), historians from Gibbon and Rostovtzeff to Jones and Brown ‘...do not form a school. Indeed their disagreements are many and fundamental. But they have in common an awareness of the new insights into the workings of human communities furnished by the social sciences. They have been influenced by the currents of thought associated with Max Weber and Karl Marx, without nailing the colours of either to their masthead.’ Also of note is a strand of philosophical materialism in the study of Christianity dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans (London, 1854[1848]).

<sup>377</sup> Browning was himself an active member of the Communist Party. Other scholars used Late Antiquity as a site for Marxist apologetics. See especially: Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 2000[1974]); Geoffrey E.M. de Ste. Croix (with additions by Michael Whitby and Joseph Streecher), *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom and Orthodoxy* (Oxford, 2006).

remain stable in others. One can define its structures as being at different times strong or weak in terms of the internal logic of its functioning.<sup>378</sup>

Wallerstein directly relates this structure to the Roman Empire when he writes:

World-system analysis argues that there have been thus far only two varieties of world-systems: world-economies and world-empires. A world-empire (examples, the Roman Empire, Han China) is a large bureaucratic structure with a single political center and an axial division of labor, but multiple cultures.<sup>379</sup>

World-systems theory thus allows for the existence of multiple, competing cultures within its broader unit of analysis, the state. Power is structured hierarchically and is tightly centralized. Such models—including, as we have seen, Gibbon's—tend towards top-down approaches that fit religion into a discourse on empire. Religion, in these readings, is not an important institution in itself but a vehicle for expressing the power of some central authority (either explicitly or implicitly). In the same way 'oriental' cults were homogenised from an 'occidental' perspective or pagan religions were conflated on the basis of difference from Christianity, so too the world-systems perspective (over)emphasizes one half of its binary opposition—the core—at the expense of the periphery.

None of this is to suggest that the history of Late Roman religion in the provinces has been completely avoided. Provincial religion finds mention in Pauly-Wissowa's *Real-Encyclopädie* and was the focus of Toutain's early (and pioneering) work on provincial cults in both the east and the west.<sup>380</sup> At least one monograph from the 1920s focuses on domestic cult worship on Delos,<sup>381</sup> and other work around that time began to focus on the imperial cult in the

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<sup>378</sup> Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 347.

<sup>379</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, 'World-Systems Analysis', in George Modelski (ed.), *World System History*, (Paris, 2004), sample chapter (<http://www.uop.edu.jo/download/PdfCourses/SA/E6-94-01.pdf>).

<sup>380</sup> Hubert Cancik, Helmuth Schneider, Manfred Landfester, and Christine F. Salazar (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* (Leiden, 2006); Toutain, *Les Cultes païens dans l'Empire romain*.

<sup>381</sup> Marcel Bulard, *La religion domestique dans la Colonie Italienne de Délos* (Paris, 1926).

provinces.<sup>382</sup> Most studies of the provincial manifestation of emperor worship are concerned more with the imperial cult as the object of study than the local articulation of the deified ruler. It has not been until the past decade, as we will see below, that the provinces have become a subject of inquiry that stand on their own.<sup>383</sup>

The marginalisation of the provinces in discussions of Late Antique religion can be attributed to three factors. First, comparative analyses of provincial religion were handicapped by a lack of evidence until recently. The lack of evidence, of course, is due to an archaeological interest in ‘major’ sites, which are inevitably cities (i.e., cores). Over time, more epigraphic and archaeological evidence from the ‘peripheries’ has come to light, which has facilitated more detailed discussions of cult practice in the provinces; Toutain’s work remains the extraordinary early exception for its collation of what was, at the time of publication, a very difficult set of data to collate and make sense of.

Second, as already mentioned, world-systems theory discounts the importance of religion. It is important to distinguish between a lack of early scholarship on provincial religion and a lack of early scholarship on the provinces in general. Indeed, the provinces were an important area of analysis for political, social, and economic studies. As Peter Beyer explains in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, a world-system, which is fundamentally a Marxist construction, ‘...treats religion as secondary and derivative.’<sup>384</sup> Many studies of Late Antique

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<sup>382</sup> Cf. William Warde Fowler, *Roman Ideas of Deity in the Last Century before the Christian Era* (London, 1914), 107-33; Ernst Kornemann, *Neue Dokumente zum lakonischen Kaiserkult* (Breslau, 1929).

<sup>383</sup> For a later but still early exception, see Robert Étienne, *Le culte impérial dans la péninsule ibérique* (Paris, 1958). For more recent examples, see: Cancik and Rüpke (eds.), *Römische Reichsreligion*; Richard Talbert, ‘Rome’s provinces as framework for world-view’, in Luuk de Ligt, Emily A. Hemelrijk, and Hek W. Signor (eds.), *Roman Rule and Civic Life: Local and Regional Perspectives* (Amsterdam, 2004), 21-37; Christopher Howgego, ‘Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces’, in Christopher Howgego, Volker Heuchert and Andrew Burnett (eds.), *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces* (Oxford, 2007[2005]), 1-18.

<sup>384</sup> Peter Beyer, ‘World-System Theory’, in William H. Swatos, Jr. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Walnut Creek, 1998), 561.

religion that adopt a world-system perspective are, fittingly, chapters of larger books or edited volumes that place religion in its political and economic context.<sup>385</sup>

Third, what publications there are on religion in specific provinces have been almost uniformly interested until the past decade in either the concept of civic religion or the imperial cult.<sup>386</sup> In each case, the study of the province(s) remains part of a top-down framework concerned only with the ways that how Roman institutions worked to replicate Late Roman power relations. The model of civic religion—that is, the theory that religion was orchestrated by and subservient to the state or municipality—has tended to argue that the dominant religious experience of the Roman world existed in the public cults of a given community. More often than not, that ‘community’ was the city. For this reason, Greg Woolf (in a critique of the approach) has introduced the term ‘*polis*-religion’ to Late Antique studies to refer to such theories.<sup>387</sup> *Polis*, of course, refers to the Greek city-state and not the Roman municipality, but Woolf’s terminology has been adopted by some for its helpful emphasis on the city as the unit of religious analysis.<sup>388</sup>

The foundation on which civic religious scholarship was built can be largely attributed to John North and especially to Mary Beard.<sup>389</sup> In part as an attempt to combat the Christianising

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<sup>385</sup> Cf. Arnold H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Baltimore, 1986[1964]), chap. 23; Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, chap. 5; Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395-600* (Cambridge, 1993), chap. 3; Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Late Roman Empire, AD 284-641: The Transformation of the Ancient World* (Malden, 2007), chap. 7.

<sup>386</sup> For a discussion, see: Clifford Ando, ‘Imperial Identities’, in *Local Knowledge and Microidentities*, 17-45.

<sup>387</sup> Cf. Greg Woolf, ‘*Polis*-Religion and its Alternatives in the Roman Provinces’, in *Römische Reichsreligion*, 71-84. For the most influential articulation of the *polis*-religion model, see: Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘Further Aspects of *Polis* Religion’, *Annali di Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli, Sezione di Archeologia e Storia Antica* 10 (1988), 259-74.

<sup>388</sup> Cf. Beate Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (Oxford, 2002), esp. 1-13; Rives, ‘Graeco-Roman Religion in the Roman Empire’, 268-9. For the applicability of the term ‘*polis*’ see: Clifford Ando, ‘Was Rome a polis?’, *Classical Antiquity* 18 (1999), 5-34. For the *polis* as an agent of interaction, see: John Ma, *Antiochus III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor* (Oxford, 2002[2000]), 179-242.

<sup>389</sup> Cf. John A. North, ‘Conservatism and Change in Roman Religion’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 41 (1976) 1-12; John A. North, ‘Religious Toleration in Republican Rome’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological*

tendency to interpret religion as a private and personal devotional enterprise, Beard championed three influential arguments.<sup>390</sup> First, the primary locus of Roman religious worship was the public cult. Second, public cults perpetuated a set of hierarchical power relations that mimicked the structure of the political system. And third, political power was inextricably linked with religious power. These arguments have become axiomatic in the years following Beard's espousal of civic religion as a framework for understanding Roman worship; so much so that some scholars have advocated that religious change can be understood as a function of the collapse (or emergence) of a civic religion.<sup>391</sup>

One of the key topics that advocates of a civic religious framework marshal to illustrate the politicisation of religion (or the religiousisation of politics) is what has come to be known as 'euergetism'—i.e., the donation of gifts (usually to the city) in exchange for public honour.<sup>392</sup> Euergetism, which often took the form of donations to cult centres (or the construction of them), can be seen as a religious means for elite members of society to command and retain power.<sup>393</sup> Donations were often a requirement of members of the priesthood—a requirement that would have prevented non-elite individuals from partaking in religious officialdom; thus, in addition to serving the purpose of materialising political power, euergetism further 'embedded' religion

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*Society* 25 (1979), 199-219; Mary Beard and John A. North (eds.), *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, 1990).

<sup>390</sup> For applications of these arguments in Beard's scholarship, see especially: 'The Roman and the Foreign: The Cult of the "Great Mother" in Imperial Rome', in Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (eds.), *Shamanism, History, and the State* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 164-90; *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. 257-86.

<sup>391</sup> Cf. John A. North, 'The Development of Religious Pluralism', in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians*, 174-93; James B. Rives, 'The Decree Decius and the Roman Empire', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1995), 135-54.

<sup>392</sup> See especially: Paul Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque* (Paris, 1976). See also: Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1978), 27-53.

<sup>393</sup> Cf. Richard L. Gordon, 'The Veil of Power: Emperors, Sacrificers and Benefactors', in *Pagan Priests*, 201-31; James B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford, 1995), 100-73. Christa Frateantonio, *Religiöse Autonomie der Stadt im Imperium Romanum* (Tübingen, 2003), 153-8.

within politics by functionally excluding those without financial resources from priestly (i.e., elite religious) standing.<sup>394</sup>

Although civic religion has been a useful model for the study of Roman religion, it has not been immune to critique. The most frequent complaint about civic religion is its almost complete dismissal of private devotion as a ‘Christianizing’ impulse.<sup>395</sup> The imposition of ‘unlikeness’ on paganism (vis-à-vis Christianity) has overstated the differences between paganism and Christianity. In so doing, the focus on public cult, which ironically was meant as a counterpoint to what Beard and other early advocates saw as an overemphasis on personal devotion, has itself been absolutised and reified the notion of religion as a tool of the state.

The other major area of Roman religious scholarship that features an abundant literature on the subservience of religion to a political agenda has been the cult of the emperor. The imperial cult has been an important component of Roman religious scholarship for nearly a century.<sup>396</sup> A number of early studies have focused on emperor worship in Rome or in other major cities of the Empire,<sup>397</sup> but unlike other areas of inquiry, scholarship on the imperial cult seems to have been more interested in the provinces than other areas in the past fifty years. Two landmark studies on the imperial cult in the late 1950s—Lucien Cerfaux and Julien Tondriau’s *Le culte des souverains* and Robert Étienne’s *Le culte impérial dans la péninsule ibérique*—

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<sup>394</sup> Cf. Angelos Chaniotis, ‘Negotiating religion in the cities of the eastern Roman empire’ *Kernos* 16 (2003), 177-90; Matthias Haake, ‘Philosopher and Priest: The Image of the Intellectual and the Social Practice of the Elites in the Eastern Roman Empire (First-Third Centuries AD)’, in Beate Dignas and Kai Tampedach (eds.), *Practitioners of the Divine: Greek Priests and Religious Officials from Homer to Heliodorus* (Cambridge, 2008), 145-65.

<sup>395</sup> Cf. Woolf, ‘*Polis*-Religion and its Alternatives in the Roman Provinces’; Andreas Bendlin, ‘Rituals or Beliefs? “Religion” and the Religious Life of Rome’, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 20 (2001), 191-208; Charles King, ‘The Organization of Roman Religious Beliefs’, *Classical Antiquity* 22 (2003), 275-312.

<sup>396</sup> Cf. Henry F. Burton, ‘The Worship of the Roman Emperors’, *Biblical World* 40 (1912), 80-91; J.S. Reid, ‘Roman Ideas of Deity’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 6 (1916), 170-184; Martin P. Charlesworth, ‘Some Observations on the Ruler-Cult Especially in Rome’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 28 (1935), 5-44; Lily R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, 1931); Arthur D. Nock, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (Stuttgart, 1936); Dionis M. Pippidi, *Recherches sur le culte impérial* (Bucharest, 1939).

<sup>397</sup> Émile Beurlier, *Le culte impérial: Son histoire et son organisation depuis Auguste jusqu’à Justinien* (Paris, 1891); John A. Moore, *The Worship of the Roman Emperors in the Province of Britain* (Chicago, 1903); Louis M. Sweet, *Roman Emperor Worship* (Boston, 1919), 84-93.

began this tradition.<sup>398</sup> Even in more recent decades many influential scholars have continued to discuss the imperial cult in regional contexts. Simon Price's and Steven Friesen's works on Asia Minor, Duncan Fishwick's and Ittai Gradel's works on the Latin West, and Manfred Clauss' Italian focus provide a few exemplary cases.<sup>399</sup>

In keeping with a world-systems perspective, the provincial manifestations of the imperial cult have been interpreted an expression of the core's power over the periphery. For this reason, the presence of the imperial cult is often used as the currency for a discourse about the process of 'Romanisation.'<sup>400</sup> Scholarship in the past few decades, however, has come to question the applicability of Romanisation as a framework for understanding the relationship between the core and the periphery. In contrast to the top-down approach so often found in the scholarship on the imperial cult, these new developments, which espouse a bottom-up model that accommodates local diversity and 'religious pluralism,' are a necessary rejoinder to world-systems frameworks.<sup>401</sup> By drawing on insights from post-colonial theory in relation to the

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<sup>398</sup> Cf. Robert Étienne, *Le culte impérial dans la péninsule ibérique*; Lucien Cerfeaux and Julien Tondriau, *Le culte des souverains* (Paris, 1957); See also: Jean Beaujeu, *La religion romaine à l'apogée de l'Empire* (Paris, 1955).

<sup>399</sup> See especially: Simon Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1984); Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden, 1991); Manfred Clauss, *Kaiser und Gott: Herrscherkult im römischen Reich* (Munich, 2001[1999]), esp. 387-419; Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2004[2002]); Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult of the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire, 3 Volumes* (Leiden, 1987-2005).

<sup>400</sup> Cf. Theodore Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire: The European Provinces*, ed. Thomas R.S. Broughton (Chicago, 1968 [1885]); Francis Haverfield, *The Romanization of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1915); Marcel Bénabou, *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation* (Paris, 1976); Martin Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain* (London, 1984), 20-51; Cartwright C. Haselgrove, 'The Romanization of Belgic Gaul: Some Archaeological Perspectives', in Thomas C.F. Blagg and Martin Millett (eds.), *The Early Roman Empire in the West* (Oxford 2002[1990]), 45-71; Martin Millett, *The Romanization of Britain: An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation* (Cambridge, 2003[1990]); Alain Cadotte, *La Romanisation des Dieux: L'Interpretatio romana en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire* (Leiden, 2007). For more nuanced accounts, see: William van Andringa, 'Religions and the Integration of Cities in the Empire in the Second Century AD: The Creation of a Common Religious Language', in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, 83-95; Günther Schörner, *Romanisierung: Theoretische Modelle und praktische Fallbeispiele* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>401</sup> Cf. North, 'The Development of Religious Pluralism.' For the perspective of a scholar writing primarily about early Christianity, see: Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1996), x-xi. However, see: Stephen G. Wilson, 'Dissidents and Defectors: The Limits of Pluralism', in Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett and Kari Syreeni (eds.), *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity*,

colonial and ‘globalized’ Roman Empire, these more recent discussions of Late Roman religion recast the unit of analysis from the core to the periphery and from the state to the individual.

### The Periphery and the Core

The movement of the discourse to the Roman provinces and the shift in focus to local agency has been explained through an analogy to the (post-)modern process of ‘glocalisation’,<sup>402</sup> which suggests that local diversity is an inherent product of globalising forces. Tim Whitmarsh puts it eloquently in the introduction to a recent and thoughtful contribution:

Yet we also need to nuance the idea of a trend towards general homogenization. At one level, certainly, we see as a general trend, towards a pan-imperial culture... But the strengthening of political ties to Rome did not mean all aspects of local identity were weakened. If anything—and here the analogy to modern ‘glocalisation’ is particularly apposite—centralisation fostered an increased sense of regional diversity. The local and the imperial were two sides of the same coin...<sup>403</sup>

An empowerment of provincial agency is embedded in Whitmarsh’s explanation of how local identity interacted with the centralised forces of the Roman Empire. As he explains earlier in the same chapter:

An account of local identity cannot be written without an awareness of the ‘globalising’ forces that create, structure, and (to an extent) oppose it. We should, indeed, as the advertisers advise us, never underestimate the *power* of local knowledge, both the power that stimulates it and that which it generates.<sup>404</sup>

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*Essays in Honor of Heikki Räsänen* (Leiden, 2002), 441-56. For a more general but related account of Republican Rome, see: Andreas Bendlin, ‘Looking beyond the Civic Compromise: religious pluralism in late republican Rome’, in Edward Bingham and Christopher J. Smith (eds.), *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy* (Edinburgh, 2000), 115-35.

<sup>402</sup> Cf. Roland Robertson, ‘Globalization or glocalization?’, *Journal of International Communication* 1 (1994), 33-52.

<sup>403</sup> Cf. Tim Whitmarsh, ‘Thinking Local’, in Tim Whitmarsh (ed.), *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World* (Cambridge, 2010), 10.

<sup>404</sup> Whitmarsh, ‘Thinking Local’, in *Local Knowledge*, 3-4.

Of particular note is Whitmarsh's admission that local identity, at least to some extent, 'opposes' the process of globalisation. As the subsequent chapters of the volume Whitmarsh introduces make clear, the broader argument implied by the excerpt above is that Roman provincial identity mediated imperial identity.<sup>405</sup> Whitmarsh's argumentation, and the other scholarship that works in this tradition, has provided fresh and important insights into the dynamics of Roman society, politics, and religion by inverting (and subverting) earlier frameworks and empowering the marginalised component the core/periphery dichotomisation.

The emergence of new approaches like Whitmarsh's has to do with two related developments. First, the preceding move to a world-systems perspective and its corresponding focus on 'Romanisation' began a discourse on 'process.'<sup>406</sup> Second, the emergence of a set of post-modern and, more specifically, post-colonial theories that emphasised the dynamism and multidimensionality of 'process' suggested that concepts such as Romanisation (and Christianisation) were overly simplistic.<sup>407</sup> Romanisation, in its very name, encodes top-down influence from the Rome. Post-modern theories, by contrast, tend towards bottom-up analyses of individual or local agency. Such theories combat the uniformity of centralised structures with the alterity and diversity of local traditions. The similarity between such theories and the post-

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<sup>405</sup> Cf. Ando, 'Imperial Identities'; Maud Gleason, 'Making space for bicultural identity: Herodes Atticus commemorates Regilla', in *Local Knowledge and Microidentities*, 125-62; Woolf, 'Afterword'.

<sup>406</sup> Jan Slofstra, 'An anthropological approach to the study of romanization processes', in Roel Brandt and Jan Slofstra (eds.), *Roman and native in the Low Countries: Spheres of interaction* (Oxford, 1983), 71-104; Greg Woolf, 'Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity, and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40 (1994), 116-43; Ton Derks, *Gods, Temples, and Ritual Practices: The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam, 1998), esp. 1-26. See also the discussion above on 'Christianisation' as a process.

<sup>407</sup> Cf. Richard Hingley, 'The Legacy of Rome: The Rise, Decline and Fall of the Theory of Romanization', in Jane Webster and Nicholas J. Cooper (eds.), *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives* (Leicester, 1996), 35-48; Dirk Krause, 'Farewell to romanization?', *Archaeological Dialogues* 8 (2001), 8-15; Jane Webster, 'Creolizing the Roman Provinces', *American Journal of Archaeology* 105 (2001), 209-25; Patrick Le Roux, 'La romanisation en question', *Annales* 59 (2004), 287-311.

modern discourse on the ‘Other’ is of note; in the Periphery/Core model, the normally ‘othered’ provinces are empowered.<sup>408</sup>

While the focus on the provinces as an ‘Other’ is a new development, scholarship on Roman religion in the provinces has a long history. Early examples, in addition to those already cited, include Roy Merle Peterson’s *Cults of Campania* and Herbert J. Rose’s *Primitive Culture in Italy*.<sup>409</sup> Early studies with a narrower local focus included Lily Ross Taylor’s *Local Cults of Etruria*, Irene Rosenzweig’s *Ritual and Cults of Pre-Roman Iguvium*, and Jérôme Carcopino’s *Virgile et les origines d’Ostie*.<sup>410</sup> Despite these origins, only in the past decade did religion in the provinces become a central focus of scholarship. Particularly noteworthy examples include David Frankfurter’s *Religion in Roman Egypt*, Ton Derks’ *Gods Temples and Ritual Practices*, and Nicole Belayche’s *Iudaea-Palestina*.<sup>411</sup> The newer religious scholarship has been concerned primarily with how centralised religious institutions like the imperial cult have been blended with local traditions. Such scholarship has already produced several important correctives, most notably the degree of flexibility in Roman imperial rule and the tremendous amount of variation among what were once considered fairly uniform institutions and cults.<sup>412</sup>

In the context of religion, therefore, most scholarship has been interested in untangling the role that autochthonous cults played in mediating (or transgressing) imperial institutions.

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<sup>408</sup> For an introduction to ideas of the ‘Other’, see: Edward E. Sampson, *Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature, Psychology, Gender, and Theory* (Boulder, 1993).

<sup>409</sup> Roy M. Peterson, *Cults of Campania* (Rome, 1919); H.J. Rose, *Primitive Culture in Italy* (London, 1926).

<sup>410</sup> Jerome Carcopino, *Virgile et les origines d’Ostie* (Paris, 1919); Lily R. Taylor, *Local Cults of Etruria* (Rome, 1923); Irene Rosenzweig, *Ritual and Cults of Pre-Roman Iguvium* (London, 1937).

<sup>411</sup> Derks, *Gods, Temples and Ritual Practice*; David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998); Nicole Belayche, *Iudaea-Palestina: The Pagan Cults of Roman Palestine* (Tübingen, 2001).

<sup>412</sup> See also: Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2000); Rebecca Preston, ‘Roman questions, Greek answers: Plutarch and the construction of identity’, in Simon Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge, 2001), 86-119; Barbara Burrell, *Neokoroi: Greek Cities and Roman Emperors* (Leiden, 2004), esp. 372-74.

Whereas earlier approaches attempt to find areas of religious similarity, post-modern theories prefer to highlight diversity within an Empire that has tended to be reified as monolithic. By decentralising the focus of scholarship the religious diversity in the Late Roman Empire has come into sharper focus. What has emerged, in other words, is variation between ‘peripheries’ themselves rather than simply between the ‘core’ and the ‘periphery’—a process that corresponds closely to the variation that emerged within Christianity and paganism as the spectral model replaced its more dichotomous predecessor.

Post-modernism has problematized both the imperial focus and the homogenisation of the provinces inherent in a world-systems framework. Although the application of post-modern theories has only recently emerged, the literature utilising such approaches is prolific. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to catalogue all of the contributions to this field, but the most influential deserve special mention. One of the first attempts to resituate the focus of scholarship on Roman religion to the provinces was undertaken in the mid-1970s by Marcel Bénabou in *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation*.<sup>413</sup> In *La Résistance*, Bénabou suggests that resistance in Africa to the Roman Empire took one of two forms—military or religious—and in the latter case a Roman cult could be syncretised with a local deity. Thus, for example, Bacchus becomes ‘Bacchus-Chadrapha,’ a variety of Bacchus whose attributes reflected ‘African values.’<sup>414</sup> Bénabou was in many respects well ahead of the field, and with several exceptions, the topic of local and provincial agency did not feature in the literature in any substantial way for another twenty years.<sup>415</sup> In the late 1990s, two particularly thoughtful studies appeared, each of

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<sup>413</sup> In all likelihood, it is not a coincidence that Bénabou’s conclusions map closely onto the contemporaneous political situation in Algeria. For a gentle critique that keys in on this observation, see: Thébert Yvon, ‘Romanisation et déromanisation en Afrique: histoire décolonisée ou histoire inversée’, *Annales* 33 (1978), 79-80.

<sup>414</sup> Bénabou, *La Résistance africaine*, 354.

<sup>415</sup> For one notable exception, see: Kurt A. Raaflaub (ed.), *Opposition et résistances à l'Empire d'Auguste à Trajan* (Geneva, 1987), within which, see especially: Glen W. Bowersock, ‘The Mechanics of Subversion in the Roman Provinces’, 291-320.

which dealt with provincial power relations. The first of the two, an edited volume entitled *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism*, was particularly valuable both for its deconstruction and critique of the concept of Romanisation and its case studies on Britain, Greece, and North Africa.<sup>416</sup> The second book, Greg Woolf's *Becoming Roman*, surveys the process by which the Gallic collective memory became 'Romanized' (although 'classicized' is probably more accurate) but is perhaps most valuable for its critiques of the processes both of 'Romanisation' and its obverse, 'resistance,' a concept which only serves to entrench an implicit imperialism.<sup>417</sup>

These two studies and the many that have followed them share an underlying argument: that the process of religious interaction was more complicated than the core/periphery model, or indeed the periphery/core model, would suggest. Roman culture cannot be dichotomised easily into a centre and a province, into the imperial and the local. Scholars have borrowed a number of terms from post-modern and post-colonial discourse to describe the process of Roman cultural interaction including 'acculturation,' 'creolisation,' 'pluralism,' and 'syncretism.'<sup>418</sup> While all of these terms have been used numerous times, the underlying model shared by the scholars who use these terms is that Late Roman religion is best characterised by its 'hybridity.'<sup>419</sup> The use of hybridity as a model is indebted to the articulation of the concept by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.<sup>420</sup> Bhabha explains hybridity as an alternative to 'multiculturalism' and

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<sup>416</sup> David J. Mattingly (ed.), *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: Power, Discourse, and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), within which, see especially: Philip W.M. Freeman, 'Mommsen through to Haverfield: The origins of Romanization studies in late 19th-century Britain', 27-50; John C. Barrett, 'Romanization: A Critical Moment', 51-65.

<sup>417</sup> Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998), 8-14.

<sup>418</sup> Cf. Webster, 'Creolizing the Roman Provinces', 209-25; Jane Webster, 'Necessary Comparisons: A Post-Colonial Approach to Religious Syncretism in the Roman Provinces', *World Archaeology* 28 (1999), 324-38.

<sup>419</sup> For an explicit mention, see: Daniel Boyarin and Virginia Burrus, 'Hybridity as Subversion of Orthodoxy? Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity', *Social Compass* 52 (2005), 431-41.

<sup>420</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994).

‘cultural diversity’ that inscribes difference in the process of articulation.<sup>421</sup> That is, cultural difference is determined by shifting boundaries that are constantly reformed rather than by essentialised differences between groups that are replicated through a social order. In the context of Late Antique religion, religious difference is not a *reflection* of political or social difference so much as it is a *proclamation* of it. Difference is active; ‘hybridity’ as a concept attributes agency to the subversive actor, which in the Late Antique religious landscape was the ‘non-imperial.’ The notion of hybridity as Bhabha explains it is not the result but the process of becoming hybridized. Hybridity on its surface would seem to be the perfect framework for what could be called the ‘processual turn’ in Roman religious scholarship that began with and then transcended ‘Christianisation’ and ‘Romanisation.’

Although the shift to a focus on the relations of Roman cults and Roman socio-political groups represents a huge methodological step, there are two important problems that remain unresolved. First, although almost all the post-modern scholarship emphasizes the process of interaction, very little inspects variation within processes. The diversity of *types of religious interaction* will be conceptually framed below and elaborated in the following chapter. Second, even using a nuanced post-modern theory to avoid simple dichotomies, notions of hybrid identities—religious, political, social, or otherwise—rest on a process negotiated between the same reified pairings developed by world-systems theory. While post-modernism empowers the local, the local is still in competition with the global. As Greg Woolf explains, local identities: ‘arise, or acquire their content, in relation to wider contexts...’<sup>422</sup> That the forces interacting in the process of hybridisation are characterised as a pair whose halves resist and contest one

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<sup>421</sup> The inscription of difference has a long academic and political history. For a recent study introducing the problematic historiography of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship on difference, see: Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933-1935*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New Haven, 2009[2005]), esp. 228 f.

<sup>422</sup> Woolf, ‘Afterword’, 191-192.

another, despite the knowledge that such a framework is reductive, implies that the theoretical apparatus employed in the study of Roman religion needs to be rethought.

### Deconstructing Dualism

In *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, in his discussion of Roman religion between AD 100 and 450 (a period that maps closely onto the one studied here), Jaś Elsner discusses the roles of ‘differentiation’ and ‘syncretism.’<sup>423</sup> Although the processes may seem to work against one another, Elsner rightly points out that the two worked at least in parallel and, in many cases, in tandem in Late Antiquity. Elsner’s observation in its way addresses the two critiques of most processual methodologies. On the one hand, the existence of ‘differentiated’ and ‘syncretic’ interactions speaks to more than one form of connection between cults. On the other, by choosing ‘Differentiation and syncretism: cultic creations of meaning’ as the title for the section in which he discusses the two modes of interaction, Elsner implies the reason for dualism’s persistence in the narrative of Roman religion.

In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida argues that in any binary opposition, the first term is conceived as the superior term while the second is seen as subordinate and derivative, a trend evidenced by the models discussed thus far. Elsner (and any other number of commentators) certainly believe in the importance of syncretism in the Late Antique religious landscape, but differentiation appears to be afforded primary status. Whether in the earlier spectral model or the more nuanced processual approaches, the combination of entities in this model is thought to

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<sup>423</sup> Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 211-221.

produce a new entity with a unique set of characteristics. Syncretism begets differentiation, which, in this scheme, is, the final product of religious interaction.<sup>424</sup> As Elsner puts it:

[Late Antiquity] was (in religious and artistic terms) a kind of melting pot where all the traditions of antiquity—from centre to periphery, from élite to relatively plebeian—were thrown together, combined, redefined, and adapted, ultimately to produce something both wonderfully new and at the same time deeply indebted to the Classical heritage. That new product would be the Christianity, and the arts, of the middle ages.<sup>425</sup>

What is particularly interesting about the process articulated by Elsner is its end-result. The very next words in the text, which comprise the title for the succeeding section, are ‘Christian triumph: a new religion as a state cult.’<sup>426</sup> The processes of syncretism and differentiation in this case result in a Christianity that certainly has pagan elements but is explicitly unique. Elsner’s Christianity is not a *telos* in the same way as it is in the pagan/Christian, east/west, and (to a lesser extent) core/periphery frameworks, but *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph* is teleological in the way that any history must be.<sup>427</sup> Local and hyper-local studies in the periphery/core tradition do not work towards the emergence of Christianity, but they do work towards a new *Gestalt* of the imperial and the provincial that is different from what existed before. In that sense, despite the newfound focus on process, the *type of process* imagined for Late Antique religions has remained largely unchanged. Elements of religions recombine to form new cults. *Differentiation* is the end-result of a dynamic historical process, and the differentiated product in religion has been seen, more often than not, as Christianity.

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<sup>424</sup> For a discussion of the convergence of differentiation and repetition, see especially: Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London, 1994 [1968]); Gilles Deleuze, ‘Plato and the Simulacrum’, trans. Rosalind Kraus, *October 27* (1983), 52 ff.

<sup>425</sup> Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 221.

<sup>426</sup> Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 221.

<sup>427</sup> The reason for a Christian *telos* in *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph* is that Christianity is taken as the topic of study. For a discussion of the importance of a ‘single systematic viewpoint’ on history, see: Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven, 1984), 32.

This markedly historicist process, like many historical methods, is indebted to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.<sup>428</sup> Hegel's influence on Roman religious history is most notable for its teleological dialectic and its concomitant emphasis on the process of development. Hegel's dialectic is most often described as the process by which a thesis and an antithesis are resolved in a synthesis. The synthesis, in turn, becomes the next thesis for another round of what Hegel calls 'sublation.' In point of fact, the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' terminology was not developed by Hegel—his was more sophisticated.<sup>429</sup>

Hegel identified two different types of dialectic, which he conflates under the banner of *Geist*. The two dialectics, while broadly similar, are slightly different in their operation. The first dialectic, introduced in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is Hegel's famous master/slave dialectic by which two self-conscious beings meet and battle each other until one succeeds at the expense of the other. Crucially, however, the 'master' and the 'slave' do not continue unchanged; they enter into a reciprocal relationship where the consciousness of each is defined in relation to their struggle and to the other. In Hegel's terminology, the master's dominance is 'mediated' by the slave's acknowledgement of his/her status as slave (and vice-versa). Echoes of the pagan/Christian model of Roman religion, especially in the literature concerned with early Christian martyrs during the pre-Constantinian era, are conspicuously audible.<sup>430</sup> Spectral

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<sup>428</sup> For Hegel's influence on Marx, see: Tony Smith, *The Logic of Marx's Capital: Replies to Hegelian Criticisms* (Albany, 1990), 3-42. On Hegel's influence on art history, see: Ernst H. Gombrich, "'The Father of Art History': A Reading of the *Lectures on Aesthetics* of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831)", *Tributes: Interpreters of Our Cultural Tradition* (Ithaca, 1984), 51-69.

<sup>429</sup> The terminology was first proposed by Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus in *Historische Entwicklung der spekulativen Philosophie von Kant bis Hegel* (Dresden, 1837). However, it was Johann Gottlieb Fichte who popularised the terminology in his lectures. See especially: Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (South Bend, 1978[1966]), 168.

<sup>430</sup> Cf. J.P. Waltzing, *Le crime rituel reproché aux chrétiens du IIe siècle* (Brussels, 1925); Geoffrey E.M. de Ste. Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?', *Past and Present* 26 (1963), 6-38; Timothy D. Barnes, 'The Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum*', *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), 509-531; Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*; James B. Rives, 'The Piety of a Persecutor', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), 1-25; Christopher Hass, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, 1997); Michele Renee

approaches moved early, clumsier models towards an interest in process, but even those more sophisticated theories treated paganism as the slave and Christianity as the master in a bitter death struggle that ended with an inevitable Christian triumph.

Although the master/slave dialectic is nominally focused on the interaction of discrete consciousnesses, Hegel's understanding of a mediated relationship between master and slave pointed towards his later conception of dialectic as a general process driving historical change.<sup>431</sup> Hegel's philosophy of history has underlying it a notion that change occurs through the transformation of a cultural/societal consciousness (*Geist*) through a dialectic that Hegel termed 'immediate-mediated-concrete.' The 'immediate'—that is, the present state—is 'mediated' (or 'negated') by some other entity or force resulting in a new, 'concrete' reality. The archetypal articulation of this dialectic was expressed in *The Science of Logic* when Hegel explained 'existence' as result of the dialectical opposition of 'Being' and 'Nothingness'—a negation that resulted in 'Becoming.'

The processual turn in Roman religious scholarship is clearly indebted to Hegel's theories. One entity—whether the west, the periphery, or later the core—is mediated by its opposite to create a new religious tradition. Following Hegel, scholars of Roman religion know how the historical process ended and thus fit their theories to the outcome. What results is both dialectical and teleological; Christianity, a Romanized province, or a unique local tradition emerges from the mediation of one component of the dialectic with the other. Although different narratives produce different 'concrete' outputs, the structure of the process remains the same.

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Salzman, 'Rethinking Pagan-Christian Violence', in Harold A. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot, 2006), 265-85.

<sup>431</sup> Georg W.F. Hegel, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge, 2010[1817]), 326-36; Georg W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (New York, 2004[1840]), 1-77.

Hegel did not find his way into the discourse on Late Antiquity directly. The most important figure in translating Hegel's theories into the scholarship was Alois Riegl. Although Riegl is often claimed as an art historian, he is perhaps better called a historical empiricist. Riegl—who also was influenced by Gottfried Semper's functionalism, Herbartian psychology, and Franz Wickhoff's argument for the 'barbarisation' of Late Antique art—looked to material culture as empirical evidence of the historical past.<sup>432</sup> Riegl's attachment to his area of study was certainly not aesthetic; his work contains no digressions on the inherent beauty of the objects that he considers. Indeed, Riegl seems to have been drawn to periods that, at the time of his writing, could only be called (aesthetic) 'others' in the history of art (e.g., Late Antiquity, Dutch portraiture, etc.).

Riegl argued that each society was characterised by a *Kunstwollen* (lit. 'will to form'). While Riegl introduced the concept of *Kunstwollen* in 1893 in *Stilfragen*, he most thoroughly defines its meaning eight years later in *Spättrömische Kunstindustrie* as a method through which logically coherent categories can be ascertained on the basis of stylistic similarity.<sup>433</sup> *Kunstwollen* may have been applied by Riegl only to material culture, but the method nevertheless is used to inscribe difference at a societal level by determining the boundary conditions for a single 'will.' That is, when the material culture of a society moves over some threshold from homogeneity to heterogeneity, that shift is empirical evidence of a change in *Kunstwollen*. *Kunstwollen* then was heavily indebted to Hegel's notion of *Geist*—just as each society had a single *Geist* so too was that *Geist* expressed through a single, corresponding *Kunstwollen*—and his position that history proceeds purposively from *Kunstwollen* to

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<sup>432</sup> Cf. Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Aesthetik* (Munich, 1878-79 [1860]); Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1850); Franz Wickhoff, *Roman Art: Some of Its Principles and Their Application to Early Christian Painting*, trans. S. Arthur Strong (London, 1900[1895]), 7-8, 77-79.

<sup>433</sup> Elsner, 'Style', 98-109.

*Kunstwollen*. While Riegl did not ascribe to the directionality and inevitability of ‘progress’ that characterised Hegel’s theory of history, Riegl did adopt the same historicising notion of independent periods.<sup>434</sup>

*Kunstwollen* has served two functions in Late Antique scholarship. On the one hand, it has extended Hegel’s theory of history, in particular his conception of *Geist*. On the other, *Kunstwollen* has provided a methodology for determining similarity and, in so doing, demarcating difference. Dialectic itself relies on dualism, which in turn relies on differentiation. Riegl was the bridge that brought these philosophical principles to bear, and the fact that Late Antiquity was the period in which he applied *Kunstwollen* has left a lasting impact.<sup>435</sup>

Hegel’s immediate-mediated-concrete dialectic also has served as the philosophical foundation for existential and later post-modern theories of the ‘Other,’ itself a differentiating structure. As existential thinkers from Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to Lacan have observed, the ‘Other’ can only exist in relation to that which it subverts/transgresses. The persistence of a dualistic, teleological metanarrative, however, undermines efforts to break free of reductive models for religious interaction and change. Instead of changing the unit of analysis from the categories to the process or adopting a new vocabulary, what is needed for the study of Late Antique religion is an entirely new framework.

## II. The Late Antique Religious Network

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<sup>434</sup> Henri Zerner, ‘Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism’, *Daedalus* 105 (1976), 177-188.

<sup>435</sup> For more on Riegl, see: Otto Pächt, ‘Art Historians and Art Critics VI: Alois Riegl’, *The Burlington Magazine* 105 (1963), 188-193; Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art* (University Park, 1992); Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, 1993); Jaś Elsner, ‘From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture: Some Reflections on Riegl’s Concept of *Kunstwollen*’, *Critical Inquiry* 25 (2006), 741-766. See also: Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (Princeton, 2003[1996]); Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge, 2010).

The issue at stake with previous and current models of Late Antique religion is not that they are underpinned by Hegelianism. The fundamental issue is that the scholarship on Late Antique religion is *historical*. History as a discipline, of course, cannot be ‘Hegelian’ since the study of history existed before Hegel; it was Hegel, however, who articulated the principles upon which the (western) historical enterprise rests. What is missing from Hegel’s philosophy and Late Antique religious scholarship alike is the recognition that history fits ‘facts’ into a trajectory that justifies its ‘outcome.’ In this way, even histories that attempt to break free of teleology all fail since the purpose of history is to explain its result.<sup>436</sup>

Consider, for example, Jacob Burckhardt, who in *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* calls Hegel a centaur ‘at the edge of the forest of history’ and in a letter to Alfred Brenner refers to Hegel’s philosophy of history as ‘a drug on the market.’<sup>437</sup> Burckhardt is so steadfast in his denial of Hegel that he writes: ‘We shall, further, make no attempt at system, nor lay any claim to “historical principles.” On the contrary, we shall confine ourselves to observation.... Above all, we have nothing to do with the philosophy of history.’<sup>438</sup> Burckhardt not only rejected Hegel but also proposed an almost antithetical philosophy of history based on recurrence, not change.<sup>439</sup> In spite of this goal, as Burleigh Taylor Wilkins notes: ‘When, however, Burckhardt announces his intention of discovering what is “*recurrent, constant, and typical*” in man’s history, we see, despite the author’s denial, a philosophy of history looms large [*italics in original*].’<sup>440</sup> Indeed, when one turns to another work by Burckhardt, *The State as a Work of Art*,

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<sup>436</sup> See especially: James Elkins, ‘Art History without Theory’, *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988), 354-78; Jason Gaiger, ‘Hegel’s Contested Legacy: Rethinking the Relation between Art History and Philosophy’, *The Art Bulletin* 93 (2011), 178-94.

<sup>437</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *Force and Freedom: Reflections on History*, trans. James H. Nichols (New York, 1943), 80; Jacob Burckhardt, ‘To Albert Brenner, Zurich, March 16, 1856’, in Alexander Dru (trans.), *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt* (London, 1955), 122.

<sup>438</sup> Burckhardt, *Force and Freedom*, 80, cited in Elkins, ‘Art History without Theory’, 354.

<sup>439</sup> For Burckhardt change is driven by accidents, not purposive forces, and is thus non-teleological.

<sup>440</sup> Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, ‘Some Notes on Burckhardt’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959), 130.

a part of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, the contours both of a Hegelian teleology and its driving dialectic emerge.<sup>441</sup> Burckhardt begins by surveying the Italian ‘despotisms’ and their dynasties. The despots, however, give way to ‘the opponents of the despots’ and ultimately the republics of Venice and Florence. Even Burckhardt, the great antagonist of Hegelian methods, is constrained by the dialectical methods of writing history.

One reason for Burckhardt’s failing is his reliance on the notion of resistance as a driver of historical change. Humanity has a tendency to script conflict into a story of struggle between entities.<sup>442</sup> Any history that relies on opposition, whether Burckhardt or Bhabha, seems predisposed to dualism, dialectic, and a perpetuation of Hegel’s philosophy of history. In response to these problems, two more recent attempts to undermine Hegel and the teleology of history have been proposed by Theodor Adorno and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.<sup>443</sup> Both Adorno and Deleuze and Guattari share the position that a non-teleological history must be *non-discursive*, since, according to these authors, discursive thought structures (and texts) are inherently narratological. Discourse and narrative place a premium on explaining *why* something happens. A non-narrative and thus non-teleological approach would be interested, by contrast, in *how* something happens. In the context of Late Antique religion, such a history would focus on the different types of religious interaction common in the period.

The beginnings of such an approach were outlined in Isabella Sandwell’s important contribution *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*. Sandwell argues that in order to understand the Church Father John Chrysostom and the great Sophist rhetor (and Chrysostom’s Antiochene contemporary) Libanios, we must reconceive our ideas about Late Antique modes of interaction.

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<sup>441</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The State as a Work of Art*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London, 2010[1990]).

<sup>442</sup> While Hegel captured this in his master/slave and immediate/mediated dialectics, Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch more generally dichotomised all conflicts into seven basic types.

<sup>443</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt, 1966); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie, Volume 2: Mille Plateaux* (Paris, 1980).

Specifically, Sandwell suggests that ‘...the model or the metaphor of a network is more useful than that of a group for describing his social relations.’<sup>444</sup> For Sandwell, therefore, the model of the network has as much to do with the applicability of the framework as it does with the problems presented by the notion of a group, a term which gives the appearance of internal coherence and masks a great deal of potential variation. The issue, according to Sandwell, is best explained by demonstrating the tension between the concept of the ‘social group’ and the inherently individual notion of ‘identity.’ As she explains:

It is easy to assume that there is a direct correlation between a religious identity and a social organization of that identity, when this might not always be the case. As identity theorists have shown, there need not be any direct correlation between the categorization of social identity and social organization. Where there is a correlation, this might be much looser forms of social organization than the term ‘group’ suggests.<sup>445</sup>

Sandwell continues to shift the focus from groups to individual interactions by quoting from a landmark study on group formation and ethnicity by Joan Vincent.<sup>446</sup> Vincent writes: ‘[we need to] move further away from... group to non-group, from the “cookie-cutter” concept to a finer understanding of the ephemerality and inconsistency of social relations.’<sup>447</sup> Sandwell, by invoking Vincent, thus sets the stage for an account of Late Antique religion as a network whose focus moves away from the construction of social groups and towards individual identities and their expression through interactions. One potential problem with this approach is that the concept of identity itself is a gross oversimplification. Whereas earlier scholarship can be said to have focused on discrete identities, the processual turn of the past decade has looked to anthropology and sociology in calling for the recognition that a single individual can have

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<sup>444</sup> Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 233-34. See also: Scott Bradbury, *Selected Letters of Libanius from the Age of Constantius and Julian* (Liverpool, 2004), 11 and 18; Jorit Wintjes, *Das Leben des Libanios: Historische Studien der Universität Würzburg, Volume 2* (Rahden Westfalen, 2005), 242.

<sup>445</sup> Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 31-32.

<sup>446</sup> On the relationship between religions and races in Late Antiquity, see especially: Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York, 2005).

<sup>447</sup> Joan Vincent, ‘The Structuring of Ethnicity’, *Human Organization* 33 (1974), 376.

multiple identities.<sup>448</sup> While such a framework has pushed scholarship ahead, there is a serious danger that these multiple identities can be too neatly sequestered from one another. According to Sandwell, this was exactly the trap into which John Chrysostom fell and of which Libanios seems to have been aware. Identity is not so easily atomised into ‘Christian’ and ‘non-Christian,’ not least because political or social affiliations are at least as important if not more important to an individual’s total identity.<sup>449</sup>

Although Sandwell’s argument has taken a huge step towards dislodging the ‘social group’ as the unit of study for Late Antique religion, three problems with her conception of the ‘network’ need to be addressed. In the first place, although her text avoids dichotomising religious identity into Christian and pagan, one wonders if her choice of subjects somewhat undermines her cause. Surely she could have identified the importance of the network by looking at other Church Fathers instead of the non-Christian Libanios. Jerome, before his turn to asceticism, would have provided an Antiochene comparison. Chrysostom and Libanios thus appear as synecdoches for ‘Christian’ and ‘pagan’ respectively—a dichotomisation into ‘groups’ that at least partially problematizes her argument.

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<sup>448</sup> The literature on identity in the ancient world has grown extensively in the past decade and a half. For an influential study that expertly describes the theoretical landscape, see: Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago 2002). For some exemplary studies on Roman material, see: Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-200* (Oxford, 1996), esp. 17-131; Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry (eds.), *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* (London, 1998); Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton, 2011), esp. 308-50. ‘Identity’ has been a particularly well-treated topic in Late Antique Jewish studies. See especially: Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, and Uncertainties* (Berkeley, 1999); Boyarin, *Border Lines*. On the Christian material, see especially: Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 2004); Buell, *Why This New Race?* On the expression of identity in art and architecture, see especially: R.R.R. Smith, ‘Cultural Choice and Political Identity in Honorific Portrait Statues in the Greek East in the Second Century A.D.’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 88 (1998), 56-93; Edmund Thomas, ‘Metaphor and identity in Severan architecture: the Septizodium at Rome between “reality” and “fantasy”’, in Simon Swain, Stephen Harrison, and Jaś Elsner (eds.), *Severan Culture* (Cambridge, 2007), 327-67; Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church amid Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge, 2010).

<sup>449</sup> See especially: Pierre-Louis Malosse, ‘Les Alternances de l’amitié: Julien et Libanios (349-363 et au-delà)’, *Revue de Philologie* 69 (1995), 249-262. See also Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 213 ff.

The second issue with *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* is the *a priori* acceptance of ‘religious identity’ separate from (but closely interacting with) social, political, and other types of identity. One equally could read from Libanios the suggestion that religious identity is not dissociable from other forms of identity. For example, in a letter to the emperor Julian he implies that religious practice has an integral role outside of religion: ‘Of such importance, O prince, to mankind is divination as it teaches everyone the best manner of governing a family, a city, a nation, and a kingdom.’<sup>450</sup> This brief quotation can be said to encapsulate much of Libanios’ admittedly obscure philosophy of religion: ‘divination’ has an important role across society.<sup>451</sup> Libanios further emphasizes the social function of religion in an oration when he explains: ‘Temples, sir, are the soul of the countryside...’<sup>452</sup> In addition to the structure that religion imposes on daily life, Libanios also acknowledges the civic and integrative roles of religion (even if he disparages them) when he asks: ‘So, too, any responsible for any benefit towards one city binds all to himself, and when prayers rise from so many lips, what must we think their effect will be?’<sup>453</sup>

In counterpoint to his functional (even world-systems) understanding of religion, Libanios also saw religion as a vehicle to motivate individuals to pursue a classical education, known as *paideia*.<sup>454</sup> In this context, Libanios’ friendship and tutelage of Christians can be easily explained as an interest in their pursuit of a classical education, not as an interest in their

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<sup>450</sup> Libanios, ‘Letter 622’, in John Duncombe (trans.), *Select Works of the Emperor Julian, and Some Pieces of the Sophist Libanios, Translated from the Greek* (London, 1784), 324.

<sup>451</sup> On the difficulty of understanding Libanios’ philosophy of religion, see especially: Vasiliki Limberis, ‘“Religion” as a Cipher for Identity: The Cases of the Emperor Julian, Libanios, and Gregory of Naziansus’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000), 386-91.

<sup>452</sup> Libanios, *Pro Templis* 30.9, in Albert F. Norman (trans.), *Libanios: Selected Works, Volume 1* (Cambridge, 1969), 55.

<sup>453</sup> Libanios, *Oration* 20.49, in *Libanios: Selected Works, Volume 1*, as cited in Limberis ‘“Religion” as a Cipher for Identity’, n. 88. For somewhat contrary take that Libanios preferred a personal place for religion, see: Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 119.

<sup>454</sup> Cf. John H.G.W. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch, City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), 228-31; René Braun and Jean Richier, *L'empereur Julien, de l'histoire à la légende (331-1715)* (Paris, 1978), 75. See also: Limberis, ‘“Religion” as a Cipher for Identity’, esp. 386-88.

religion. Likewise, it is not ‘paganism’ *per se* that Libanios supported during Julian’s reign but, rather, ‘...his actions to the complete restoration of learning to its position by honouring its exponents...’<sup>455</sup> Libanios’ concept of religious identity, it is fair to say, could plausibly be interpreted as inseparable from civic, intellectual, and, as we will see in the following chapter, social identities.<sup>456</sup>

The third issue with Sandwell’s argument, identified by at least one reviewer, is that Sandwell may too easily dismiss Chrysostom and privilege Libanios in her interpretation of the fourth-century Antiochene religious landscape.<sup>457</sup> While this is not to suggest that Sandwell necessarily privileges ‘pagan’ sources over ‘Christian’ sources, it is of note that her study—which focuses on a particular civic centre—shares the same bias and resulting problems as the major proponents of Roman civic religion: Christianising impulses are fought off and, in the process, the pendulum may swing too far. Libanios’ approach to religion certainly on its surface contradicts Chrysostom’s rhetoric advancing a Christian political, ethnic, and civic identity; but Libanios’ position is hardly enough on its own to warrant the conclusion that Chrysostom was ‘wrong’ about the nature of identity. More important than determining who between Chrysostom and Libanios was ‘correct,’ their disagreement implies that religious identity in Late Antique Antioch appears to have meant different things to different people.

The matter is complicated further by the fact that both Libanios’ and Chrysostom’s writings suggest that some individuals felt that religions were non-exclusive entities and that they could retain membership in several cults at the same time.<sup>458</sup> Although some like

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<sup>455</sup> Libanios, *Funeral Oration* 18.157, in *Libanios: Selected Works, Volume 1*, 381.

<sup>456</sup> *Paideia* (or *otium* as the analogous concept was called in the Western provinces) was the educational regime of the elite and, in this role, served as a marker of status.

<sup>457</sup> Christine Shepardson, ‘Review: *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch*’, *Church History* 77 (2008), 706-8.

<sup>458</sup> In addition to *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, see also: Athanassiadi and Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, within which, see especially: Michael Frede, ‘Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy in Later

Chrysostom claimed that they were Christian and nothing else, others were many things at many times. The emperor Severus Alexander, for example, was said to have worshipped every holy man and deity from Apollonius of Tyana and Christ to Orpheus and Achilles.<sup>459</sup> Such an understanding of Late Antique religious affiliation presents new possibilities for interpreting identity. Consider a hypothetical Antiochene congregation listening to one of Chrysostom's sermons. The listeners may understand their own religious affiliation to be exclusively Christian, both Christian and some other combination of religions, or only non-Christian (presumably someone interested in potentially converting may have been in the audience). Each sub-group would undoubtedly understand any given homily differently. A Christian who partook in Mithraic rituals may see things rather in quite a different way from a strictly Jovian devotee. The implication of this thought experiment is that, instead of focusing on identity solely or even primarily as a group phenomenon, the explosion of discrete groups allows for a shift towards a study of the individual.<sup>460</sup>

If each person has a unique identity, which is some combination of 'microidentities',<sup>461</sup> and if each of these identities interact in meaningful ways to inform an individual's perception, then each person should have a unique interpretation of the world. An individual may share certain elements of his or her interpretation with others, but each worldview *in its totality* always will be unique.<sup>462</sup> Different, unique identities inform different, unique interpretations. Although

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Antiquity', 41-68; Stephen Mitchell, 'The Cult of Theos Hypistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians', 81-148. On Gnosticism as a form of part-Christian, part-'pagan' religion, see: Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis*, trans. Robert McLaglan Wilson (Edinburgh, 1983), 275-94; Arthur H. Armstrong, 'Dualism: Platonic, Gnostic, and Christian', in Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman (eds.), *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany, 1992), 33-54

<sup>459</sup> Cf. *Historia Augusta*, 'Severus Alexander', 29.2-3, 31.4-5.

<sup>460</sup> Although focusing on Classical Greece, for useful remarks on the excision of the individual from studies of religion, see especially: Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford, 1996), 1-9.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. Gleason, 'Making space for bicultural identity', 125 ff.

<sup>462</sup> The foregoing is effectively a restatement of 'The Death of the Author,' a 1967 essay written by Roland Barthes that critiques interpretation on the basis of authorial intent and instead proposes the exploration of how a 'reader' interprets a 'text.' 'The Death of the Author' provides an important corrective to the tendency to conflate the

not every interpretation is available to historians (since individual identities are seldom preserved), the implication is that religious interaction took place between individuals. Group identity informs individual identity, but Late Antique religious discourse should be thought of as the interpretation of messages—visual, verbal, or other—by individuals whose views were modulated by group affiliations in varying degrees. Chrysostom’s sermons, in this reading, were not understood monolithically as ‘Christian apologies’; rather, to certain individuals a homily may have been a convincing piece of rhetoric that evinced conversion, while to someone like Libanios that same sermon could have been bad philosophy, disconnected idealism, or a stratagem to manufacture group identity.<sup>463</sup> A single message could be interpreted in as many ways as there were people who heard it. We do not need to be able to identify the full set of interpretations to recognise that the interpretative landscape of Late Antiquity, religious or otherwise, was more complicated than most models can account for.

In a recent contribution edited by Liz James, a number of scholars have suggested that art was a form of rhetoric—that is, an act of communication.<sup>464</sup> The difference with art, as we have already seen for the image of Christ, is that the possibility for ambiguity—a key part of any act of communication—is particularly heightened. When a viewer interacts with a work of art, it is the artwork that is both the message and the other interlocutor; the artist is not necessarily (and infrequently) present.<sup>465</sup> While signifiers can be used to guide a viewer’s reception—of which

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individual with the group. For an instructive overview laying some of the blame at the feet of the concept of ‘collective memory,’ see: Alan Confino, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method’, *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997), 1386-1403.

<sup>463</sup> Chrysostom, of course, was also using his rhetoric as a tool to help create the group for which he advocated. See especially: Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication*, 88-117. On the self-perpetuation of (sub-)groups once created, see especially Burce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>464</sup> Cf. Liz James (ed.), *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. ‘Introduction’ and chaps. 1, 2, and 6.

<sup>465</sup> Cf. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998), esp. 28-50.

some examples for the image of Christ were listed in the first chapter—the viewer is ultimately free to impute a wide range of meanings into the object.

While interpretations varied from person to person, the types of interactions that affected these interpretations were fewer in number. Whether Christ was seen as an emperor, a philosopher, a god, or something entirely separate is highly individual; fitting that interpretation into a rhetorical structure, however, is more constrained. While the narrative is our preferred structure—witness the narrativisation of conflict discussed above—among some Late Antique viewers, one exceedingly popular rhetorical structure would have been the persuasive argument, the importance and articulation of which is the subject of the following chapter.

## Chapter IV

### The Second Sophistic and the Cultural Milieu of Late Antique Image Production

Although previous scholarship on Roman religion may have its shortcomings, one of the benefits of a teleological narrative is its inherently diachronic perspective. The argument proposed in this chapter—that religious interpretation, and three modes of interpretation in particular, were consistent across a 300-year span—may seem problematic on its surface. As it turns out, however, the three centuries between AD 200 and 500 were characterised by important continuities. One of the earliest scholars to single out these continuities, perhaps ironically, was Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Winckelmann, claimed by classical archaeologists and art historians alike,<sup>466</sup> was a proponent of the position that Late Antique art represented a stylistic disjunction with the Graeco-Roman material culture that preceded it. For example,

Winckelmann writes:

The actual, specific date at which the complete fall of art occurred was before Constantine, at the time of the great disturbances wrought by the thirty tyrants who rose up against Gallienus, that is, at the start of the second half of the third century.<sup>467</sup>

Despite his disdain for what we would today call Early Christian and Early Byzantine art, Winckelmann nonetheless was astute enough to realise the *continuities* that existed in non-visual culture between the High Empire and Late Antiquity. As he explains:

Had the world not been reshaped due to the uprooting of paganism, one would judge from the four great church fathers Saint Gregory Naziansus, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Basil, and Saint John Chrysostom that even after Constantine, the Greek nation was not lacking in extraordinary talents, even in Cappadocia. And just as those holy fathers restored the eloquence and the beauty of

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<sup>466</sup> For Winckelmann as an archaeologist, see: Michael Shanks, *Classical Archaeology of Greece: Experiences of the Discipline* (London, 1996), 55-57; Anthony Snodgrass, 'What is Classical Archaeology? Greek Archaeology', in Susan E. Alcock and Robin Osborne (eds.), *Classical Archaeology (Blackwell Studies in Global Archaeology)* (Malden, 2007), 15-19. For Winckelmann as an art historian, see especially: Alex Potts, *Flesh and Ideal: Winckelmann and the origins of art history* (New Haven, 1994), esp. 11 ff.

<sup>467</sup> Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Los Angeles, 2006[1764]), 346-47.

language again after a great decline, such that they could stand alongside Plato and Demosthenes and by comparison overshadowed all of the pagan writers of their time, it would not have been impossible for the same thing to happen in art.<sup>468</sup>

Although Winckelmann's argument that the 'classical' style evaporated after Gallienus has been questioned in recent years (witness objects such as the Parabiago Plate or Projecta's Casket, which is discussed below; Figures 163, 164),<sup>469</sup> his argument for an intellectual and rhetorical continuity between the High Empire and Late Antiquity has found increasingly wide support. Today, the type of rhetorical skill and mastery of Greek language to which Winckelmann referred is associated with a broader cultural phenomenon known as the 'Second Sophistic.' The first section of this chapter briefly reviews the main characteristics of this phenomenon and, following recent scholarship, suggests that the Second Sophistic extended throughout Late Antiquity. In so doing, the three modes of communication on which this dissertation focuses—panegyric, polemic, and apologetic—will be introduced.

The second section of this chapter attempts to unify these modes of communication under the heading of 'protreptic,' a category of rhetoric that was widely used in Late Antiquity, particularly in religious debates. The third section argues that the Late Antique religious modes of communication preserved in the written record can be extended to the contemporaneous visual evidence. In particular, 'naming'—that is, the process of analogising Christ with an existing iconography—is highlighted as a fundamentally rhetorical act that made some combination of panegyric, polemic, and apologetic claims. The chapter's two final sections focus on specific processes—*interpretatio romana* and typology—which have been identified with 'paganism'

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<sup>468</sup> Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 348.

<sup>469</sup> See especially: Ioli Kalavrezou, 'The Cup of San Marco and the "Classical" in Byzantium', in Florentine Mütterich, Katharina Bierbrauer, Peter K. Klein, and Willibald Sauerländer (eds.), *Studien zur mittelalterlichen Kunst 800-1250* (Munich, 1985), 167-74. See also: Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 249-87; Adam Levine, 'Late Antique and Early Byzantine Religious Art and the Second Sophistic: The Case of Projecta's Casket', in Karolina Wizniewska (ed.), *Byzantium and Renaissances* (Warsaw, forthcoming).

and Christianity respectively. The chapter closes with an argument that both forms of associative naming are specific types of a comparative strategy called *synkrisis*, a rhetorical trope particularly popular among the better-educated during of the Second Sophistic.

### I. Panegyric, Polemic, and Apologetic in the Second Sophistic

The Second Sophistic refers to a movement characterised by an interest in ‘Greek’ identity that emerged during the early centuries of the Roman Empire.<sup>470</sup> In the context of the Second Sophistic, ‘Greekness’ was determined neither by geography nor ethnicity; rather, Greek identity was constituted by certain cultural markers, among which the most prominent were the use of Attic Greek; an antiquarian impulse in literature, philosophy, and art; and the study and employment of classical rhetorical strategies.<sup>471</sup> A typical definition of the Second Sophistic is offered by Simon Goldhill: “‘The Second Sophistic’ is conventionally used to refer to Greek writings (and the intellectual society that produced them) from the first to third centuries CE (following—and authorised by—its use in Philostratus).”<sup>472</sup> Tim Whitmarsh similarly defines the ‘phenomenon’ as one ‘found over all of the Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire in the first three centuries CE (and some of the Latin-speaking parts too).’<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> On the Second Sophistic, see especially: Glen W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1969); Glen W. Bowersock (ed.), *Approaches to the Second Sophistic* (State College, 1974); Ewen L. Bowie, ‘Greek Sophists and Their Past in the Second Sophistic’, in Moses I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society* (London, 1974[1970]), 166-209; Graham Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* (London, 1993); Peter A. Brunt, ‘The Bubble of the Second Sophistic’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 39 (1994), 25-52; Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*; Thomas Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht: Zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit* (Munich, 1997); Barbara Borg (ed.), *Paideia: The World of the Second Sophistic* (Berlin, 2004); Simon Swain, ‘Sophists and Emperors: The Case of Libanius’, in *Approaching Late Antiquity*, 355-400; Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>471</sup> On Atticism and rhetoric, see especially: Ewen L. Bowie, ‘The Importance of Sophists’, *Yale Classical Studies* 27 (1982), 29-59; Woolf, ‘Becoming Roman, Staying Greek’, 116-43; Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 17-64. On the embeddedness of this notion of identity see Jonathan M. Hall, ‘The Role of Language in Greek Ethnicities’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 41 (1995), 83-100.

<sup>472</sup> Simon Goldhill, ‘Introduction. Setting an Agenda: “Everything in Greece is to the wise”’, in *Being Greek under Rome*, 14.

<sup>473</sup> Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, 3.

In these and other definitions, the Second Sophistic is elided with both an ‘intellectual society’ and a ‘period.’ The attempt to reconcile the Second Sophistic with a period is a tendency that in all likelihood has something to do with a Hegelian model of history (i.e., *Geist*) and, more directly, with the (false) conflation of Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists* with a *terminus ante quem*.<sup>474</sup> The tension between the Second Sophistic as a period and as an intellectual movement is present in most scholarly definitions of the period. As Graham Anderson explains: ‘...it can be very difficult to find out what the Second Sophistic amounts to or implies.’<sup>475</sup> Likewise, in one recent study, Laura Salah Nasrallah struggles to define the ‘so-called Second Sophistic.’<sup>476</sup>

Instead of attempting to interpret the Second Sophistic as a period, this dissertation will define the Second Sophistic as the widespread construction of Greek identity through the use of (ancient) Greek intellectual traditions.<sup>477</sup> If the Second Sophistic represents an intellectual tradition, then the conceptual cornerstone of that tradition was its educational regime, known by the term *paideia*. Strabo puts it succinctly when he explains how Alexander identified Greeks as those among whom ‘prevail the law-abiding and the political instinct, and the qualities associated with education [*paideia*] and powers of speech...’<sup>478</sup> Some centuries later, Cicero also would

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<sup>474</sup> For the equation of the Second Sophistic with the period covered in *Lives of the Sophists*, see: Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*, 7-8; Ivars Avotnis, ‘The Holders of the Chairs of Rhetoric at Athens’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975), 313-24; Goldhill, ‘Introduction. Setting an Agenda’, 14. For a critique, see Vivian Nutton, ‘Two Notes on Immunities: *Digest* 27, 1, 6, 10 and 11’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 52. See also: Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, 4 n.7 (with bibliography).

<sup>475</sup> Anderson, *The Second Sophistic*, 7.

<sup>476</sup> Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 29-30.

<sup>477</sup> By this definition, ‘Sophism’ was not ‘reborn’ in the first century AD; rather, it underwent an efflorescence. What appears to modern scholars as the ‘period’ of the Second Sophistic is simply the existence of relatively more source material in the Sophist tradition.

<sup>478</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, I, 4.9, in Horace Leonard Jones (trans.), *The Geography of Strabo, Volume 1* (Cambridge, 1917), 249; Note the nuance of Strabo’s use of *επικρατει*, here translated as ‘prevail.’ Literally, the word means ‘rule over’; hence, Strabo’s usage puns on the Greek dominion over the ‘barbarians’ as well as on *paideia*’s role in that lordship.

imply the importance of *paideia* to Greek identity when he wrote of senator Titus Albucis, ‘[he was] well versed in Grecian literature, or, rather, almost a Greek himself...’<sup>479</sup>

The notion of *paideia* is of particular importance for two reasons. First, an education that rested on the principle of *paideia* would have been reserved for the upper classes of society, a fact that has prompted some scholars to link *paideia* to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*.<sup>480</sup> The culture of the Second Sophistic, which was socialised by *paideia*, was thus an elite ‘phenomenon.’ Second, if the Second Sophistic is defined as an intellectual tradition perpetuated by instruction in *paideia*, then it makes sense to question the tendency to assume that the Second Sophistic ended in the third century. Recently, Anthony Kaldellis, mirroring Winckelmann’s comments cited at this chapter’s open, has argued that the ideals of the Second Sophistic continued throughout Late Antiquity and into Byzantium; what changed, according to Kaldellis, was the intensity of this practice across the Empire, which ‘fizzled’ in the third-century as the relations between Rome and the provinces changed.<sup>481</sup> Libanios, Himerios, the orators of Gaza, and the Church Fathers all attest to the continuation of a ‘Sophistic’ intellectual tradition throughout Late Antiquity.<sup>482</sup> The Projecta Casket, now in the British Museum (Figure 164), offers an interesting art historical example in support of this proposition.

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<sup>479</sup> Cicero, *Brutus*, in Edward Jones (trans.), *Cicero’s Brutus, or History of Famous Orators: Also, His Orator, or Accomplished Speaker* (London, 1776), 87. See also Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca 1992), 257-8 and 290-1.

<sup>480</sup> Cf. Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht*, esp. 26-31 and 63-66; Marco Galli, “‘Creating religious identities’: *Paideia* e religione nella Seconda Sofistica”, in Börg (ed.), *Paideia*, 305-56.

<sup>481</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007), 41. See also: George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under the Christian Emperors* (Princeton, 1983), esp. chap. 3.

<sup>482</sup> It is worth pointing out the similarity between Kaldellis’ position and recent art historical studies that have problematised the notions of ‘Renaissances,’ pointing out that the traditions that were ‘reborn’ actually existed uninterrupted (albeit in less visible and prolific capacities). See n. 468. See also: Scott F. Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study* (Washington, D.C., 2006), esp. 172-220.

The casket, wrought in silver with a touch of gilding, was probably made in the second half of the fourth century for an elite woman, Projecta.<sup>483</sup> We know that Projecta was a member of the upper classes since only someone with substantial resources could afford such an object. The scenes depicted in repoussé relief on the top and sides of the container show servants carrying a similar casket (but of slightly different shape) to the bath. The casket features an inscription reading: ‘Projecta and Secundus, may you live in Christ.’ The text on the casket thus clearly identifies Projecta and her husband, Secundus, as Christians. Yet, in spite of this religious affiliation, the top of the casket’s lid is decorated with the birth of Venus and Nereids (Figure 165). The use of classical motifs suggests that Projecta (and likely Secundus) would have been familiar with these *topoi*; moreover, the incorporation of scenes and figures associated with water shows an understanding of classical mythology and iconography. These subjects are not indiscriminately chosen; they are classical rather than classicizing. The use of these scenes and the implied infrastructure in the fourth century for teaching the *paideia* necessary for their production and understanding is an art historical indication that the Second Sophistic extended beyond its normative end-date and continued throughout Late Antiquity.<sup>484</sup>

Although *paideia* placed a great emphasis on ancient literature, mythology, philosophy and art, the culture of the Second Sophistic was in many ways first and foremost concerned with the study of rhetoric and the ability to articulate compelling arguments.<sup>485</sup> In particular, the

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<sup>483</sup> It is possible that the casket was made for Projecta’s husband, Secudus (or both of them jointly). Cf. Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 41. For the most detailed overview of the casket, see: Kathleen J. Shelton, *The Esquiline Treasure* (London, 1981), 72-75; Bente Küllerich, *Late fourth century classicism in the plastic arts: studies in the so-called Theodosian renaissance* (Odense, 1993), 162 ff.

<sup>484</sup> For similar art historical arguments related to the influence of *paideia* on image choice and production, see: Ruth E. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Aldershot, 2004); Björn Ewald, ‘Myth and Visual Narrative in the “Second Sophistic” – a Comparative Approach: Notes on an Attic Hippolytos Sarcophagus in Agrigento’, in Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson (eds.), *Life, Death and Representation: New Work on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berlin, 2010), 257-303.

<sup>485</sup> Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (1991), esp. 81-82; Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, 1995), 1 ff.

genre of ‘epideixis’ was central to Second Sophistic education. Aristotle defined epideixis as rhetoric used ‘to praise and blame.’ Epideixis was invoked to urge individuals to adopt a new position by extolling it or denigrating another, approaches that correspond to ‘panegyric’ and ‘polemic’ respectively.<sup>486</sup>

The term ‘panegyric’—from the Greek *panegyrikos*, which is derived from the Greek word for festival—can be traced back to Isocrates and is classically associated with a public speech, often with a political purpose.<sup>487</sup> By the Roman Empire, however, panegyric had become associated more generally with praise and, in particular, with the praise of nobility and the imperial office.<sup>488</sup> In part for this reason, panegyric is also bound up with a Latin tradition of *laudes* and *laudationes*, which tended to heap praise upon an individual (e.g., the emperor), a group (e.g., the nobility), or a deity.<sup>489</sup> Panegyric’s focus on a single individual or family often lent itself to biography.<sup>490</sup> As Tömas Hagg and Philip Rousseau put it:

To speak of [biography and panegyric as] two genres, however, is to ask for trouble. It would be more appropriate, for the period which we are studying [Late Antiquity], just to call them two sets of texts, one overtly panegyric in form, the other biographical: for it is precisely the transgression of the boundaries between them, their interaction and coalescence, that is most in evidence.<sup>491</sup>

A Latin panegyric *For the Restoration of the Schools* (ca. AD 297), is a notable exception for its form and its emphasis. The panegyric, supposedly authored by Eumenius, is a panegyric

<sup>486</sup> See especially: Laurent Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain*, 2 Volumes (Paris, 1993), esp. esp. 493-98.

<sup>487</sup> Cf. Konrat Ziegler, ‘Panegyrikos’, in Hans Herter (ed.), *Der Kleine Pauly*, Volume 4 (Stuttgart, 1972), 455-57.

<sup>488</sup> Cf. Sabine MacCormack, ‘Latin Prose Panegyrics’, in Thomas A. Dorey (ed.), *Empire and Aftermath* (London, 1975), 143-205.

<sup>489</sup> Quintilian, ‘Institutio Oratio’, III.4.14-15, in Harold E. Butler (ed.), *Institutio Oratio* (Cambridge, 1920-22), 415-17. See also: Charlotte Roueché, ‘Acclamations in the Roman Empire’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 74 (1984), 181-88.

<sup>490</sup> Tömas Hagg and Philip Rousseau, ‘Introduction: Biography and Panegyric’, in Tömas Hagg and Philip Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000), 1 ff.

<sup>491</sup> Hagg and Rousseau, ‘Introduction’, in *Greek Biography and Panegyric*, 1.

in the classic Isocrolean sense: the speech, probably delivered in Autun (in Gaul), is more a public proclamation than an attempt at biography. Although the city and the emperor are praised, the focus of the speech is Eumenius' proposed program for restoring the schools of Autun. It is of note that the rhetor claims to have had an Athenian grandfather, perhaps explaining the less biographical nature of his panegyric. Among the so-called 'Panegyrici Latini,' *For the Restoration of Schools* is the only one to address itself to a general audience rather than emperors or nobility and, in that sense, is more in the tradition of *panegyrikos* than *laudationes*. By contrast, each of the other third-century panegyrics, all of which had unknown authors, was dedicated to and focuses upon the exploits of either Maximian or Constantius I. The existing tradition of *laudes* may have facilitated the translation of 'panegyric' into a more strictly biographical tradition in the Latin-speaking parts of the Empire.<sup>492</sup>

The focus on individuals, particularly emperors, left the Western form of panegyric well-adapted to Christian uses (or Christian subversion).<sup>493</sup> The importance of Constantine to the history of the Early Church was the basis for a number of panegyrics by anonymous orators, Nazarius, and most famously, Eusebius.<sup>494</sup> None of this is to say that panegyric in this form was unknown in the Greek-speaking East; we simply have fewer extant examples (perhaps because Rome was still the centre of the Empire and most of the individuals for whom a panegyric would be written resided in the West). Panegyrics in the East developed a more distinct biographical

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<sup>492</sup> Cf. Susanna M. Braund, 'Praise and Protreptic in Early Imperial Panegyric: Cicero, Seneca, Pliny', in Mary Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1998), 55-58.

<sup>493</sup> Cf. Ian Henderson, 'The Second Sophistic and Non-Elite Speakers', in Thomas Schmidt and Pascale Fleury (eds.), *Perceptions of the Second Sophistic and Its Times* (Toronto, 2011), 23-35; Mark Humphries, 'Savage Humour: Christian anti-panegyric in Hilary of Poitiers' *Against Constantius*', *The Propaganda of Power*, 201-24.

<sup>494</sup> For a characteristic panegyric by an anonymous orator, see: 'Panegyric of Constantine', in C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara S. Rodgers (eds.), *In Praise of Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini—Introduction, Translation, and Historical Commentary* (Berkeley, 1994), 218-53. For Nazarius, see: 'Panegyric of Constantine', in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 343-85. For Eusebius, see: Averil Cameron, 'Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine', in Mark J. Edwards and Simon Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), 145-74.

flavour in the middle of the fourth century, after the relocation of power to Constantinople, with Gregory of Naziansus.<sup>495</sup> Gregory, of course, was just as well known for his polemic *Invectives against Julian* as for his panegyrics.<sup>496</sup> Polemic, as Alan Cameron notes: ‘...was simply an inversion of the panegyric’ that served ‘...as an opening for vituperation instead of eulogy.’<sup>497</sup> Panegyric and polemic went hand in hand.

‘Polemic’ comes from the Greek *polemikos*, which most closely translates to ‘warlike.’<sup>498</sup> Polemic discourse in Late Antiquity was not confined to religious interaction, although it does appear to have been particularly popular among Christian authors.<sup>499</sup> Certain polemical texts, a few with equally polemical responses, are especially well-known and frequently commented upon: Origen’s *Contra Celsus*, John Chrysostom and Ephrem the Syrian’s invectives against Julian, and Augustine’s polemics against the Manicheans are but a few.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> However, see: Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, ‘Panegyric to Theodosius’, in *The Panygirci Latini*, 448-516. On Gregory of Naziansus, see: Frederick W. Norris, ‘Your Honor, My Reputation: St. Gregory of Naziansus’ Funeral Oration on St. Basil the Great’, in *Greek Biography and Panegyric*, 140-59. Although the biographical nature of *laudes* may have influenced the subject matter of *panegyrikos*, there is reason to suspect that the latter’s influence on the former was greater. On the theoretical/formal influence of Menander Rhetor in particular, see: C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, ‘General Intoduction’, in *The Panygirci Latini*, 10-14.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. ‘Gregory Nazianzen’s Two Invectives against Julian the Emperor’, in Charles William King (trans.), *Julian the Emperor: Containing Gregory Nazianzen’s Two Invectives and Libanius’ Monody with Julian’s Extant Theosophical Works* (London, 1888), 1-121.

<sup>497</sup> Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), 255 and 274.

<sup>498</sup> On polemic in Late Antiquity, see: John G. Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Tübingen, 2000), esp. 9-16. For relevant discussions of Byzantine polemic, see: Kathleen A. Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge, 1992); Averil Cameron, ‘Texts as Weapons: Polemics in the Byzantine Dark Ages’, in Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf (eds.), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1994), 198-215.

<sup>499</sup> For polemic as a trans-cultural and trans-religious phenomenon, see: Theo L. Hettema and Arie van der Kooij (eds.), *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers Presented at the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) held at Leiden, 27-28 April 2000* (Assen, 2004).

<sup>500</sup> On Origen, see: *Contra Celsum*; Henry Chadwick (ed.), *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, 1980[1953]), see esp. ‘Introduction’. On John Chrysostom, see: ‘Homily on St. Babylas, against Julian and the Pagans’, in Samuel N.C. Lieu (ed.), *The Emperor Julian: Panegyric and Polemic* (Liverpool, 1986), 59-79; Christine Spheerdsen, ‘Rewriting Julian’s Legacy: John Chrysostom’s *On Babylas* and Libanius’ *Oration 24*’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2 (2009), 99-115. On Ephrem the Syrian, see: Kathleen E. McVey (ed.), *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (Mahwah, 1989), 219-58; Sidney H. Griffith, ‘Ephraem the Syrian’s Hymns “Against Julian”: Meditations on History and Imperial Power’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987), 238-66. On Augustine, see: Philip Schaff (ed.), *Writings Against the Manicheans and Against the Donatists: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (New York, 1887), 3-365; Frederick H. Russell, ‘“Only Something Good Can Be Evil”’: The Genesis of Augustine’s Secular Ambivalence’, *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), 698-716.

Nuanced analyses of less explicitly polemical texts, such as Denise Kimber Buell's analysis of Clement of Alexandria's treatises, also have unearthed less overt polemical agendas.<sup>501</sup>

What is often lost in the discussion about particular polemics was the functional necessity of polemic as a rhetorical strategy for Late Antique Christianity. Of the many attributes that differentiated early forms of Christianity from other cults, perhaps the most important one in Late Antiquity was the religion's negative theology.<sup>502</sup> It follows from a negative theology, which maintained that God was infinite and unbounded, that: (1) the nature of the godhead is nebulous, and (2) the godhead cannot be circumscribed. In the first case, Christianity's negative theology lent itself to multiple interpretations of god (and Christ's nature[s] in particular), and these positions were often at odds with one another. The debates between 'Gnostic' and 'orthodox' theologies is a case-in-point.<sup>503</sup> In the second case, Christianity's negative theology provided an imperative to discredit anthropomorphic non-Christian deities that could claim to be known. To apologise alone or to praise Christianity or the Christian god would not be enough to establish the theology of a still-nascent religion that was being attacked itself; the construction of an orthodoxy required a communicative mode that could attack and undermine the 'heterodox' religions, whether they referred to themselves as Christians or not.<sup>504</sup> From a functional perspective, polemic was a necessary component of early Christian discourse.

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<sup>501</sup> Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton, 1999), in which she argues: 'procreative and kinship metaphors function polemically in early Christian discourses of self-identity and self-authorization', p. 4.

<sup>502</sup> See especially: Finney, *The Invisible God*. Compare with: Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia, 2000); Robin Margaret Jensen, *Face to Face*.

<sup>503</sup> Cf. Harry A. Wolfson, 'Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides', *Harvard Theological Review* 50 (1957), 145-56.

<sup>504</sup> See especially: D.W. Palmer, 'Atheism, Apologetic, and Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century' *Vigiliae Christianae*, 37 (1983), 234-59. See also: Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 2: Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. John Austin Baker (London, 1973), 323 ff.

It is not surprising then, that in addition to the better-known polemics, dozens of lesser known Christian polemical texts are preserved from Late Antiquity. In one example, *Against the Sabellians*, Dionysius of Rome goes out of his way to denigrate the leader of a rival, ‘heterodox’ form of Christianity when he writes:

For the doctrine of the foolish Marcion, which cuts and divides the monarchy into three elements, is assuredly of the devil, and is not of Christ's true disciples, or of those to whom the Saviour's teaching is agreeable. For these indeed rightly know that the Trinity is declared in the divine Scripture, but that the doctrine that there are three gods is neither taught in the Old nor in the New Testament.<sup>505</sup>

Lest Dionysos’ appeal to the Old Testament imply that Jews were immune from censure, some scholars have argued that early Christian critiques of Judaism were the first Christian polemics.<sup>506</sup> One particularly interesting example comes from Alexander of Alexandria’s *Epistles on Arianism*. A text which has nothing whatsoever to do with Judaism in principle still attacks Jews as those that forsook Christ. Alexander writes:

Who made Him thus to go down? The impious people. behold, you sons of men, behold what recompense Israel made unto Him! She slew her Benefactor, returning evil for good, affliction for joy, death for life. They slew by nailing to the tree Him who had brought to life their dead, had healed their maimed, had made their lepers clean, had given light to their blind. Behold, you sons of men!<sup>507</sup>

Some of the most extreme polemics, however, were reserved for ‘pagans.’

Perhaps the most acerbic such text, Arnobius’ *Against the Heathen*, invokes Christianity’s negative theology and distinct disdain for the Roman pantheon to argue for

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<sup>505</sup> Dionysius of Rome, ‘Against the Sabellians’, 1, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7*, 365. For a discussion of anti-Sabellianism (and its corresponding polemic), see: Luise Abramowski, *Formula and Context: Studies in Early Christian Thought* (London, 1992), chap. 11.

<sup>506</sup> See especially the work of Daniel Boyarin: *Dying for God*; ‘Justin Martyr Invents Judaism’, *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 70 (2001), 427-61.

<sup>507</sup> Alexander of Alexandria, ‘Epistles on the Arian Heresy and the Deposition of Arius’, V.5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6*, 301. On the dialogue in Alexandria between Alexander and the Arians in which this polemic played a part, see especially: Edward R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia, 1954), 332.

the superiority of Christ to the primary Roman deity, Jupiter.<sup>508</sup> It is worth quoting

Arnobius at length:

But in vain, says one, do you assail us with a groundless and calumnious charge, as if we deny that there is a deity of a higher kind, since Jupiter is by us both called and esteemed the best and the greatest; and since we have dedicated to him the most sacred abodes, and have raised huge Capitols. You are endeavouring to connect together things which are dissimilar, and to force them into one class, *thereby* introducing confusion [italics in original translation]. For by the unanimous judgment of all, and by the common consent of the human race, the omnipotent God is regarded as having never been born, as having never been brought forth to new light, and as not having begun to exist at any time or century. For He Himself is the source of all things, the Father of ages and of seasons. For they do not exist of themselves, but from His everlasting perpetuity they move on in unbroken and ever endless flow. Yet Jupiter indeed, as you allege, has both father and mother, grandfathers, grandmothers, and brothers: now lately conceived in the womb of his mother, being completely formed and perfected in ten months, he burst with vital sensations into light unknown to him before. If, then, this is so, how can Jupiter be God supreme, when it is evident that He is everlasting, and the former is represented by you as having had a natal day, and as having uttered a mournful cry, through terror at the strange scene?<sup>509</sup>

Dozens more examples of polemics could be added to the three cited here against Jews, pagans, other forms of Christianity, and hybrid religions such as Manichaeism.<sup>510</sup> As the excerpt from Arnobius makes clear, however, few texts were exclusively polemics; rather, most all texts blend elements from other modes of communication.<sup>511</sup> Elements of panegyric are included in the selection from *Against the Heathens* when the author refers to an ‘omnipotent god’ and implicates Christ as ‘God supreme.’ Likewise, Arnobius references Christians that seem to have dedicated a temple to Jupiter. Apart from the implied syncretism, which, as we saw in Chapter 2,

<sup>508</sup> On Arnobius, see especially: John A. North, ‘Arnobius on Sacrifice’, in John Drinkwater and Benet Salway (eds.), *Wolf Liebeschuetz Reflected: British Institute of Classical Studies Supplement 91* (London, 2007), 27-36.

<sup>509</sup> Arnobius, ‘The Seven Books of Arnobius Against the Heathen’, I.34, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6*, 421-22.

<sup>510</sup> For example, against the Jews see: Ephrem the Syrian, ‘Rhythm against the Jews’, in J.B. Morris (trans.), *Select Works of St. Ephrem the Syrian, Translated out of the Original Syriac with Notes and Indices* (Oxford, 1847), 67-83; Hippolytus, ‘Expository Treatise Against the Jews’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5*, 219-21. Against ‘pagans,’ see: Athanasius, ‘Against the Heathen’, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4* (Buffalo, 1892), 1-30. Against other forms of Christianity, see: John Cassian, ‘The Seven Books on the Incarnation of the Lord, Against Nestorius’, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11*, 551 ff.; Tertullian, ‘The Prescription Against Heretics’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3*, 243-68. Against Manichaeism, see: Alexander of Lycopolis, ‘Of the Manicheans’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6*, 241-60; Archelaus, ‘Acts of the Disputation with the Heresiarch Manes’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6*, 179-240.

<sup>511</sup> See especially: Donald A. Russell, ‘Longinus Revisited’, in Gregory Nagy (ed.), *Greek Literature, Volume 8: Greek Literature in the Roman Period and in Late Antiquity* (London, 2001), 14-28 (originally published in *Mnemosyne* 34 [1981]).

is entirely compatible with Late Antique religious practice, Arnobius also defends Christianity against the charge of Jupiter worship. Such a defensive mode of communication, ‘apologetic,’ is the final mode of Late Antique religious interaction to be explored here.

Of the modes of communication used in Late Antique religious discourse, ‘apologetic’ has been the most widely discussed. An *apologia* (lit. ‘speaking in defence’) is normally defined as a (religious) defence of a position using logical principles.<sup>512</sup> The *apologia* was originally a legal defence and thus a non-epideictic mode of address. As religion and religious persecution became increasingly embroiled in matters of the state, it is not at all surprising that apologetic should have become a widespread mode of communication. Thus, in addition to famous texts like Justin Martyr’s *Apologies* and Athenagoras’ *Embassy* (properly titled *Legatio pro Christianis*), Aristides’ *The Apology*, Vincent of Lerins’ *Commonitory*, and countless epistles could be added to the list of apologies.<sup>513</sup>

As a corrective to a simplistic and straightforward interpretation of apologetic, Laura Salah Nasrallah rightly points out in *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture* that the notion of a defence of one religion against another religion can create monolithic entities that elide a great deal of intra-group variation. Nasrallah’s problematisation of Christian apologetic derives from two important observations: (1) *apologia* does not appear to have been a coherent category in antiquity and (2) the notion of *apologia* assumes *a priori* a demarcation between

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<sup>512</sup> For a good overview of apologetic literature with a focus on the early Christian tradition, see: Harry Gamble, ‘Apologetics’, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 65-71. For the potentially influential use of apologetic in the Jewish tradition, see especially: Heinz Schreckenberg, ‘The Works of Josephus and the Early Christian Church’, in Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (eds.), *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit, 1987), 315-24.

<sup>513</sup> Justin Martyr, ‘The First Apology’ and ‘The Second Apology’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1*, 159-93; Athenagoras, ‘A Plea for the Christians’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2*, 123-48; Aristides, ‘The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 9*, 263-82; Vincent of Lerins, ‘A Commonitory for the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelities of All Heresies’, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11*, 131-56. On apologetic and the epistolary form, see: Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Content and Exegesis*, Daniel P. Bailey (trans.) (Waco, 2006), 194-206.

Christians and non-Christians.<sup>514</sup> Nasrallah differentiates herself from ‘definitions of apologetic [that] reify the categories of Christians, Jews, and pagans...’<sup>515</sup> by arguing that the *apologia* was a mode of communication that took place in a broader cultural conversation. As she explains:

What if instead of using the category of apologetic to map Christian versus Jewish versus “pagan” identity, we were to envision apologetic texts on a different stage, engaged in a different drama? What if we were to read some so-called Christian apologies as taking part in and taking advantage of some broader cultural conversation...<sup>516</sup>

Nasrallah’s problematisation of a sequestered ‘religious identity’—which, as we have seen, Sandwell presumes in her conception of the Late Antique religious network—is best expressed in her critique of the scholarship on Justin’s *Apologies*:

To ask about the authenticity of Justin’s Christian *or* Greek identity misses the point of how fluidly the rhetoric of ethnicity and religions operated in the Roman world [italics in original]...<sup>517</sup>

Although the weight given to *apologia* in the ‘cultural conversation’ is probably overstated, Nasrallah rightly notices that the different modes of address in Late Antiquity all contributed to this give-and-take. Some scholars have proposed that apologetic by Late Antiquity was a form of epideixis, an argument that would unify panegyric, polemic, and apologetic under the same ‘praise-and-blame’ heading. As Marc D. Lauxtermann has observed, epideixis, which was originally any non-deliberative, non-forensic form of rhetoric, by the Roman period was understood to have ‘a more distinct, encomiastic character.’<sup>518</sup> With this broader definition, apologetic would have been able to migrate under the epideictic umbrella and

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<sup>514</sup> Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 23-28 and 44-50.

<sup>515</sup> Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 47.

<sup>516</sup> Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 50.

<sup>517</sup> Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 135.

<sup>518</sup> Marc D. Lauxtermann, ‘What is an Epideictic Epigram’, *Mnemosyne* 51 (1998), 525. See also: Theodore C. Burgess, ‘Epideictic Literature’, *Studies in Classical Philology at the University of Chicago* 3 (1902), 89-261; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratio*; Donald A. Russell and Nigel G. Wilson (eds.), *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1981); Pernot, *La rhétorique de l’éloge*, 25 ff.

transcend its Aristotelian circumscription to the legal arena. Athenagoras' *Embassy* could be understood as an example of this shift; while the text historically has been catalogued as a Christian *apologia*, William Schoedel has argued that it in fact represents a panegyric in praise of the Roman Emperor.<sup>519</sup> The problem with Lauxtermann's argument, of course, is that acknowledging the hybridity of the communicative modes in Late Antiquity does not prove that apologetics primarily praised or blamed—even those that had panegyric or polemical elements were still defences above all else. While it is clear that retaining a rigid division between these three rhetorical structures misunderstands their close relationship, the same logic prevents one from accepting the proposition that what unifies panegyric, polemic, and apologetic is a standard praise-and-blame formula.

As it turns out though, the unifying characteristic of the modes of Late Antique religious communication can be found elsewhere in Aristotle's discussion of epideixis. According to Aristotle, panegyric and polemic were not intended only to laud or to censure; instead, they were intended to do so with the aim of persuasion (προτρεπτικός).<sup>520</sup> The rhetoric of persuasion, or 'protreptic' as it is transliterated from the Greek, can also be extended to apologetic, the purpose of which was to compel its audience (usually to abandon a polemical position). In crude terms, panegyric was meant to convince that a position was good; apologetic was meant to convince that a position was right; and polemic was meant to convince that a position was either bad or wrong. The following section picks up on Aristotle's thread and argues that in Late Antiquity a

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<sup>519</sup> Cf. William R. Schoedel, 'In Praise of the King: A Rhetorical Pattern in Athenagoras', in Donald F. Winslow (ed.), *Disciplina Nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans* (Cambridge, 1979), 69-90. More generally, see: William R. Schoedel, 'Apologetic Literature and Ambassadorial Activities', *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), 55-78. Cf. Russell and Wilson (eds.), *Menander Rhetor*, 180-81.

<sup>520</sup> Cf. Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge*, 515 ff. See also the works by George A. Kennedy: *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, 1963), esp. chap. 12; *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World: 300 B.C.-A.D. 300* (Princeton, 1972), 260-64.

text or image—whether interpreted as panegyric, polemical, or apologetic—was in each instance understood as an attempt to convince, persuade, and/or convert.

## II. Protreptic Modes of Interaction in Late Antiquity

As with apologetic, panegyric and polemic, what exactly the term ‘protreptic’ means is not always clear. Protreptic is derived from the Greek προτρέπω, meaning ‘to urge forward.’ The term was originally associated with the Sophists who tried to persuade other philosophers to adopt their epistemology and ontology.<sup>521</sup> Protreptic continued to be bound up with philosophy on some level into the Second Sophistic, as the (satirical) example of Lucian’s *Sale of the Ways-of-Life* makes clear; in Lucian’s volume, each philosopher sells his ‘wares’ in a ‘marketplace.’ Despite the veneer of philosophical competition and debate, at its core protreptic can be thought of as the art of persuasion via rhetoric, or, more simply, as systematised persuasion.<sup>522</sup> That protreptic, so-defined, should have originated within philosophical discourse is not surprising in light of the importance of rhetoric to philosophy, especially ancient Greek philosophy.

Protreptic, however, should not be confused with a type of philosophy, a point made by Mark D. Jordan. Jordan presents the issue as follows:

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<sup>521</sup> Cf. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, 66.

<sup>522</sup> In the context of the Late Antique religious landscape, ‘persuasion’ has often been conflated with the idea of ‘conversion,’ a term loaded with Christian overtones. For the most influential study on the concept of ‘conversion’ as a trans-cultural and trans-religious phenomenon, see: Nock, *Conversion*, esp. chap. 11. For more recent examples, see especially: Ramsay MacMullen, ‘Two types of Conversion to Early Christianity’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1983), 174-92; Anthony J. Guerra ‘The Conversion of Marcus Aurelius and Justin Martyr: The Purpose, Genre, and Content of the First Apology’, *The Second Century* 9 (1992), 171-87; Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (Rochester, 2003), within which, esp. Rebecca Lyman, ‘The Politics of Passing: Justin Martyr’s Conversion as a Problem of “Hellenization”’, 36-60; Laura Salah Nasrallah, ‘The Rhetoric of Conversion and the Construction of Experience: The Case of Justin Martyr’, in Edward J. Yarnold and Maurice F. Wiles (eds.), *Studia Patristica 18: Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Conference of Patristic Studies Held in Oxford, 2003* (Leuven, 2006), 467-74.

There are... difficulties of definition. It is not only that there are works called 'protreptic' which do not point towards philosophy, there are many works that persuade to philosophy under some other title than 'protreptic.'<sup>523</sup>

Jordan goes on to argue that protreptic is only a genre in that it can be defined on the basis of its intent to convince (rather than on certain formal elements). Philosophy and protreptic thus enter into what Jordan terms a 'dialectical' relationship whereby certain philosophies *use* protreptic modes to establish the superiority of their positions, but the protreptics are not philosophies in themselves.

In Late Antiquity, it appears that protreptic strategies were widely used in the religious marketplace in a way rather similar to the philosophical 'marketplace' described by Lucian.<sup>524</sup> The line between philosophy and religion that holy men straddled is one example of the use of protreptic in a non-Christian 'religious' context.<sup>525</sup> The common use of the three modes outlined above in Late Antique religious debates has been widely commented upon,<sup>526</sup> although Annemaré Kotzé (greatly inflected by Jordan's work) succinctly sums up the most widely held position on the use of protreptic in religious communication and conversion:

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<sup>523</sup> Mark D. Jordan, 'Ancient Philosophic Protreptic and the Problem of Persuasive Genres', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 4 (1986), 313.

<sup>524</sup> Cf. North, 'The Development of Religious Pluralism', 174-93.

<sup>525</sup> Cf. Fowden, 'The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society', 33-59; Francis, *Subversive Virtue*; Alain Billault, 'The Rhetoric of a "Divine Man": Apollonius of Tyana as Critic of Oratory and as Orator According to Philostratus', in *Greek Literature*, 371-78 (originally published in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 26 [1993]); Laurent Pernot, 'The Rhetoric of Religion', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Religion* 24 (2006), 235-54. For a slightly earlier but relevant case study, see: Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London, 1994). 'If one is to be regarded as divine, one has a reasonable obligation to connive...' (p. 30).

<sup>526</sup> Cf. Carl Andresen, *Logos und Nomos: die Polemik des Kelsus wider das Christentum* (Berlin, 1955); Leslie W. Barnard, *Athenagoras: A Study in Second Century Christian Apologetic* (Paris, 1972); Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque (IIe-IIIe siècles)*, 2 Volumes (Paris, 1985); Elaine Pagels, 'Christian Apologists and the "Fall of the Angels": An Attack on Roman Imperial Power?', *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985), 301-27; Richard M. Grant, 'Five Apologists and Marcus Aurelius', *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1988), 1-17; Jean-Claude Fredouille, 'L'apologétique chrétienne antique: métamorphoses d'un genre polymorphe', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 41 (1995), 201-26; Clifford Ando, 'Pagan Apologetics and Christian Intolerance in the Age of Themistius and Augustine', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), 171-207; Tessa Rajak, 'Talking at Trypho: Christian Apologetic as Anti-Judaism in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew', in Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price (eds.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Oxford, 1999), 59-80; Naomi Koltun-Fromm, 'Re-Imagining Tatian: The Damaging Effects of Polemical Rhetoric', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008), 1-30.

The next issue that has to be touched upon cursorily is the relation between Early Christianity and (pagan) ancient philosophy. The reader will note that, firstly, I speak of ‘conversion’ as the aim of ancient philosophical protreptics and Christian protreptics alike...<sup>527</sup>

Protreptic practice was so deeply embedded in Early Christian discourse that its effects are evident in the Gospels itself. An influential paper written by John Cook nearly two decades ago provided several cogent insights into Christian protreptic that have featured in subsequent scholarship.<sup>528</sup> First, Cook deconstructed Early Christian literature into its constituent protreptic arguments ranging from a fear of hell and the centrality of divine speech to the importance of love and the value of *elocutio*. Second, Cook analysed the Gospel of John and demonstrated that the biblical text itself was (self-avowedly) protreptic. Cook’s second observation has been expanded by Bart Ehrman and, more recently, Kim Haines-Eitzen, both of whom convincingly show that it was not uncommon for scribes to alter texts to support orthodox doctrine more explicitly.<sup>529</sup> Of particular note is Haines-Eitzen’s argument that the biblical verse Mark 6:3 (in which Christ seems to be identified as a carpenter/mason) was subject to ‘textual modification motivated by apologetic reasons,’ specifically to counter Celsus’ claim that Christians worshipped a carpenter.<sup>530</sup> Here the New Testament not only staked out a protreptic position (as,

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<sup>527</sup> Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine’s Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden, 2004), 55.

<sup>528</sup> John G. Cook, ‘The Protreptic Power of Early Christian Language: From John to Augustine’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 48 (1994), 105-34. See also: David Rankin, ‘Apologetic or Protreptic? Audiences and Strategies in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* and *Protrepticus*’, *Sacris Erudiri* 44 (2005), 5-35; Annewies van den Hoek, ‘Apologetic and Protreptic Discourse in Clement of Alexandria’, in Antoine Wlosok and François Pachoud (eds.), *L’apologétique chrétienne gréco-latine à l’époque prénicénienne* (Vandœuvres-Geneva, 2005), 69-93.

<sup>529</sup> Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford, 1993); Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford, 2000). See also: Wayne C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse in the Scribal Tradition: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels* (Leiden, 2004); Claudia Rapp, ‘Safe-Conducts to Heaven: Holy Men, Meditation and the Role of Writing’, in Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (eds.), *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown* (London, 2009), 187-203.

<sup>530</sup> Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, 117.

for example, Anthony Guerra argues for Paul's letters<sup>531</sup>) but it also played an active role in contemporaneous debates.<sup>532</sup>

Parallel to these studies of Christian scribal practices, the use of protreptic modes in Christian homiletic and epistolary communication has become a popular subject. Peter Brown has made an important contribution (although he does not mention protreptic, instead using only 'persuasion') as has Ramsay MacMullen.<sup>533</sup> Following on the heels of these notable scholars, Raymond Van Dam's work on Roman Cappadocia and Jaclyn LaRae Maxwell's work on Antioch provide case studies illustrating that Early Christian homilies and exegeses were dialogic.<sup>534</sup> Maxwell in particular tries to understand John Chrysostom's sermons not only through the lens of the speaker's intent but also through the lens of the audience's reception.<sup>535</sup> Kotzé identifies the appeal to the audience as the single most important consideration in identifying a protreptic when she writes: '...one of the strongest arguments for seeing [a] text as a protreptic is its preoccupation with its audience.'<sup>536</sup>

Although there is a case to be made for protreptic as the overriding genre of Christian and non-Christian religious proselytising in Late Antiquity, some scholars have contended the characterisation of a body of texts as protreptic *de facto* carries with it certain unfair assumptions. One such assumption—that the notion of persuasion assumes *a priori* the

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<sup>531</sup> Anthony J. Guerra, *Romans and the Apologetic Tradition: The Purpose, Genre and Audience of Paul's Letter* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. chap. 1.

<sup>532</sup> Cf. Michele Pellegrino, *Studi su l'Antica Apologetica* (Rome, 1947), 12-23.

<sup>533</sup> Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1992); Ramsay MacMullen, 'The Preacher and His Audience', *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989), 503-11.

<sup>534</sup> Raymond Van Dam, *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia, 2003); Jaclyn LaRae Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and his Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge, 2006). More generally, see: Edwards, Goodman, and Price (eds.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire*.

<sup>535</sup> Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication*, 65-87. See also: Wendy Mayer, 'John Chrysostom and His Audiences: Distinguishing Different Congregations at Antioch and Constantinople', *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997), 3-21; Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom* (London, 2000), 34-40.

<sup>536</sup> Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions*, 117.

construction of groups—is a generalisation of the critique that Nasrallah levels at apologetic.<sup>537</sup>

Consider Silke-Petra Bergjan's articulation of the problem:

Protreptic patterns however are the basis of a firm concept, ... [described] by three elements: the protreptic intention, the educated non-Christian as addressees, and the link to philosophy given by philosophical examples of the protreptic genre.<sup>538</sup>

It is hard to disagree that a protreptic mode implies the existence of a group in need of persuasion from the perspective of the author. The very existence of protreptic religious texts implies that a number of authors thought both that their causes needed 'converts' and that there were sufficient numbers of potential converts to warrant the creation of a protreptic text. This admission though implies two essentialised groups—one in need of persuasion and one doing the persuading—that bring us dangerously close to a tacit acceptance of the dualistic process that we are trying to avoid.<sup>539</sup>

We are able to sidestep this trap by noting that Bergjan's and Nasrallah's critiques are valid only insofar as they problematize the privileged place afforded to the 'author' and authorial intent. One framework for avoiding this dilemma was provided in Anselm Strauss'

*Negotiations: Varieties, Contexts, Processes, and Social Orders*. Strauss argues for the fundamental importance of the process of negotiation to the construction of a social order.

Strauss identifies the dynamism of negotiations as the proximate cause for the dynamism of

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<sup>537</sup> Cf. Heinrich Dörrie, 'Die Andere Theologie. Wie stellten die frühchristlichen Theologen des 2.-4. Jahrhunderts ihren Lesern die "Griechische Weisheit" (= den Platonismus) dar?', *Theologie und Philosophie Freiburg* 56 (1981), 1-46.

<sup>538</sup> Silke-Petra Bergjan, 'How to speak about Christian apologetic literature? Comments on the recent debate', in Maurice F. Wiles and Edward J. Yarnold (eds.), *Studia Patristica, Volume 36: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford, 1999* (Leuven, 2001), 177-78.

<sup>539</sup> Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 44-48. See also: Hans Conzlemann, *Gentiles, Jews, Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman Era* (Minneapolis, 1992); Gregory Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography* (Leiden, 1992); Amy Wordelman, 'Cultural Divides and Dual Realities: A Greco-Roman Context for Acts 14', in Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (eds.), *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (Atlanta, 2003), 205-32.

social orders, an approach that accords well with the interactive model of the ‘network’ espoused here.<sup>540</sup> Moreover, Strauss’ position that negotiation is open-ended contrasts with the usual postmodern interpretation of process as a site of differentiation. While Strauss’ terminology may differ from that used here, his concept of negotiation applies readily to the dialogic nature of Late Antique religious communication and the fluid process of Late Antique identity formation.<sup>541</sup>

If religious interaction were dialogic, then it stands to reason that the *reception* of protreptic modes is as important as the intention behind them.<sup>542</sup> The key point here is that interpreting how Late Antique religious communication was received allows for, in theory, as many interpretations as there were receivers.<sup>543</sup> A polemic may not always have been received as an attack, especially when, as we have seen, polemical elements were embedded alongside apologetic and panegyric ones. A Christian polemic could have been received, among other things, as simply ‘bad philosophy’ by a ‘pagan’ citizen of Rome or a Manichean. In this reading, groups are not reified *a priori*—they emerge from interpretations of arguments and judgments on the persuasiveness of those arguments. By resituating the site at which meaning is produced from the author/artist to the ‘receiver,’ however, it becomes necessary to better understand how the process of interpretation unfolded in Late Antiquity. Here we begin to see the outlines of a synthesis with the ambiguous material culture discussed in the first two chapters. The next section takes a further step towards this synthesis by looking to semiotics to provide the

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<sup>540</sup> Anselm Strauss, *Negotiations: Varieties, Contexts, Processes, and Social Orders* (San Francisco, 1978). See also: Lynn M. Mather, ‘Review: *Negotiations: Varieties, Contexts, Processes, and Social Orders*’, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24 (1979), 694-99.

<sup>541</sup> For a compatible perspective, see: Mijastine Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c. 360-430* (Aldershot, 2007), esp. 55-92.

<sup>542</sup> Cf. Jean-Marie Salamito, ‘Christinisation et democratization de la culture: aspects aristocratiques et aspects populaire de l’être-chrétien aux IIIe et IVe siècles’, *Antiquité Tardive* 9 (2001), 165-78.

<sup>543</sup> Cf. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 97.

theoretical bridge that will connect the Second Sophistic culture of verbal rhetoric with its contemporaneous visual culture.

### III. Towards a Framework for Interpreting Late Antique Images of Christ

Two forms of semiotics have been introduced over the past century-and-a-half, and each has been marshalled in attempts to construct a framework for the interpretation of images. The semiotics developed by Ferdinand de Saussure—a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Swiss linguist—assumes that images are read like texts. The Saussurean tradition posits that a thing in the world, the ‘signified,’ is represented by a linguistic concept, the ‘signifier.’ Saussure’s writings have been widely influential both on academia in general and on Late Antique art history in particular. The structuralism of Lévi-Strauss and the post-structuralism of Foucault and Barthes (and to an extent Derrida) are all indebted to Saussure, as are the works by scholars like Meyer Schapiro, and, as we have seen, André Grabar and Tonio Hölscher, all of whom who have contributed directly to discussions of Late Antiquity.<sup>544</sup>

The major issue with the Saussurean framework is the strict division that it posits between image and text.<sup>545</sup> A number of authors have defended Saussure’s semiotics on the grounds that, while there might be a division between image and text, there is not a hierarchical relationship between the two.<sup>546</sup> Although there is good reason to be suspicious of this claim, the

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<sup>544</sup> On the relationship of Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida to Saussurean semiotics, see: Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, ‘Semiotics and Art History’, *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991), 191-2. For examples of Saussurean approaches to Late Antique art, see: Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 9-13 and 90-95; Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and Symbolic Illustration of a Text* (Berlin, 1983[1973]), 37-49; Hölscher, *The Language of Images in Roman Art*, 20-23 and 113 ff.

<sup>545</sup> Cf. Colin Murray Turbayne, ‘Visual Language from the Verbal Model’, *The Journal of Typographical Research* 3 (1969), 345-54; Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought* (New York, 1975), 174 ff.; Áron Kibédi Varga, ‘Criteria for Describing Word & Image Relations’, *Poetics Today* 10 (1989), 31-53.

<sup>546</sup> See especially: Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Art* (Chicago, 1982); Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago, 1988), esp. chap. 2.

more important critique of Saussure's method is that the strict divide—hierarchical or not—between image and text is a straw man. The general case for this argument was put forward by Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art* and most fully developed by W.J.T. Mitchell in two volumes published in the 1980s: *The Language of Images* (1980) and *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986).<sup>547</sup> Mitchell states very clearly that:

We tend to think, in other words, that to compare poetry with painting is to make a metaphor, while to differentiate poetry from painting is to state literal truth... My argument here will be twofold: (1) there is no *essential* difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, that is given for all time by the inherent natures of the media, the objects they represent, or the laws of the human mind; (2) there are always a number of differences in effect in a culture which allow it to sort out the distinctive qualities of its ensemble of signs and symbols [*italics in original*].<sup>548</sup>

As the excerpt demonstrates, Mitchell not only provides a general critique of Saussurean semiotics but also allows for individual historical conditions to play a role in the interpretation of signs. Throughout Late Antiquity—as throughout the entire classical world—the relationship between text and image was substantively different than it has been in the past several centuries, a point made by Michael Squire in his valuable contribution *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. Squire's volume is broken into two parts, the first of which demonstrates the 'tyranny' of the Reformation and its verbo-centrism in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, while the second demonstrates the equality and harmonious interplay of image and text in classical antiquity.<sup>549</sup> Central to Squire's argument is the ancient literary genre of *ekphrasis*, which can be defined as (often florid) verbal descriptions of visual scenes.<sup>550</sup> The first extant *ekphrasis* is Homer's description of Achilles' shield; the genre, however, became especially popular during

<sup>547</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, 1976); W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Language of Images* (Chicago, 1980); Nelson Goodman, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1987[1986]).

<sup>548</sup> Mitchell, *Iconology*, 49.

<sup>549</sup> Michael Squire, *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>550</sup> On *ekphrasis*, see especially: Jaś Elsner (ed.), *The Verbal and the Visual: Cultures of Ekphrasis in Antiquity*, *Ramus* 31 1/2 (2002); Shadi Bartsch and Jaś Elsner (eds.), *Essays on Ekphrasis, Special Issue of Classical Philology* 102 (2007); Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Burlington, 2009), see esp. 131 f. on the role of *ekphrasis* in protreptic religious discourse.

the Second Sophistic. In its most classical context, *ekphrasis* is linked to the rhetorical exercises known as *progymnasmata* (lit. ‘fore-exercises’) meant to prepare students for delivering orations.<sup>551</sup> One such exercise would have been the description of a work of art, an exercise that in itself indicates the existence of socialised thought structures that allow for the translation between one form of art (the visual) to another (the verbal).<sup>552</sup>

In recent years *ekphrasis* has entered into the semiotic debate through the related concept of the ‘focalizer,’ that is, the ‘source of the vision presented in [an] utterance.’<sup>553</sup> The focalizer is differentiated from the ‘narrator’—the speaker of the utterance—and the ‘actor’—the person acting out the sequence of events.<sup>554</sup> *Ekphrasis* is particularly interesting in that, since it competes with the work of art it describes, it elides the narrator and the focalizer. In one reading, the artist is the narrator and the author of the *ekphrasis* is the focalizer; in another the author/orator of the *ekphrasis* is the narrator and the text (or speech) itself is the focalizer.<sup>555</sup> One result of this tension is that an *ekphrasis* highlights the potential for multiple interpretations and forces an ‘actor’ to rethink his/her interpretations and confront his/her subjectivity.<sup>556</sup>

The self-reflexive critique of subjectivity engendered by *ekphrasis* does not map neatly onto Saussurean semiotics with its absolutized, ‘Platonic’ signifier. An alternative semiotic system, developed by the American logician Charles Sanders Peirce, details a more dynamic

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<sup>551</sup> See especially: Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*.

<sup>552</sup> ‘Selections from the Commentary on the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius Attributed to John of Sardis, Including Fragments of the Treatise on *Progymnasmata* by Sopatros’, in *Progymnasmata*, 218-20.

<sup>553</sup> On focalization, see especially: Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, 1985), 142-60. For an application of focalization to antiquity, see: Irene J.F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Bristol, 2004).

<sup>554</sup> Within this triad, *ekphrasis* has the ability ‘to focalize voices and perspectives.’ See especially: Sahdi Bartsch and Jaś Elsner, ‘Introduction: Eight Ways of Looking at *Ekphrasis*’, in *Essays on Ekphrasis*, ii.

<sup>555</sup> The *ekphrasis* thus takes on its own agency and, in an odd way, comes to mimic a core feature of art. See: Gell, *Art and Agency*.

<sup>556</sup> *Ekphrasis* thus echoes Barthes’ narratological codes and Bakhtin’s notion of *heteroglossia*. See: Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (Paris, 1970); Mikhail M. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (trans.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin, 1981), 259 ff. For this viewpoint on *ekphrasis* expressed in relation to Late Antiquity, see especially: Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*, esp. chap. 4.

process of signification enacted through a triad not dissimilar to the ‘narrator-focalizer-author’ trichotomy. Peirce identifies three positions of signification: (1) the ‘sign’ (or *representamen*), which stands for something else; (2) the ‘interpretant,’ the mental image that the recipient forms of the sign; and (3) the ‘referent’ (or ‘object’), the thing to which the sign refers. Peirce’s ideas on semiosis have been applied in the visual domain by Rosalind Krauss, Wolfgang Kemp, Louis Marin, Margaret Iversen and Mieke Bal amongst others.<sup>557</sup>

Following these authors, an image in a work of art is a sign depicting a real-world object, the referent, which is interpreted by a viewer who creates an interpretant in his/her mind. In spite (or perhaps because) of the complexity of Peirce’s notion of semiosis, two important gaps open up in Peirce’s system. In the first, the interpretant, once formed, immediately becomes its own sign and necessitates another interpretant. For example, Edouard Manet’s *Olympia* (Figure 166), once configured mentally, might become a sign for Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (Figure 167), on which the former is said to be based. In the second gap, it remains ambiguous whether the viewer’s interpretant is also related to the original referent. When a viewer sees a painted tree, s/he is both aware that the painted tree is a painting and that it points to some referent tree. That referent tree is both ‘real’ in that there are ‘real’ trees in the world and ‘not real’ in the sense that the tree depicted in the painting is the artist’s interpretant of a tree. Peirce’s semiotic system, like *ekphrasis*, describes a mechanism by which an individual becomes aware of his or her

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<sup>557</sup> Cf. Rosalind Krauss, ‘Notes on the Index’, *October* 3 (1977), 68-81; Rosalind Krauss, ‘Notes on the Index’, *October* 4 (1977), 58-67; Wolfgang Kemp, *Der Anteil des Betrachters: Rezeptionsästhetische Studien zur Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1983); Louis Marin, ‘The Iconic Text and the Theory of Enunciation: Luca Signorelli at Loreto (Circa 1479-1484)’, *New Literary History* 14 (1983), 553-96; Margaret Iversen, ‘Saussure v. Peirce: Models for a Semiotics of Visual Art’, in A.L. Rees and Frances Borzello (eds.), *The New Art History* (Atlantic Highlands, 1988), 82-94; Mieke Bal, *Reading ‘Rembrandt’: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. chap. 5.

subjectivity; moreover, Peirce allows for an individual to have multiple, competing, and dynamic interpretations of a sign.<sup>558</sup>

Although Peirce's system would seem to be a better fit for understanding the creation of meaning, his approach falls victim to the same critique we saw of Hegel's dialectic in the previous chapter; namely, that it is ahistorical. Consider how Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson explain semiosis, invoking (perhaps unintentionally) the terminology of dialectic: '...as process and as movement... not as a thing but as an event, the issue being not to delimit and isolate the one sign from other signs, but to trace the possible emergence of the sign in a *concrete* situation, as an event in the world [*italics added*].'<sup>559</sup> While at first glance it would seem that Bal and Bryson are anything but ahistorical, it is telling that the 'process' and 'movement'—whether Peircean, Saussurean, or other—remains constant across time. In short, a sign's meaning is historicized, while the process of semiosis is not.<sup>560</sup>

As we have seen, however, the relationship between words and images *is* historically contingent and was markedly different in Late Antiquity. As an alternative to semiotics, therefore, this dissertation advocates the use of Mitchell's 'iconological' framework, which introduces historicism within its analysis of signification.<sup>561</sup> In this regard, Mitchell's framework is a perfect complement to Panofsky's eponymous method. 'Iconology,' which will refer to Mitchell's brand unless otherwise specified, provides a method for the interpretation of signs by

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<sup>558</sup> It should be noted that in Peirce's system a sign cannot have multiple meanings at once; rather, an interpretant must first become its own sign, which in turn allows for a new interpretant and a new meaning. Meanings can change rapidly but must occur in sequence. For a different framework that allows for multiple, even conflicting, meanings to be held at once, see the discussion of 'condensation' in: Bal and Bryson, 'Semiotics and History', 197.

<sup>559</sup> Bal and Bryson, 'Semiotics and History', 194

<sup>560</sup> As in the previous chapter, the Hegelian metanarrative is apparent in the ahistorical notion of an unchanging semiotic process. It is perhaps not coincidental that the sign emerges in a 'concrete' situation, a term that mimics Hegel's immediate-mediated dialectic.

<sup>561</sup> 'Iconology' as a term, of course, has deep connection art history. Cf. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 1972[1939]). Oddly, despite the shared name, Mitchell cites Panofsky only once. For Panofsky's use of the term, see: Christine Hasenmueller, 'Panofsky, Iconography, and Semiotics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36 (1978), 289-301.

problematizing the notion of a static relationship between words and images. Mitchell suggests of the sign:

I propose that we historicize it [i.e., the relationship between words and images], and treat it, not as a matter for peaceful settlement under the terms of some all-embracing theory of signs, but as a struggle that carries the fundamental contradictions of our culture into the heart of theoretical discourse itself.<sup>562</sup>

Iconology thus seems a particularly useful framework for analysing Late Antique images of Christ. As we saw in the first chapter, the image of Christ had an ambiguous iconography between AD 200 and 500, the result of which was that an Christ either could have been confused for other figures or could have been conceived of as a syncretic composite that integrated attributes of other images. As Mitchell puts it in general terms: ‘The meaning of a picture does not declare itself by a simple and direct reference to the object it depicts... In order to know how to read it, we must know how it speaks, what is proper to say about it and on its behalf.’<sup>563</sup> The vault mosaic from the tomb of the Julii could have been seen as Christ, Helios, or Christ-Helios (among other possibilities); the designation of the image as one or the other of these possibilities has to do with ‘what is said in its behalf.’ The act of identification, in other words, is not only a process of recognition but also a process of *naming*.

Historically, the act of naming has been a mark of power-relations,<sup>564</sup> and during the Roman Empire in general—and throughout Late Antiquity and the Second Sophistic in particular—the re-labelling of deities was a widespread and important practice. Known as *interpretatio romana*, the re-labelling of non-Roman gods with Roman names is often explained

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<sup>562</sup> Mitchell, *Iconology*, 44.

<sup>563</sup> Mitchell, *Iconology*, 28.

<sup>564</sup> See especially: Pierre Bourdieu, ‘From Rules to Strategies’, *Cultural Anthropology* 1 (1986), 110-20; Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Social Space and Symbolic Power’, *Sociological Theory* 7 (1989), 14 ff., esp. 20-21.

as a manifestation of ‘Romanisation.’<sup>565</sup> Christianity, which emerged from the same religious network in which *interpretatio romana* figured so prominently, probably partook in similar processes. Before closing the chapter with a discussion of how Christianity employed similar approaches to images of Christ, it is first necessary to take a brief look at *interpretatio romana* to better understand its history and its operation.

#### IV. *Interpretatio Romana* and Naming as Metaphor

*Interpretatio romana*—often analogised to *interpretatio graeca*, the earlier Greek practice of re-labelling foreign deities and incorporating them into the Greek pantheon—is a term that been employed widely in recent years despite the fact that there is only one known use of the term from antiquity.<sup>566</sup> In his *Germania*, Tacitus records the following anecdote:

Among the Naharvali is shown a grove, the seat of a prehistoric ritual. A priest presides in female dress, but the gods commemorated there are, according to *interpretatio romana*, Castor and Pollux. That, at least, is the power manifested by the godhead, whose name is Alci. There are no images, no trace of any foreign superstition, but nevertheless, they worship these gods as brothers and young men.<sup>567</sup>

It is notable that the translation leaves *interpretatio romana* in Latin, the implication being that there is no exact English equivalent. In an alternative translation of the passage,

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<sup>565</sup> See especially: Jane Webster, ‘*Interpretatio*: Roman Word Power and the Celtic Gods’ *Britannia*, 26 (1995), 153-61; Wolfgang Spickermann, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*? Zeugnisse der Religion der Römern, Kelten und Germanen im Rheingebiet bis zum Ende des Bataveraufstandes’, in Detlef Hopp and Charlotte Trümpfer (eds.), *Die frühe römische Kaiserzeit im Ruhrgebiet* (Essen, 2001), 94-106. For a more nuanced account, see: Christopher B. Krebs, *Negotio Germaniae* (Göttingen, 2005). For a recent study on the ‘Christianizing power’ of words, see: Catherine M. Chin, ‘Origen and Christian Naming: Textual Exhaustion and the Boundaries of Gentility in Commentary on John 1’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006), 407-36.

<sup>566</sup> On *interpretatio romana* and its relationship to *interpretatio graeca*, see: Franz Richter, *De deorum barbarorum interpretatione Romana quaestiones selectae* (Halle, 1906); Georg Wissowa, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*: Römische Götter im Barbarenlande’, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 19 (1916-1919), 1-49; Jean-Louis Girard, ‘*Interpretatio romana*: questions historiques et problèmes de méthode’, *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 60 (1980), 21-27; Fritz Graf, ‘*Interpretatio II*: Religion’, in Hubert Cancik and Helmut Schneider (eds.), *Der Neue Pauly*, Volume 5 (Brill, 1998), 1042-3; Clifford Ando, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*’, *Classical Philology* 100 (2005), 41; Cadotte, *La Romanisation des Dieux*.

<sup>567</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, 43.3, cited in ‘*Interpretatio Romana*’, 41.

however, James Rives defines the term as ‘Roman translation,’<sup>568</sup> which implicates *interpretatio romana* as a linguistic process.<sup>569</sup> Clifford Ando has criticised the relegation of *interpretatio romana* to ‘the linguistic-conceptual realm’ on the grounds that the process of reinterpreting foreign deities was as much if not more a theological than a linguistic issue.<sup>570</sup> Even so, the conception of *interpretatio romana* as a form of translation has been adopted readily by scholars that see the phenomenon as an imperialist process of religious appropriation.<sup>571</sup> In this context, ‘translation’ is involved in a semiotic process that many scholars call ‘Romanisation’ (see Chapter 3). Bal and Bryson explain this type of translation as follows:

The interpretant formed by the reader is possible because the latter knows what things usually mean in the culture in which the sign functions. The idiom of a particular language is conventional in the same sense as the idiom of iconographic traditions. “Translation” from one language into another, from an image into words that explain it, from one image into another image, all work by virtue of the knowledge of such idioms.<sup>572</sup>

Although many studies of *interpretatio romana* suggest that it was a colonising and imperial practice, recently a number of scholars have begun to complicate that picture. Ando rightly points out that the reinterpretation of deities was largely a provincial process, so the imposition of a Romano-centric set of ‘cultural idioms’ is somewhat contradictory.<sup>573</sup> Ando’s critique looks to earlier works by Ton Derks and Greg Woolf on Gallic religion as well as Miranda Green’s work on Romano-British mosaics, all of which invert standard interpretations

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<sup>568</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, 43.3, trans. James B. Rives, *Religion and Authority*, 94.

<sup>569</sup> Phyllis Fray Bober, ‘Origin and Transformation of a Celtic Divinity’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 55 (1951), 13-51; Wolfgang Schenk, ‘Interpretatio Graeca-Interpretatio Romana. Der hellenistische Synkretismus als semiotisches Problem’, in Peter Schmitter and H. Walter Schmitz (eds.), *Innovationen in Zeichentheorien: Kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien zur Kreativität* (Münster, 1989), 83-121; Graf, ‘Interpretatio II’, 1042-3.

<sup>570</sup> Ando, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*’, 41.

<sup>571</sup> See especially: n. 564.

<sup>572</sup> Bal and Bryson, ‘Semiotics and Art History’, 191

<sup>573</sup> Cf. Ando, *Roman Religion* 141-6.

and empower the provinces.<sup>574</sup> In particular, these studies cast provincial elites as active agents who effectively married local religions with Roman cults.<sup>575</sup> *Interpretatio romana*, so conceived, allows for the continuation of local cult practices and is possible only under an empire with a loose administrative policy.

Wherever the agency in the process sits (and it was likely shared among all the various stakeholders), the more pertinent question for us is *why* certain deities were translated into other deities. Beard, North, and Price explain the dilemma well:

In most cases . . . we have only the record of a mixed divine *name*; we can only guess what that name meant, which deity (Roman or native) was uppermost in the minds of the worshippers, or whether the two had merged into a new composite whole (a process often now referred to as 'syncretism'); we do not know, in other words, how far the process was an aspect of Roman take-over (and ultimately obliteration) of native deities, how far a mutually respectful union of two divine powers, or how far it was a minimal, resistant and token incorporation of Roman imperial paraphernalia on the part of the provincials [*italics in original*].<sup>576</sup>

'Syncretism,' is a loaded term that has taken on a pejorative connotation.<sup>577</sup> Ando critiques the notion of 'simplistic translation' by likening it to '...contact syncretism, by which Romans and Germans, in this case, recognised some identity between the *vires* of the *numina* of gods whom they knew by different names.'<sup>578</sup> The concept of 'syncretism,' however, can be salvaged if it is understood more generally 'as the mode of production for each and every set of religious data rather than as deviation from some idealised ahistorical point of origin or utopian

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<sup>574</sup> Derks, *Gods, Temples, and Ritual Practices*, 11-18; Miranda Green, 'God in Man's Image: Thoughts on the Genesis and Affiliations of Some Romano-British Cult Imagery', *Britannia* 29 (1998), 17-30; Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 214.

<sup>575</sup> See especially: Ton Derks, 'The Perception of the Roman Pantheon by a Native Elite: The Example of Votive Inscriptions from Lower Germany', in Nico Roymans and Frans Theuws (eds.), *Images of the Past: Studies of Ancient Societies in North-Western Europe* (Amsterdam, 1991), 235-65; Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 206-30.

<sup>576</sup> Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome, Volume 1*, 317

<sup>577</sup> Cf. Yukako Suzawa, *The Genesis of Early Christian Art: Syncretic Juxtaposition in the Roman World* (Oxford, 2008), 1-8. See also: Luther H. Martin and Anita Maria Leopold, 'New Approaches to the Study of Syncretism', in Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, and Randi R. Warne (eds.), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion, Volume 2: Textual, Comparative, Sociological, and Cognitive Approaches* (Berlin, 2004), 95.

<sup>578</sup> Ando 'Interpretatio Romana', 42.

goal.<sup>579</sup> Ando is right to point out, as he does in his critique of the etymology of ‘Druid,’ that the scholarship on syncretism has relied on an epistemic structure that distinguishes and elevates the verbal.<sup>580</sup> However, syncretism need not be bound to or by linguistics.

For example, although similarities in name might provide a basis for connecting one deity with another, iconographical similarities could also have played a role. Lucian documents a case where, in the temple of Atargartis in Hierapolis, Hadad is likened to Zeus (i.e., Jupiter) on the basis of visual likeness. Lucian records: ‘Certainly the image of Zeus [i.e., Hadad] resembles Zeus in all respects—his head and cloak and throne—so that you would not willingly liken him to anyone else.’<sup>581</sup> Similitude could also be assessed on the basis of the powers attributed to or the acts of the deity. We have already seen a description from Tacitus comparing Sarapis and his powers to several other deities including Asklepios, Osiris, and Dispater.<sup>582</sup> Tacitus’ and Lucian’s descriptions open up the intriguing possibility that the same figure—physical or imagined—could have been interpreted as a different deity by different individuals or, possibly, as multiple deities to the same individual.<sup>583</sup> In the most general sense then it seems that *interpretatio romana*, the ‘novel application’ of (in this case) Roman religious names, was not based exclusively in the epigraphic/literary record, iconography, or mythology: it was based on any sort of *resemblance*.<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> Martin and Leopold, ‘New Approaches to the Study of Syncretism’, 96.

<sup>580</sup> Ando, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*’, 50.

<sup>581</sup> Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 31-32, cited in Ando, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*’, 45.

<sup>582</sup> Tacitus, *Historia Augusta*, IV.84.5, cited in Ando, ‘*Interpretatio Romana*’, 45.

<sup>583</sup> This is possible in a Peircean semiotic system where an interpretant becomes its own sign, which in turn points to another, related interpretant (and so on); such a phenomenon, however, is not possible in the Saussurean model. See also n. 557 above on ‘condensation.’

<sup>584</sup> One reason to avoid overemphasising the importance of the literary record is that, often, the tone and even the authorship of the texts is unclear. On the authorship of the Lucian text cited here, see especially: Graham Anderson, *Lucian: Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic* (Leiden, 1976), 68-82; Robert A. Oden, *Studies in Lucian’s De Dea Syria* (Cambridge, 1977), 4-14. On the tone, compare: Oden’s *Studies*, 41 with Swain’s *Hellenism and Empire*, 305.

What constitutes resemblance, however circumscribed by the norms of social groups, will inevitably vary from person to person.<sup>585</sup> In that vein, immediately after likening Zeus to Hadad on iconographical grounds, Lucian describes the accompanying image of Hera as follows:

But Hera will reveal to you as you look at her a form of diverse appearances. Taken all together, to be sure, she is Hera, but she also has something of Athena and Aphrodite and Selene and Rhea and Artemis and Nemesis and the Parcae.<sup>586</sup>

Lucian's text, and this excerpt in particular, has been scrutinised by a number of scholars to try and establish its intent and tone (even the authorship has been questioned).<sup>587</sup> The important point vis-à-vis *interpretatio romana*, however, is that there were certain instances in which different gods resembled one another. In semiotic terms, each sign had a number of potential referents. For each viewer the perceived referent could have been different, which in turn would have resulted in different interpretants. Given the similitude of the referents, however, an interpretant could have become its own sign pointing to another of the possible referents. In Lucian's terms, while he saw Hera ('to be sure'), Hera called to mind the other goddesses. For someone without Lucian's background (Lucian's Greek text implies a *paideia* that other presumably Syrian viewers of the statue may not have shared), there is no guarantee the image would have been so-interpreted.

If Christianity and the image of Christ developed in this cultural-religious matrix, then we must ask if *interpretatio romana* was extended to Late Antique images of Christ. An answer is suggested in the *Historia Augusta* when Sarapis is analogised to Christ in addition to the other deities mentioned above.<sup>588</sup> Apart from pointing to religious syncretism, the passage in question,

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<sup>585</sup> For example, see: Jeremy Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and Its Other* (Stanford, 1995), 9-51 and 143-56.

<sup>586</sup> Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 31-32, cited in Ando, 'Interpretatio Romana', 45.

<sup>587</sup> Cf. n. 583.

<sup>588</sup> See: n. 201.

which was cited in a previous chapter, demonstrates the perceived resemblance between Christ and Sarapis—a resemblance that was apparently not lost on the devotees of each. The veracity of the account is not nearly as important as the recognition that Christ was analogised to other gods in a way entirely consistent with the practice of *interpretatio romana*. *Interpretatio romana* was not a process that excluded Christianity; rather, it was a particular manifestation of a type of analogical thinking common in Late Antiquity. Among scholars of Christianity, this mode of thought has often been likened to ‘typology’—that is, the idea that ‘some person, event, or institution of the Old Law related in some way to the new and definitive self-revelation of God in Christ.’<sup>589</sup> The similarities between ‘typology’ and *interpretatio romana* beg the question: was there some broader phenomenon of which these two forms of *interpretatio* were types? The final section of this chapter argues at least among Late Antique elites that there was and that this unifying thought structure, *synkrisis*, was embedded from the Second Sophistic interest in rhetoric.

## V. Typology and Christian *Synkrisis* in Late Antiquity

In his lecture on ‘Pagan and Jewish Elements in Early Christian Sculpture’, Fritz Saxl noted of Early Christian sarcophagi that:

The narrative is in both cases of secondary interest and the interconnection between scenes is such that an uninstructed though attentive observer could hardly guess the underlying meaning. The worshipper himself has to bring an understanding of their unity to the apparently disconnected scenes...<sup>590</sup>

Saxl’s general argument, which suggests that some degree of religious *gnosis* was a prerequisite for a ‘proper’ Christian interpretation, has been adopted by several scholars, albeit

<sup>589</sup> Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, ‘Type and Antitype’, *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 14* (Washington, D.C., 1967), 351.

<sup>590</sup> Fritz Saxl, ‘Pagan and Jewish Elements in Early Christian Sculpture’, *Lectures, Volume 1* (London, 1957), 52-53.

using somewhat different terminology. Wladimir Weidlé introduced the term ‘signative’ to describe the way in which non-specific iconography could ‘signify’ a Christian meaning to a properly educated Christian viewer.<sup>591</sup> Ernst Kitzinger adopted the same term (spelling it, however, as ‘signitive’) in *Byzantine Art in the Making*, which he used to mean that Christian images are ‘ciphers conveying an idea.’<sup>592</sup> Peter Brown argues that Christian art ‘assumed onlookers who could supply associations “triggered off” by a few clear pointers.’<sup>593</sup> Erich Dinkler uses the term ‘abbreviated images’ to refer to these early Christian ‘signs,’<sup>594</sup> a term that Friedrich Deichman translated as ‘*Kurzszenen*’ (lit. ‘short scenes’).<sup>595</sup> Hans Belting grounds this phenomenon in imperial practice when he notes that ‘the state provided image veneration with a public pattern and so gave certain signals to society.’<sup>596</sup> He then goes on to elaborate that, in the case of Christian images:

We are concerned here with material images, of course, but ones that are invested with mental images. They came into being because they were to provide a visual likeness of what they stand for. In our case they represent persons who cannot be seen because they are absent (the emperor) or invisible (God).<sup>597</sup>

Belting’s position, which draws a parallel between Christian and imperial image theory and situates both within a Platonic tradition, leans heavily on the work of André Grabar. Grabar, as we have seen, argued both for the influence of imperial on Christian iconography as well as for the Saussurean notion of the ‘image-sign.’ That Grabar would have looked to Saussure is not

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<sup>591</sup> Wladimir Weidlé, *The Baptism of Art: Notes on the Religion of the Catacomb Paintings* (London, 1950), 32.

<sup>592</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making: Main Lines of Stylistic Development in Mediterranean Art* (Cambridge, 1977), 20.

<sup>593</sup> Peter R.L. Brown, ‘Art and Society in Late Antiquity’, in *Age of Spirituality, Symposium*, 22.

<sup>594</sup> Erich Dinkler, ‘Abbreviated Representations’, in *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century—Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1979), 396-402. On the related notion of ‘staccato images’, see: Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 12-16.

<sup>595</sup> Friedrich W. Deichman, *Einführung in die Christliche Archäologie* (Darmstadt, 1983), 161.

<sup>596</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 41-42. For a more detailed discussion about Christ’s image as a signifier for his divine ‘prototype’, see: Gerhart B. Ladner, ‘The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953), 1-34.

<sup>597</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 42.

surprising: Saussure's signifier/signified divide has clear Platonic and neo-Platonic parallels, and, as Grabar argued in an influential article, early Christian and Byzantine art was premised on a similar philosophy of the relationship between an image (the 'signifier') and the prototype (the 'signified').<sup>598</sup> Sister Mary Charles Murray goes so far as to claim that Grabar's Saussurean framework has become axiomatic of much of the scholarship on early Christian imagery. She writes:

Since Grabar's book [*Christian Iconography*] is essential to the study of Christian iconography, it may be his theory which is responsible for the impression that one receives from some recent writings that symbols have a one-to-one relationship between the sign and its meaning.<sup>599</sup>

The one-to-one relationship envisioned Saussure and applied to Late Antiquity by Grabar is particularly popular among students of 'typology,' the basic framework of which is that there exist two entities, a 'type' and an 'antitype,' the thing to which the type refers. For example, in a sarcophagus from the Museo Nazionale delle Terme, and object about which we will have more to say shortly, the image of Peter striking a rock is the type and the antitype is conventionally seen as salvation through baptism (Figure 120).<sup>600</sup> 'Typological thinking,' although it extends to New Testament scenes, normally is associated with establishing Old Testament narratives as prefigurations of New Testament acts.<sup>601</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen describes the impetus for 'typological thinking' in this way:

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<sup>598</sup> André Grabar, 'Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 1 (1945), 15-36. It is probably not a coincidence that this article predates each Saussurean theory of early Christian imagery catalogued above. For that reason, though it may be anachronistic to say that Grabar's 'image-sign' influenced Weidlé's 'signitive image,' I would contend that in 'Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale' Grabar has laid the foundations for this argument even if he has not developed his exact terminology; as such, I would argue that Grabar's 'image-sign' was an influential *concept* even before his phraseology was realized.

<sup>599</sup> Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 10.

<sup>600</sup> Cf. Carl Otto Nordström, 'The Water Miracles of Moses in Jewish Legend and Byzantine Art', in Joseph Gutmann (ed.), *No Graven Images: Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible* (New York, 1971), 277-308.

<sup>601</sup> On 'typological thinking', see: Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus* (Princeton, 1990), 42 ff. On the application of typological thinking to the Old Testament, see especially: Kenneth J. Woolcombe, 'The Biblical Origins and Patristic Development of Typology', in Geoffrey W.H. Lampe

Christian thinkers, eager to establish a link between the old and new covenants in the sacred history, deftly identified prophetic figures or types in the Old Testament that bore out their claims of divine providence and anticipated the coming of Jesus as Saviour.<sup>602</sup>

Old Testament imagery, in this reading, is a commentary on the New Testament, and has been likened to a form of ‘visual exegesis.’<sup>603</sup> If we return to the image of ‘Peter’ from Figure 120 and compare it with the image of ‘Moses’ (Figure 121), a designation borrowed from Jensen,<sup>604</sup> striking a rock that produces water from a sarcophagus in the Vatican’s Museo Pio Cristiano we can see visual exegesis at work. Peter and Moses are likened to one another through a shared iconography implying a link both between their narratives and between the concepts for which they stand; both are ‘types’ for baptism. A closer inspection of the sarcophagus from the Museo Pio Cristiano (Figure 121), however, complicates the picture. The movement of the scene clearly proceeds from left to right culminating in the centre of the sarcophagus with a frontal orant figure (here partially cropped out of the scene); it is probably not too much to presume that the image would have thus been read from the left to right.<sup>605</sup> If that is the case, then a chronological reading, beginning with Moses, progressing through Peter, and ending with Christ, who turns is depicted transforming water into wine at Cana, at a quick glance appears to be a logical progression. However, a strictly chronological reading must be

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and Kenneth J. Woolcombe (eds.), *Essays on Typology: Studies in Biblical Theology, Volume 22* (London, 1957), 39 ff.; Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality*; Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: Die Typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen* (Darmstadt, 1969).

<sup>602</sup> Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 71.

<sup>603</sup> Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 64-93. See also: Geoffrey W.H. Lampe, ‘Typological Exegesis’, *Theology* 56 (1953), 201-8; Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 3: The Origins of Latin Christianity*, trans. John Austin Baker (London, 1977), esp. 297-319. On the dangers of ‘visual exegesis’, see: Robert A. Markus, ‘Presuppositions of the Typological Approach to Scripture’, *Church Quarterly Review* 158 (1957), 442-51.

<sup>604</sup> Cf. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 86.

<sup>605</sup> On how to read a sarcophagus, see Malbon’s discussion of ‘compositional cues’: Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, 7-10.

discarded since the arrest of Peter, the second of the three scenes, occurs after the Miracle at Cana. What reason, if any, is there for the order of the scenes?

If we engage in ‘typological thinking’, two elements of the scene are of particular note. First, all three of the main figures on the sarcophagus carry wands. Whether the wands allude to imperial power, philosophical didacticism, or magical abilities is less important than the fact that the depiction of each figure with a wand unifies them.<sup>606</sup> This unity, in a typological reading, would suggest that each scene corresponds to a similar ‘meaning’—in this case, salvation and redemption through Christ. Second, the leftmost two figures—‘Moses’ and ‘Peter’—look exactly the same.<sup>607</sup> Following the rules of interpretive juxtaposition, we would thus expect the first scene either to show Peter striking a rock or the second scene to show the arrest of Moses. In the former case, there was an apocryphal tradition that recorded that Peter struck the wall of his prison cell, which issued water that was then used to convert his two guards (depicted at the bottom of the stream of water on the sarcophagus),<sup>608</sup> whereas in the latter case there is no known story or iconographical tradition depicting the arrest of Moses. It would seem then that the sarcophagus in question shows Peter’s water miracle, which, interestingly, would result in a chronological progression of scenes from right to left—that is, against the movement of the figures. While that reading is of course possible, and there is no reason to assume the necessity of a chronological progression, the idea that Peter would be shown during his arrest being led away from his prison cell seems odd. In the final analysis, the argument for an identification of the leftmost image as Peter seems a bit stronger, but we cannot be certain whether the figure is

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<sup>606</sup> On Christ’s wand, see especially: Martine Dulaey, ‘Le symbole de la baguette dans L’art paleochrétien’, *Revue des études augustiniennes* 19 (1973), 3-38.

<sup>607</sup> It is unclear whether both are clothed similarly since the perspective of the scenes is different. It does appear, however, that ‘Moses’ wears a *pallium* while Peter wears a *toga*.

<sup>608</sup> Cf. Robin Margaret Jensen, ‘Moses Imagery in Jewish and Christian Art: Problems of Continuity and Particularity’, *SBL Seminar Papers* (1992), 395-98.

Peter or Moses.<sup>609</sup> A case could be made for either, and, indeed, several contradicting cases have been made. What has been neglected, however, is that the image on the Vatican sarcophagus could have been *either* depending on the viewer (e.g., would every viewer have known the story of Peter in his jail cell?), *both*, or, indeed, *neither*.

At issue here is not typological thinking in itself; there is no reason that typology cannot permit the image in question to be both Moses and Peter. As we have seen in our discussion of *interpretatio romana*, during AD 200 to 500 the same image could have multiple referents, and to divorce Christianity from that cultural matrix is anachronistic. One could even argue that the exegetical function of typological thinking is *enhanced* by the possibility of seeing an image as ‘Peter-Moses’ instead of either Peter or Moses. What is at issue, instead, is a Saussurean model for typological thinking. Mary Charles Murray explains the normal typological position as:

...any conception of symbols as an agreed sign-language, the basic premiss from which the mind of the early Church worked was that the meaning of a sign was hidden and only revealed itself to those who knew how to look for the answer. It was this idea that lay behind the whole allegorical interpretation of Scripture.<sup>610</sup>

Murray pithily sums up most typological studies as ‘allegorical and symbolic.’<sup>611</sup> As with the ‘image-sign,’ a number of different terminologies have sprung up to describe how typology ‘worked.’ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon prefers ‘allusive’ whereas Catherine Brown Tkacz prefers thinking of a typological ‘key.’<sup>612</sup> Sabine Schrenk is perhaps the most Saussurean

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<sup>609</sup> For previous arguments on the topic, see: Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 70; Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 129 ff.; David R. Cartlidge and James K. Elliott, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (London, 2001), 162-66; Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 90.

<sup>610</sup> Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 10. More generally, see: Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History* (Chicago, 1998), 43-53 on ‘multi-strand’ activities.

<sup>611</sup> Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 10.

<sup>612</sup> Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, 10-11; Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket*, 66 ff.

in her strict adherence to the ‘type’/‘antitype’ dichotomy.<sup>613</sup> The situation though is far more complicated than the standard typological approach will allow. Mary Charles Murray has led the charge to complicate the Saussurean semiotics implied in most typological studies (although she has never used this terminology). It is worth quoting her discussion at length:

[Typology] has its roots in religion rather than in art and it sees symbolization as of divine origin, mysteriously communicated. It is a method of biblical exegesis, and this must be surely the tradition to which Christian art belongs. On this view, therefore, far from being unambiguous, a symbol could have several meanings, and conversely several images may illustrate one theme... The very “openness” of some symbols of early Christian art may be deliberate. It is essential, therefore, in my view, that Christian iconography must start with a study of institutions, that is, the Church and its tradition, rather than a study of symbols understood as constants and then decoded.<sup>614</sup>

An understanding of early Christian imagery as ambiguous and polysemic is both in accordance with the visual evidence (as the Peter/Moses case study demonstrated) and with Peirce’s more dynamic theory of semiosis. Texts and images refer to other texts and images; interpretants become their own signs—Moses, becomes Peter (or Peter becomes Moses), who becomes Christ, who becomes salvation, etc. Where Murray missteps, however, is in her view that the institutional context of Christian art is the Church. While it is beyond question that theology played an important role in the development of Christian art (witness the reliance on Scripture in narrative scenes), as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the *cultural* context of Christian art was broader and was associated with, among other things, the contemporaneous Second Sophistic.

The scholar making the first attempts to situate early Christian art within Second Sophistic discourse is Jaś Elsner. In his contribution to the *Life, Death and Representation*

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<sup>613</sup> Sabine Schrenk, *Typos und Antitypos in der frühchristlichen Kunst* (Münster, 1995). For complications, see: William Diebold, ‘Typology, Theology, and Historiography in an Ottonian Ivory Diptych’, in Colum Hourihane (ed.), *Objects, Images, and the Word* (Princeton, 2003), 257-73; Patrick J. Bayens, *The Brescia Casket: Patristic Exegesis and Biblical Iconography on an Early Christian Alms Box* (Lexington, 2004).

<sup>614</sup> Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 10-11.

symposium, Elsner argues that Christian artworks are rhetorical in nature and, specifically, that they engage in the more widespread apologetic and polemic religious discourses traced out above.<sup>615</sup> Elsner focuses specifically on the image of Christ's trial both as an apology for the anti-Christian invective that Christ could not be wise or divine if he was silent during his trial and as a polemic against the Roman state, alluded to by the image of Pilate.<sup>616</sup> Elsner's argument is an important precedent, but amendments and amplifications need to be made to the project that Elsner has begun. He writes:

...whether in texts or in art, the edge of both polemic and apology is highly dependent on a series of rhetorical tropes such as *synkrisis* (comparison), encomium and panegyric (both forms of praise), *psogos* (invective), *topos* (the amplification of faults and virtues), and *antirrêsis* (the contradiction of another's argument), which all have notable theoretical literatures in many of the rhetorical handbooks used in ancient education which survive from our period.<sup>617</sup>

Two points in particular need to be made in response to the foregoing excerpt. First, despite his acknowledgement of encomium/panegyric as an important trope (as well as *topos*, which was used to extol virtues within panegyric), Elsner focuses only on apology and polemic. In Elsner's text, he illustrates six sarcophagi depicting Christ's passion scene each of which also includes at its centre a triumphal image of Christ or, in one case, Lateran 171 (Figure 133), an equally triumphal cross with a wreathed chi-rho monogram sitting atop it. That Christ's triumph would be invoked is not surprising when another scene on each sarcophagus, Jesus' trial, 'stands for the Passion.'<sup>618</sup> Christ's death may be signified, but, if these sarcophagi are indicative, not without some reference to Christ's triumph over death. These triumphal scenes, while certainly part of the narrative on each sarcophagus, are also central, frontal, and stand alone in their meaning; the scenes may have an overarching syntax, but that does not mean that each

<sup>615</sup> Elsner, 'Image and Rhetoric in Early Christian Sarcophagi', 359-86.

<sup>616</sup> Elsner, 'Image and Rhetoric in Early Christian Sarcophagi', 361-62.

<sup>617</sup> Elsner, 'Image and Rhetoric in Early Christian Sarcophagi', 360.

<sup>618</sup> Elsner, 'Image and Rhetoric in Early Christian Sarcophagi', 363.

component does not have its own nuanced meaning. If we consider the central scene of Lateran 171, the polemic of Christianity's supremacy and Rome's impotence are encoded by the diminutive Roman soldiers that sit below the cross and are dwarfed by the wreathed chi-rho. The apologetic message of the image is communicated by the implication of Christ's resurrection and triumph, a visual sign for Christianity's central mystery. Finally, of course, the very notion of a Christian 'triumph' embodies the praise of Christ one would expect from a panegyric.

The panegyric function of early Christian iconography is more clearly 'articulated' on the Lateran 174 sarcophagus (Figure 140), which Elsner juxtaposes with Lateran 171. On Lateran 174, seven intercolumniated scenes adorn the front of the sarcophagus instead of the five on Lateran 171, and in the central scene we are faced with another triumphal image of Christ. Christ is shown in a *pallium*, on a throne and turned to his left towards Paul. Christ also appears to be giving Peter the law, which here takes the form of an unwound scroll that spans the columnar partition between Christ and the first Pope. Within the central intercolumniation Christ is flanked by two unidentified attendants and rests his feet atop of the figure of Caelus, god of the heavens—a *topos* probably used to signify dominance over the world. It is not my purpose to suggest that the central Christ on Lateran 174 can only be understood as 'Christ as King' and not, say, as 'Christ as philosopher' or 'Christ as Supreme Deity'; indeed, all those readings are possible and we will return to them in the next chapter. It will suffice for the moment to point out that this image quite clearly articulates Christ's supremacy, his erudition, and his dominion, all of which are attributes worthy of praise and cited in contemporaneous panegyrics.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Cf. Hagg and Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*. See also Chapter 5 below. Late Antiquity also featured Christian epic poetry that, though not strictly panegyric, functioned similarly. See especially: Carl P.E. Singer, *The Gospel as Epic in Late Antiquity: The Paschale Carmen of Sedulius* (Leiden, 1988). See also: Michael Roberts, *The Cult of Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor, 1993); Roger P.H. Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator* (Oxford, 2006).

The second point prompted by the Elsner's excerpt is that, however one understands the central image of Christ from Lateran 174, the reading is based on an implicit *synkrisis*. Christ as King and thus the panegyric function of the image derive from similarities with imperial iconography, a good example of which is preserved on the Missorium of Theodosius, a silver commemorative dish celebrating the emperor's *decennalia* (Figure 28). Theodosius, enthroned under an arch, is separated from his co-emperors Valentinian II and Arcadius by columns; he, like Christ, reaches across the column to his right to give (or receive) a scroll. In a lower register, a personification of earth is sprawled amid an abundance of vegetation as two putti offer up the earth's plenty to the emperor. Although the iconographies of the Missorium and Lateran 174 are not identical, they are similar enough to allow for the more general observation that for those familiar with both forms of iconography, comparing Christ to the emperor (or vice-versa) would have been unsurprising and, perhaps, natural. Whether the iconography borrowed for Christ was imperial, religious or philosophical *synkrisis* was the rhetorical trope (indeed, the thought structure) that would have enabled panegyric, polemic, and/or apologetic interpretations of Late Antique iconography. As Nicolaus the Sophist explained:

There being three parts of rhetoric, *synkrisis* [sic] would seem to belong to one, I mean encomion [panegyric], but it will exercise us also for the others; for when engaged in deliberation we want to show that our proposals are finer than those spoken by others [apologetic], and we shall do the same when giving an account of wrongs done and we shall try to show that the present ones are greater than all [polemic].<sup>620</sup>

The application of *synkristic* thinking to *ekphraseis*, however, was not confined to the relationship between an image and its prototype; the comparison could be and was extended to anything that shared a degree of similitude. As Aelius Theon, the author of one set of *progymnasmata*, puts it: ‘...let it be specified that *synkrisis* [sic] are not comparisons of things

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<sup>620</sup> Nicolaus the Sophist, ‘The Preliminary Exercises of Nicolaus the Sophist’, in *Progymnasmata*, 163-64.

having a great difference between them; for someone wondering whether Achilles or Thersites was braver would be laughable.’<sup>621</sup> It was not laughable to think though that a *synkrisis* could be extended beyond comparisons of inanimate objects. Aelius Theon makes this clear elsewhere when he tells us: ‘Synkrisis [sic] is language setting the better or the worse side by side. There are synkrisis of both persons and things.’<sup>622</sup> Thus Tim Duff has demonstrated how Plutarch’s *Lives*, which pair biographies together, were intended as a *synkrisis*.<sup>623</sup> Caesar did not base his life on Alexander *per se*, but their juxtaposition in Plutarch’s work facilitated comparison, which in turn was instructive since similarities and differences could emerge once they were ‘set side by side.’ The broadness of *synkrisis* and its similarities with contemporaneous typological thinking suggests that the two may be manifestations of the same cultural phenomenon. Michael Hollerich has already demonstrated the functional equivalence between *synkrisis* and typology in his studies of Eusebius. Writing of Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine*, Hollerich puts it succinctly: ‘In the terminology of classical rhetoric this version of the comparison is a *synkrisis* as well as a typology.’<sup>624</sup> Earlier still, Eva Topping suggested the coincidence of *synkrisis* with typology in Byzantine rhetoric, although her interpretation has been criticized.<sup>625</sup> Others too are beginning to draw out the similarities between the genres.<sup>626</sup> There is no reason that this convergence should be surprising. After all, even if the individuals engaged in ‘one or the other’ (if we allow them to be differentiated for the time being) shared different religious orientations, both probably has

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<sup>621</sup> Aelius Theon, ‘The Exercises of Aelius Theon’, in *Progymnasmata*, 52.

<sup>622</sup> Aelius Theon, ‘The Exercises of Aelius Theon’, in *Progymnasmata*, 52.

<sup>623</sup> Tim Duff, *Plutarch’s Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>624</sup> Michael J. Hollerich, ‘Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius: Reassessing the First “Court Theologian”’, *Church History* 59 (1990), 322. See also: Michael J. Hollerich, ‘Myth and History in Eusebius’ *De Vita Constantini: Vit. Const.* 1.12 in its Contemporary Setting’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989), 421-45.

<sup>625</sup> Eva Topping, ‘Romanos, On the Entry into Jerusalem: A Basilikos Logos’, *Byzantion* 47 (1977), 65-91. For a critique, see: Margaret Mullett, ‘The Madness of Genre’, *Homo Byzantinus: Papers in Honor of Alexander Kazhdan, Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992), 238.

<sup>626</sup> Jaś Elsner, ‘Sarcophagi, Rhetoric and Shifting Paradigms of Praise’, Paper delivered at ‘Body and Soul in Late Antiquity’ Seminar, Oxford, 24 May 2011. See also: George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, 1980), esp. 152-55.

been exposed to the rhetorical training typical of *paideia*—how else could they have learned the protreptic techniques to articulate their arguments and evince conversion? This is just to say that those engaged in typological and *synkristic* thinking at the very least probably shared good deal culturally. While the exact nature of the relationship between typology and *synkrisis* still needs to be worked out, for the purposes of this dissertation it is sufficient to note that the former seems to be a type of the latter; that is, *synkrisis* is a conventionalised form of comparison and typology is its uniquely Christian application.

Elsner's argument that depictions of Jesus' trial could function as polemic, apologetic, or both is an important step towards opening up the possibility that single images could have multiple meanings and towards expanding the 'institutional context' of early Christian images from the Church to Late Antiquity more generally. Yet, as we saw above, the notions of apologetic, polemic and the more general heading 'protreptic' have all been criticised on the grounds that they imply a specific audience. In that regard, despite Elsner's nuanced account of how rhetoric influenced the ways that a sarcophagus could have been understood, he still assumes a Christian audience in the same way that 'typological thinking' assumes a Christian meaning. It may have very well been the case that many viewers of early Christian artwork were Christians (but what type of Christians?); nevertheless, a Christian audience is not a given—it is a hypothesis in need of testing. The next section's two case studies query the idea that viewers of Christian artworks were necessarily Christian and provide plausible Christian and non-Christian interpretations for two important Late Antique artworks: the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the Hinton St. Mary floor mosaic.

### Section III

#### Late Antique Interpretations of Two Images of Christ

In this section, we apply the methodology developed in Section II to two objects: (1) the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and (2) the floor mosaic from Hinton St. Mary. As the introduction explained, both objects share certain features none of which are as important as the elite viewing contexts and the relatively secure dates for each. Since our objects would have been viewed by Late Antique elites, the ‘rhetorical-individual’ model of interpretation that we developed in the preceding section can be applied to both artworks.

Although the approach to each object is shared, the results of the analyses differ considerably. Whereas Chapter 5 elucidates a non-Christian interpretation of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus—an object that was clearly intended to carry a Christological meaning, Chapter 6 develops a possible Christian interpretation for an image (or, as we shall see, set of images) whose intent is unclear. Despite these differences, each chapter presents a new reading of its object that is consistent with the rhetorical thought structures of *paideia*, including the protreptic modes of interaction and the comparative framework of *synkrisis*.

The key to this section is the realisation that the interpretations provided were entirely plausible in a Late Antique, elite viewing context. While some associations are undoubtedly stronger than others, even the most tendentious were possible; indeed, from a rhetorical point of view, the more difficult the manoeuvres required to make a point, the more highly praised the speech (assuming no great variation in style or delivery). The point is to instantiate the model of interpretation developed in Section II by applying it to relevant material culture. Each of the interpretations offered in the next two chapters may not be generalizable to more than one person, and it is conceivable that no one ever made the associations that are suggested below.

While it may seem strange to say, these issues are beside the point. What is relevant is that the interpretations that are provided work within the logic of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries and thus provide insight into what kinds of understandings were possible. The point is not the result so much as it is the process. In the first section we saw that a history of ontological consensus overlooks epistemological ambiguity by subordinating the process of individual interpretation to the notion of a societal or group consensus. In the second section we saw that the dynamics of individual interpretation differ markedly from those of group interpretation. What remains, and what this section undertakes, is to trace the process of interpreting Late Antique objects in a way that conforms with the cerebral processes of Late Antique viewers.

## Chapter V

### The Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus: A Non-Christian Interpretation

In 2009, Corpus Christi College at the University of Oxford hosted a conference on Roman sarcophagi, the proceedings of which have been published recently under the title *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Sarcophagi*.<sup>627</sup> The book was ‘born out of two impulses’: (1) to provide an introduction to sarcophagi in English and (2) to survey the huge scope of sarcophagi rather than focus on a single type of sarcophagus.<sup>628</sup> In so doing, the book opens up the discourse to theoretical insights that have been largely lacking from the mostly German scholarship the subject.<sup>629</sup> The move towards new perspectives on sarcophagi is an important one for the study of Late Antique art. Sarcophagi have been a fundamental component of the literature on early Christianity both because their use remained continuous throughout Late Antiquity and because many have survived to the present.<sup>630</sup> In large part for this reason, those looking to trace the evolution of early Christian art have leaned heavily upon sarcophagi.<sup>631</sup> Historically, the focus of the scholarship has been on iconography and style; however, with those foundations laid, and especially since the publication of the authoritative catalogue of Christian sarcophagi, the *Repertorium* (replacing Garrucci’s 19<sup>th</sup> century compilation),<sup>632</sup> volumes like *Life, Death and Representation* are needed to provide new perspectives on ‘...the assumptions

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<sup>627</sup> Elsner and Huskinson (eds.), *Life, Death and Representation*.

<sup>628</sup> Elsner, ‘Introduction’, *Life, Death and Representation*, 1.

<sup>629</sup> For exceptions, see especially: Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser, *Kulträume im römischen Alltag: das Isisbuch des Apuleius und der Ort von Religion im kaiserzeitlichen Rom* (Stuttgart, 2000); Natascha Sojc (ed.), *Neue fragen — neue Antworten: Antike Kunst als Thema der Gender Studies* (Berlin, 2005); Paul Zanker and Björn C. Ewald, *Mit Mythen leben: die Bilderwert der römischen Sarkophage* (Munich, 2004). For an earlier historiography with a critical survey of the scholarship, see: Guntram Koch and Hellmut Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage* (Munich, 1982), esp. 3-19.

<sup>630</sup> According to Thomas Mathews, nearly 1,000 ‘Christian’ sarcophagi survive. See: ‘The Beginnings of Christian Art’, in Robin Cormack and Maria Vassilaki (eds.), *Byzantium: 330-1453* (London, 2008), 49.

<sup>631</sup> Cf. Charles Rufus Morey, *Early Christian Art* (Princeton, 1942); Wolfgang F. Wolbach, *Early Christian Art* (London, 1961), 22-23; Beat Brenk, *Spätantike und Frühes Christentum* (Frankfurt am Main, 1977), 138.

<sup>632</sup> Deichman, *Repertorium, 2 Volumes*. Compare with: Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana*.

guiding the long study of sarcophagi.<sup>633</sup> This is not to say that all previous scholars have completely avoided the ‘big picture’; however, the social context of sarcophagus production and ‘consumption’ has been obstructed by what Jaś Elsner in the introduction to *Life, Death and Representation* calls ‘...[the] strange division between sarcophagi with Christian subjects and those without...’.<sup>634</sup>

The next section briefly outlines the historiography of what the Germans call ‘Sarkophagstudien,’<sup>635</sup> and in mapping the contours of ‘sarcophagus studies’ the rigid divide between Christian and non-Christian sarcophagi will be problematized. The chapter will then turn its attention to perhaps the most iconic early Christian sarcophagus—the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Figure 7)—and demonstrate both how it transcends the normative ‘Christian’ interpretive framework and how the sarcophagus could have been interpreted from a non-Christian perspective.

### **I. Sarcophagus Studies: A Brief History**

The systematic study of sarcophagi began only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with scholars like Otto Jahn, Carl Robert, and Friedrich Matz. Jahn receives less credit than the others in part because he made no direct contribution to the literature on sarcophagi, but it was his compendium of Latin inscriptions, the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (‘CIL’), that provided the model for his conception of an analogous catalogue of sarcophagi that he would call *Die antike Sarkophag-Reliefs* (usually abbreviated ‘ASR’). Jahn had begun compiling sarcophagi at the time of his death, but with his passing the study of sarcophagi and his chair at

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<sup>633</sup> Elsner, ‘Introduction’, *Life, Death and Representation*, 1.

<sup>634</sup> Elsner, ‘Introduction’, *Life, Death and Representation*, 1.

<sup>635</sup> For an excellent recent review of the subject, see: François Baratte, ‘Les sarcophages romains: Problèmes et certitude’, *Perspective* 1 (2006), 38-54.

the DAI were bequeathed to Friedrich Matz and, subsequently, to Carl Robert—the first giant of the field. Robert acceded to the DAI directorship in 1874 and inaugurated the ASR with the publication of its first volumes. Robert wrote the volumes on mythological cycles and individual myths, and this preoccupation with mythology would remain central to later scholarship.<sup>636</sup> The first four volumes of the ASR set another precedent: they focused exclusively on pagan sarcophagi. Some of this focus is undoubtedly due to the assumption that mythological scenes evoked the religion of the interred, an assumption only recently problematized.<sup>637</sup> As we saw in the earlier discussion of Roman religion, the first volumes of the ASR were produced in an intellectual environment that saw Christianity as an exclusive religion sharply differentiated from pagan cults and their ‘religious’ mythology.<sup>638</sup> In part for this reason, once the different disciplines of *Klassische Archäologie* and *Christliche Archäologie* had crystallised (with their separate catalogues of the ASR and the *Repertorium* respectively), the divide persisted.<sup>639</sup>

Robert’s work on the ASR was undertaken partly in collaboration with his predecessor’s eponymous nephew. Friedrich Matz ‘the younger’ was an intergenerational figure whose career overlapped with both the old guard and scholars like Gerhard Rodenwaldt who introduced a different research agenda.<sup>640</sup> While Rodenwaldt would continue the DAI’s publication of the ASR, he was more interested in sarcophagi as markers of stylistic change than he was in the

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<sup>636</sup> Cf. Carl Robert, *Der Pasiphae-Sarkophag* (Halle, 1890).

<sup>637</sup> Cf. Zahra Newby, ‘In the Guise of Gods and Heroes: Portrait Heads on Roman Mythological Sarcophagi’, in Elsner and Hutchinson (eds.), 189 ff.; Dennis Trout, ‘Borrowed Verse and Broken Narrative: Agency, Identity, and the (Bethseda) Sarcophagus of Bassa’, in *Life, Death and Representation*, 337 ff.

<sup>638</sup> See especially: Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, chap. 1.

<sup>639</sup> For example, compare two recent volumes both edited by Guntram Koch but both maintaining the division between Christian and ‘pagan.’ For the former, see: Guntram Koch (ed.), *Akten des Symposions ‘Frühchristliche Sarkophage’* (Marburg, 1999). For the latter, see: Guntram Koch (ed.), *Akten des Sarkophag-Corpus 2001. Sarkophag-Studien, Volume 3* (Mainz, 2007).

<sup>640</sup> Cf. Elsner, ‘Alois Riegl and Classical Archaeology,’ 45-57. As Elsner notes, one of the theoretical issues with which the new generation had to deal was the integration of Hans Seldmayr’s theory of *Strukturforschung*. See, for example: Friedrich Matz, ‘Stukturforschung und Archäologie’, *Studium Generale* 17 (1964), 203-19.

strict production of catalogues.<sup>641</sup> An interest in style remained an important part of the literature on sarcophagi, but the focus of the scholarship after Rodenwaldt moved from the compilation of catalogues of mythological scenes to the explanation of the use of particular myths and their meanings.<sup>642</sup>

With this transition from cataloguing to interpretation, the centre of gravity in sarcophagus studies moved beyond German borders. Franz Cumont's *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* was especially influential to this shift. In *Recherches*, Cumont, using the same Christianising assumptions discussed in Chapter 3, argues that the myths used on sarcophagi carried symbolic meanings that could only be decoded through a careful reading of the material evidence in conjunction with contemporaneous epigraphic and literary sources.<sup>643</sup> Cumont's argument provided a new, theoretical repackaging of the differentiation between Christian and non-Christian sarcophagi. Cumont maintained that a form of intimate religious knowledge was needed to interpret a sarcophagus, an argument that presupposes different, exclusive bodies of religious knowledge. In other words, Cumont provided the framework that allowed scholars to argue that Christian art could only be fully understood by Christians and non-Christian art could only be correctly interpreted by 'pagans.'

Cumont's position, however influential, was not immune from criticism, and assaults on his methodology came swiftly.<sup>644</sup> The prolegomena to future critiques of Cumont, benignly

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<sup>641</sup> Gerhart Rodenwaldt, *Über den Stilwandel in der antoninische Kunst. Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin, 1935); Gerhart Rodenwaldt, 'The Transition to Late-Classical Art', in Stanley A. Cook, Frank E. Adcock, Martin P Charlesworth and Norman H. Baynes (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 12: The Imperial Crisis and Recovery, A.D. 193-324* (Cambridge, 1939), 544-570.

<sup>642</sup> On the continued interest in style, see: Helmut Jung, 'Vorgeschichte des spätantoinischen Stilwandels', in Bernard Andreae (ed.), *Symposium über die antiken Sarkophage* (Marburg, 1984), 59-103. On the mythological focus, see: Lehmann and Olsen, *Dionysiac Sarcophagi in Baltimore*; Frank G.J.M. Müller, *The So-Called Peleus and Thetis Sarcophagus in Villa Albani* (Amsterdam, 1994).

<sup>643</sup> Cf. Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris, 1942).

<sup>644</sup> See especially: Arthur Darby Nock, 'Sarcophagi and Symbolism', *American Journal of Archaeology* 50 (1946), 140-70. Even so, some scholars have defended Cumont's scholarship. See especially: 'Les sarcophages romaines

titled ‘Sarcophagi and Symbolism,’ was authored by Arthur D. Nock in 1946. In what was ostensibly a review of Cumont’s *Recherches*, Nock rightly questioned Cumont’s assumptions and built an alternative reading for sarcophagi centred on the use of mythology as an expression of classicism instead of religion. ‘Sarcophagi and Symbolism’ proved influential for a number of studies, including (but not limited to) works like Ian A. Richmond’s *Archaeology and Afterlife in Pagan and Christian Imagery*, Erwin Panofsky’s *Tomb Sculpture*, and Hellmut Sichtermann’s work on Endymion sarcophagi (as well as his more general work with Guntram Koch on Greek mythology).<sup>645</sup> Each of these studies and others like them work from the same assumption that the Greek mythology found on sarcophagi was translated into meanings intelligible and particular to the Roman culture that produced them.<sup>646</sup>

More recently, this scholarship has grown increasingly nuanced and shifted its focus from the group to the individual. One of the early studies with this new focus was Susan Wood’s article concerning Alcestis on Roman sarcophagi, which looked at how the myth of Alcestis was appropriated and modified by its patron to articulate a specific message about the deceased.<sup>647</sup> Wood’s argument was generalised a few years later in an important contribution by Natalie B. Kampen on the role of biography in Roman funerary art,<sup>648</sup> and Kampen’s argument was itself generalised from ‘biographical narration’ to the role of narrative in general in Richard Brilliant’s *Visual Narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art*.<sup>649</sup>

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et le problème du symbolisme funéraire’, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, II*, 16 (1978), 1700-35; *Message d’outre-tomb: L’iconographie des sarcophages romains* (Paris, 1999).

<sup>645</sup> Ian A. Richmond, *Archaeology and Afterlife in Pagan and Christian Imagery* (London, 1950); Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (New York, 1964); Hellmut Sichtermann and Guntram Koch, *Griechische Mythen auf Römischen Sarkophagen* (Tübingen, 1975).

<sup>646</sup> Cf. Hern G. Thümmel, ‘Heidnisches und Christliches auf spätantiken Sarkophagen’, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Reihe* 35 (1986), 688-93.

<sup>647</sup> Susan Wood, ‘Alcestis on Roman Sarcophagi’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 82 (1978), 499-510.

<sup>648</sup> Natalie Boymel Kampen, ‘Biographical Narration in Roman Funerary Art’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 85 (1981), 47-58.

<sup>649</sup> Brilliant, *Visual Narratives*, 124-65.

If Wood, Kampen, and Brilliant set the stage, the main actor to move the discipline of *Sarkophagstudien* towards the study of individual motives was Michael Koortbojian whose *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* remains as methodologically sophisticated as any work published in the field.<sup>650</sup> Koortbojian's major insight was that the convergence of iconographies allowed for multivalent and overlapping meanings.<sup>651</sup> Koortbojian advocated a strikingly contingent interpretation of Roman sarcophagi (one which could be called 'iconological' in Mitchell's sense of the word) that has been influential for subsequent work both on sarcophagi and on other types of funerary art.<sup>652</sup>

Koortbojian's, Wood's and Kampen's approaches, however, are subject to two critiques. On the one hand, the odd division between Christian and non-Christian sepulchral art is retained; on the other, despite opening the door for the possibility of dynamic meanings, the traditional interest in the *intention* of the iconography (as determined by the patron and/or workshop) persists. While the intention of the patron is undoubtedly important, an exclusive focus on intentionality overlooks the complex meanings that could be imputed into objects by different viewers; if an object could evoke many different interpretations, then those interpretations should be given full-play. More recent developments in *Sarkophagstudien* include an increased awareness of sarcophagi as a Second Sophistic phenomenon as well as an interest in their

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<sup>650</sup> Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory*.

<sup>651</sup> Koortbojian's framework is not dissimilar to previous conceptions of Christ's images as a composite of various 'layers' of meaning. For example, see: Ernst Dassman, 'Das Apsismosaik von Santa Pudentiana in Rom', *Römische Quartalschrift* 65 (1970), 67-81. On the ambiguity of sepulchral iconography, see also: Robert Turcan, 'Déformation des modèles et confusion typologiques dans l'iconographie des sarcophages romains', *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa, Series 3* 17 (1987), 429-46.

<sup>652</sup> Cf. Janet Huskinson, "'Unfinished Portrait Heads" on Later Roman Sarcophagi: Some New Perspectives', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 46 (1998), 129-58; R.R.R. Smith, 'Sarcophagi and Roman Citizenship', in Christopher Ratté and R.R.R. Smith (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 4: New Research on the City and Its Monuments, Journal of Roman Archaeology* 70 (Providence, 2008), 347-94.

context. Both developments have moved the discipline towards a more dynamic interpretive framework.<sup>653</sup>

The next disciplinary move will be to question the wall erected between the literatures on Christian and non-Christian sarcophagi. Scholars like Barbara Borg, Hugo Brandenburg, and Henning Wrede have started this systematic rethink.<sup>654</sup> Key to each of these scholars is the role that *paideia* plays in understanding sarcophagi. Following Nock, the ‘religious’ knowledge that allegedly was so important to understanding sarcophagi is replaced by the more widely available knowledge received through a classical education. Religious *gnosis* should not be underplayed—to do so risks swinging the pendulum too far in a secularist direction—but the observation that, regardless of religion, *paideia* was a structuring principle of elite thought during the Second Sophistic for Christians and non-Christian alike is an important observation that bears on our interpretation of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus.

Before moving to the discussion of the Bassus sarcophagus proper, a more general question must be addressed. If, as the shift in framework towards *paideia* suggests, religious objects could be interpreted by individuals who did not share the religious affiliation of the object’s patron, then is it possible for a non-Christian interpretation of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus? Put more generally, could non-Christians interpret Christian sarcophagi? While the theoretical answer may be a resounding ‘yes,’ on a practical level we must first demonstrate that

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<sup>653</sup> On Second Sophistic, see: Egelhaaf-Gaiser, *Kulträume im römischen Alltag*; Bjorn Ewald, ‘Men, Muscle, and Myth: Attic Sarcophagi in the Cultural Context of the Second Sophistic’, in *Paideia*, 229-76. On context see: Kurt Fittschen, ‘Über Sarkophage mit Porträts verschiedener Personen’, in *Symposium über die antiken Sarkophage*, 129-61; Jutta Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen des 4.-6. Jahrhunderts im westen des römischen Reiches: Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte, Supplement Volume 55* (Rome, 2003), 9-17; Ruth Bielfeldt, *Orestes auf römischen Sarkophagen* (Munich, 2005), esp. 19-28 and 48 ff.

<sup>654</sup> Henning Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophage Roms: der Beitrag des Senatorenstandes zur römischen Kunst der hohen und späten Kaiserzeit* (Mainz, 2001); Hugo Brandenburg, ‘Das Ende der antiken Sarkophagkunst in Rom. Pagane und christliche Sarkophage im 4. Jahrhundert’, in *Akten des Symposions*, 19-39; Barbara Borg, *Matter of Life and Death: A social history of tombs and burial customs in second and third century AD Rome* (Oxford, forthcoming).

non-Christians would have had access to Christian sarcophagi before we can argue that non-Christians interpreted them. The following section takes up this challenge, and in so doing, calls into question the idea that ‘intent,’ which very well may have been religious, ought to be privileged over ‘reception.’

## II. The Viewing Audience for Sarcophagi in Late Antiquity

Proof of a non-Christian audience for Christian sarcophagi is most easily done by contradiction—that is, by finding the faults with the assumption that a Christian sarcophagus would have been viewed only by Christians. Such an assumption presents three questions. First, how can we know if a sarcophagus belonged to a Christian? The porous line between pagan and Christian iconography was discussed in Chapter 1, and the similarity between Jewish and Christian iconographies is implicit in the importance of typological thinking to early Christian art.<sup>655</sup> Iconography, therefore, is not enough on its own to warrant the designation of a sarcophagus as ‘Christian.’ Leonard Rutgers has provided a systematic methodology for assessing the religion of the interred from sarcophagi in Jewish burial contexts, and Rutgers’ method can be extended to the designation of Christian sarcophagi. Rutgers explains:

An identification of an individual fragment as Jewish is only warranted when the following three conditions are met: (1) a sarcophagus is found *in situ*; (2) it carries an inscription that indicates its use by Jews; [and] (3) the iconography of the piece suggests a Jewish commission.<sup>656</sup>

Second, when we say that a sarcophagus is ‘Christian,’ what do we mean? As we have seen, the notion that there was a single ‘Christianity’ is problematic; thus, the ascription of a

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<sup>655</sup> Cf. Elsner, ‘Archaeologies and Agendas’, 114-28; Jaś Elsner, ‘Inventing Christian Rome: The role of early Christian Art’, in Catharine Edwards and Gregg Woolf (eds.), *Rome the Cosmopolis* (Cambridge, 2003), 77. On Jewish art, see: Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman World*; Herbert Kessler, ‘Through the temple veil: the holy image in Judaism and Christianity’, *Kairos* 32/33 (1990/91), 53-77.

<sup>656</sup> Leonard V. Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence for Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora* (Leiden, 2000), 78.

single iconography to a diverse set of Christianities, some of which intermingled with Judaism (e.g., ‘Jewish-Christianity’) and ‘paganism’ (i.e., Manichaeism), is equally dangerous.<sup>657</sup> It has been a difficult business trying to ascribe iconographies to different Christian groups, although there is evidence from Rome that suggests that among catacomb paintings different ‘house-schools’ had distinct and identifiable iconographies.<sup>658</sup> The third question that must be considered is, even where Rutgers’ method allows us to identify a sarcophagus as ‘Christian’ and even where we think we know the type of Christian interred in the sarcophagus, how can we know that the coffin was viewed only by Christians (or indeed if it was viewed at all)?<sup>659</sup> This question requires a somewhat longer answer than the first two, if only since the assumption of a Christian audience for Christian artworks, as we have seen, is deeply embedded within the scholarship on early Christian artworks.

In order to argue for an exclusively Christian audience for Christian artworks requires three assumptions that do not stand up to scrutiny. The first presumption is that the sculptor—or, more properly, every employee in the sculpting workshop—was Christian. An entire scholarship on ‘Werkstattgleichheit’—i.e., ‘[common] workshop-identity’—suggests that Christians and non-Christians used the same workshops for everything from gold glass to sarcophagi.<sup>660</sup> John B. Ward Perkins sums up the situation: ‘Meaning was emphatically in the eye of the beholder.

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<sup>657</sup> See though: Paul C. Finney, ‘Gnosticism and the Origins of Early Christian Art’, *Atti del IX Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana. Roma 21-27 Settembre 1975* (Vatican City, 1978), 1391-405.

<sup>658</sup> Cf. Allen Brent, *Hippolytus & the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (Leiden, 1995), 398-457; Paul C. Finney, *Invisible God*, 116-35.

<sup>659</sup> Certain sarcophagi, even incredibly ornate ones, seem to have been buried. For example, on the Adelfia sarcophagus, see: Santi Luigi Agnello, *Il Sarcophago di Adelfia* (Vatican City, 1956), 4-8.

<sup>660</sup> On ‘Werkstattgleichheit’ in general, see: George M.A. Hanfmann, *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks, Volume I* (Cambridge, 1951), 57; Klauser, ‘Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte’, 20-51. On gold glass, see especially: Charles Rufus Morey, *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library. With Additional Catalogues of Other Gold Glass Collections* (Vatican City, 1959), nos. 27-28 and 32. On Jewish sarcophagi, see: Leonard V. Rutgers, *The Hidden Heritage of Diaspora Judaism* (Leuven, 1998), 77. On Christian sarcophagi, see especially: Klaus Eichner, ‘Die Produktionsmethoden der römischen Sarkophagfabrik in der Blütezeit unter Konstantin’, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 24 (1981), 88-90.

As for the craftsman, it was quite immaterial whether he was pagan or Christian.<sup>661</sup> Second, the assumption of a Christian audience also presumes that all sarcophagi were only viewable in private; otherwise, in a public venue, any citizen of the Empire—Christian or non-Christian alike—could have seen a sarcophagus. There is some evidence that ‘Greek’ sarcophagi, which were decorated on all four sides, may have lined the streets of the processional route(s) to a town’s cemeteries, a tradition not dissimilar to the later display of sarcophagi in churches during the sixth century (Figures 156, 168).<sup>662</sup> That Christian sarcophagi may have been visible above ground and in public is implied by a law added to the *Theodosian Codex* by Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosian I that necessitates the removal of above-ground sarcophagi or urns outside of the city.<sup>663</sup> Since it was Roman custom to bury individuals outside of the city precinct, and with increasing evidence for the proximity of Christian and non-Christian burials, it is entirely conceivable that while on a funeral procession or while traversing the processional route for another reason, a non-Christian could have seen a Christian sarcophagus.<sup>664</sup>

The foregoing does not imply that all Christian burials took place above ground; indeed, most certainly did not. The notion, however, that there was a single set of early Christian funerary rites probably is misguided. Recently, Éric Rebillard has demonstrated the relative autonomy of families in arranging funerary celebrations and the often minimal role that bishops and clergy played in the administration of such rites.<sup>665</sup> Rebillard’s conclusions, which pertain predominantly to Rome and Carthage, can be extended to the non-urban parts of the Empire

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<sup>661</sup> Cf. John B. Ward-Perkins, ‘The Role of Craftsmanship in the Formation of Early Christian Art’, *Studi di Antichità Cristiana* 32 (1978), 646.

<sup>662</sup> Cf. Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Baltimore, 1971), 270-76.

<sup>663</sup> *Theodosian Code*, 9.17.6: ‘Omnia quae supra terram urnis clausa vel sarcofagis corpora detinentur, extra urbem delata ponantur, ut et humanitatis instar exhibeant et relinquunt incolarum domicilio sanctitatem.’

<sup>664</sup> Walter Hauser, ‘The Christian Necropolis in the Khargeh Oasis’, *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 27 (1932), 38-50; Johnson, ‘Pagan-Christian Burial Practices’, 37-60; Éric Rebillard, ‘Église et sépulture dans l’Antiquité tardive (Occident latin, 3e-6e siècles)’, *Annales* 54 (1999), 1029-32.

<sup>665</sup> Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Rottier-Pucci (Ithaca, 2009[2003]), 123 f.

thanks to an important contribution by Kim Bowes.<sup>666</sup> Yet, the Church did have a role to play in certain funerals, particularly for important Christians, including for martyrs,<sup>667</sup> and funerary displays in these circumstances appear to have been quite visible—so much so that, as one scholar puts it, funerary processions ‘...had become a nuisance for polytheists...’<sup>668</sup> The visibility of and the annoyance caused by large Christian funerary processions may have precipitated the legislation passed under the pagan emperor Julian that funerals should take place at night.<sup>669</sup>

The ‘nuisance’ of Christian burial practice, however, extended beyond their processions to their interference in some cases with pagan sacred space. The well-known case of Saint Babylas provides an extraordinary example. Saint Babylas’ remains, which were buried at Daphne (near Antioch), supposedly interfered with Julian’s ability to receive an oracle at a nearby shrine of Apollo. The emperor’s inability to commune with Apollo was blamed on the proximity of the saint, whose sarcophagus was exhumed and moved to a different location as a result.<sup>670</sup> While the story of Saint Babylas is the exception rather than the rule, the excavators and movers of the sarcophagus provide an example of a pagan audience for a Christian sarcophagus.

The third problematic ‘given’ for those who assume a Christian viewing audience is that, even in the most private scenario—i.e., the interment of the body and/or any funerary feast to celebrate the deceased—only Christians would have been in attendance. This third assumption can be restated in an equivalent form whose harshness should give pause to most: in Late

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<sup>666</sup> Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Virtues, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), 6, 27-37 and 135-57.

<sup>667</sup> Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, 97-100.

<sup>668</sup> Béatrice Caseau, ‘Sacred Landscapes’, in Glen W. Bowersock, Peter R.L. Brown, and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, 2001[1999]), 36.

<sup>669</sup> *Theodosian Code*, 9.17.5.

<sup>670</sup> Caseau, ‘Sacred Landscapes’, 36-37.

Antiquity every family member and every friend of a Christian would have been Christian as well. As the discussion of Libanios, John Chrysostom, and the Late Antique religious network should have evidenced, this assumption seems unwarranted, especially in the fourth century with its non-exclusive Christianities. For an example of the practical complications to this third and final assumption, consider the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus.

Using Rutgers' methodology, there can be no doubt that the sarcophagus belonged to a Christian: it was originally placed immediately behind Saint Peter's tomb; it depicts both New Testament and Old Testament iconography; and an inscription identifies the deceased as a newly baptised Christian.<sup>671</sup> Bassus came from a distinguished family: the son of an eponymous Praetorian prefect, Junius Bassus himself was the *Praefectus urbi* at the time of his death. Based both on the iconographical program of the basilica built by his father with its mythological scenes and Egyptianising motifs (Figure 169) and on the lack of textual evidence that so prominent a figure might have been Christian (evidence that we have from several sources for his son), it seems likely that the senior Bassus was not a Christian.<sup>672</sup> This limited background on the junior Bassus and his family provides sufficient information to question the assumption that all viewers of his sarcophagus would have been Christian. The fact that Junius Bassus and his father may not have died as worshippers of the same cult opens up the possibility that family members need not have been affiliated with the same religion(s). Furthermore, in Late Antiquity it was typical for individuals to be baptised on their deathbed.<sup>673</sup> In fact, it would have been

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<sup>671</sup> 'NEOFITUS IIT AD DEUM.' On the role of inscriptions on sarcophagi, see: Dennis Trout, 'Inscribing Identity: The Latin Epigraphic Habit in Late Antiquity', in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, 173-74. More generally, see also: Trout, 'Borrowed Verse and Broken Narrative', 337 ff.

<sup>672</sup> See, however: Barnes, 'Conversion of the Aristocracy', 139-40.

<sup>673</sup> Cf. Joseph Janssens, *Vita e morte del cristiano negli epitaffi di Roma anteriori al sec. VII*, 'Analecta Gregoriana' Volume 223 (Rome, 1981), 33; Victor Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation chrétienne du IIe au VIe siècle: Esquisse historique et signification d'après leur principaux témoins* (Spoleto, 1988), 424.

normal for such a high-ranking official to have never set foot in church.<sup>674</sup> As such, the nature of Bassus' 'Christianity' is worth some further inspection, and his sarcophagus can shed some light on the question.

Many sarcophagi were purchased during the lifetime of the individual commemorated.<sup>675</sup> The complexity of the iconographical program on the sarcophagus as well as its high-level of workmanship and exacting detail suggest that the sarcophagus took some time to produce. The detail of the iconographical program accords with what generally is known about the production process of sarcophagi in Rome: since greater skill was required (which the customer did not want to entrust to the quarry sculptors), the city-based sculpting workshop appears to have done the bulk of the work.<sup>676</sup> There can be little doubt, therefore, that Bassus was at least aware of (and perhaps involved in) the commission of his sarcophagus, which allows us to reasonably conclude that he likely considered himself a Christian in advance of his death. It is not clear, however, when Junius Bassus first self-identified as a Christian. Although there is a certain logic to the assumption that a family would become more Christian as one family member converted, the different religions of Junius Bassus and his father suggest that, particularly if the younger Bassus became Christian later in his life, not everyone in his family necessarily had followed suit by the time of his death.<sup>677</sup>

Despite the problems with the assumption that the entire Bassus family was Christian, it is not impossible to maintain that the relatives of such an important figure followed the patriarch's lead and converted. An inscription from Junius Bassus' villa near Aqua Viva which

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<sup>674</sup> Neil McLynn, 'The Transformation of Imperial Churchgoing in the Fourth Century', in *Approaching Late Antiquity*, 235 ff.

<sup>675</sup> Cf. Joyce Reynolds and Charlotte Roueché, 'The Inscriptions', in Fahri Işık (ed.), *Girlanden-Sarkophage aus Aphrodisias: Sarkophag-Studien, Volume 5*, (Mainz, 2007), 149.

<sup>676</sup> See especially: Koch and Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage*, 461-70.

<sup>677</sup> In fact, converting to Christianity may have seemed to be a particularly poor idea at the moment of Bassus' death since, just a few years earlier, Julian 'the Apostate' was made Caesar in the west.

post-dates his death by five years labels Bassus ‘*theotenicus*,’ which suggests his successors retained some sort of affiliation with Christianity.<sup>678</sup> But even allowing for the assumption of an exclusively Christian family, it is very difficult to imagine that an elite figure in fourth-century Rome would have had only Christian friends.<sup>679</sup> The fourth-century empire still featured a great diversity of non-Christian religions, many of which were still practiced among the upper classes of Rome.<sup>680</sup> Consider, for example, the well-known Symmachi-Nicomachi diptych, which shows a wreathed priestess in neo-Attic dress making what appears to be a Dionysiac offering (Figure 170) on its Symmachorum leaf and, on the less frequently discussed Nichomachorum leaf, what appears to be a *kore* partaking in the Eleusian mysteries (Figure 171).<sup>681</sup> Although the diptych was undoubtedly meant at least in part as an expression of *paideia*, sources indicate that the Symmachi and Nichomaci families were prominent pagan supporters.<sup>682</sup> While we do not know whether members of the Symmachi or the Nichomaci were friends with Bassus, these families provide an example of the sort of individuals Bassus would have dealt with in his role as prefect of Rome and comprise some of the individuals that may have accompanied his funeral procession to his tomb.

When it comes to the audience for Late Antique sarcophagi there is little that we can know with certainty. We cannot know, for example, whether Bassus’ sarcophagus was paraded

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<sup>678</sup> Ginette Évrard, ‘Une inscription inédite d’Aqua Viva et la carrière des Junii Bassi’, *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’École Française de Rome* 74 (1962), 607-47. One could interpret the inscription from Aqua Viva as just such evidence for the younger generation.

<sup>679</sup> For an implicit counterargument in a discussion of the funerary context, see: Paul-Albert Février, ‘À propos de repas funéraire: culte et sociabilité’, *Cahiers Archéologiques* 26 (1977), 29-45.

<sup>680</sup> Cf. Arthur H. Armstrong, ‘The Way and the Ways: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in the Fourth Century A.D.’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984), 1-17; Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital*, 159 ff.

<sup>681</sup> See especially: Dale Kinney, ‘The Iconography of the Ivory Diptych Nicomachorum-Symmachorum’, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 37 (1994), 64-96.

<sup>682</sup> Cf. Richard Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin, 1929), 209-15; David H. Wright, ‘The Persistence of Pagan Art Patronage in Fifth-Century Rome’, in Ihor Ševčenko and Irmgard Hutter (eds.), *Aetos: Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango Presented to Him on April 14, 1998* (Berlin, 2010[1998]), 354-69.

during his funeral procession, which may well have been a state-sponsored affair,<sup>683</sup> or whether it was already buried in the ground at Saint Peter's by the time that the funeral procession arrived. The implications of this uncertainty, of course, are that we cannot know how many non-Christians saw the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. What we can be sure of, however, is that the assumption of exclusively Christian interpretations, and by extension of exclusively Christian viewers, is problematic. At every stage from the production of a sarcophagus to the internment of the body, there was the opportunity for non-Christians to view and interact with Christian sarcophagi.

The expense of lavishly decorated sarcophagi, of which, by definition, sarcophagi with images of Christ are a subset, ensured that the individuals who commissioned these works would have been wealthy members of the patrician class.<sup>684</sup> Christian elites from Rome, whether prefects or not, would have interacted with non-Christian elites regularly and would have been comfortable blending Christian and non-Christian traditions. There is no reason to believe that religion, which was not inherently divisive to personal relationships in life, would have been any different in death. Here we see the Late Antique religious network in action. By focusing on the practical realities of individual relationships rather than strictly on the abstracted relationship between cults, the assumption of a Christian audience for sarcophagi is exploded and replaced with a number of potential viewers with different religious affiliations. In this model, the number of possible interpretations of any given image significantly expands, and it is to the diverse and divergent interpretations of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus that the next section turns.

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<sup>683</sup> Cf. Alan Cameron, 'The Funeral of Junius Bassus', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 139 (2002), 290-92.

<sup>684</sup> Cf. Ben Russell, 'The Roman Sarcophagus "Industry": A Reconsideration', in *Life, Death and Representation*, 122.

### III. Non-Christian Identifications of ‘Christ’ on the Sarcophagus of Junius

#### Bassus

If we can imagine that the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus was seen by non-Christians, then we must ask: what did they see? Entire volumes have been written about the sarcophagus in question,<sup>685</sup> so the remarks here can only be minor by comparison. Our focus will be on the central intercolumniation of the upper register. The choice to focus on this scene has to do with its importance in the composition of the sarcophagus. Although the scene would have been understood in the context of the other scenes, in all likelihood it would have been the first scene apprehended and, therefore, would have affected how other intercolumniations were interpreted.<sup>686</sup> The central image of the top register, in other words, was the sarcophagus’ likely ‘first impression.’ Moreover, whereas the narratives depicted in the biblical scenes may not have been easily intelligible to non-Christians an interpretation of the sole non-biblical scene would have been easier to produce.<sup>687</sup>

To access the possible interpretations of our image, the first question that concerns us is the simplest one: what does the scene show? A beardless figure with wavy hair is seated on a lion-footed throne. The throne rests on a pedestal below which a bearded, well-muscled figure

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<sup>685</sup> For previous studies of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, see: Anton de Waal, *Der Sarkophag des Junius Bassus in den Grotten von St. Peter: Eine archäologische Studie* (Rome, 1900); Anton de Waal, ‘Zur Chronologie des Bassus-Sarkophags in den Grotten von Sankt Peter’, *Römische Quartalschrift* 21 (1907), 117-34; Friedrich Gerke, *Der Sarkophag des Iunius Bassus* (Berlin, 1936); Karl Schefold, ‘Altchristliche Bilderzyklen: Bassussarkophag und Santa Maria Maggiore’, *Rivista di archeologia Cristiana* 16 (1939), 289-316; Gerhart Egger, ‘Zum Datierungsproblem in der spätantiken Kunst’, *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 64 (1968), 62-64; Johannes A. Gaertner, ‘Zur Deutung der Junius-Bassus-Sarkophages’, *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 83 (1968), 240-64; Georg Daltrop, ‘Anpassung eines Relieffragmentes an den Deckel des Iunius Bassus Sarkophages’, *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 51/52 (1978-80), 157-70; Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*.

<sup>686</sup> Cf. Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, 52.

<sup>687</sup> This is not to suggest that one needed to be Christian to understand biblical scenes; however, the biblical meaning of the scenes probably would not have been easily decipherable to someone without at least some knowledge of scripture. On the non-biblical nature of the central intercolumniation of the upper register, see: René Grousset, *Étude sur l’histoire des sarcophages chrétiens: catalogue des sarcophages chrétiens de Rome qui ne se trouvent point au Musée du Latran* (Paris, 1885), 39; Daltrop, ‘Anpassung eines Relieffragmentes’, 164; Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1981), 129.

emerges from the partition between registers. The enthroned figure wears a *toga*, is flanked by two bearded men, and holds a folded scroll in his right hand. Although we have already established that Junius Bassus was a Christian and the *intent* of these scenes may have been to depict Christ, it does not follow that non-Christians would have understood the enthroned figure as Christ; such a conclusion needs to be demonstrated.

Most discussions of the meaning of the central scene of the upper register have focused on the identification of the central scene as Christ giving the law to Peter and Paul. This iconography, which depicts the so-called *traditio legis*,<sup>688</sup> appears to have developed in the fourth century and to have been a popular *topos* among the Christian upper classes in Rome. Perhaps the first depiction of the *traditio legis* can be found in Santa Costanza, created around AD 350, which served as a mausoleum for Constantine's daughters.<sup>689</sup> The Santa Costanza *traditio legis* differs from the scene on the Bassus sarcophagus in that Christ is standing rather than seated (Figure 25). Another mosaic from Santa Costanza does show Christ seated on a blue orb, a symbol of the universe, giving the keys of heaven to Peter (the so-called *traditio clavium*), but Paul is absent (Figure 26).<sup>690</sup> Although several scholars have suggested that the Bassus sarcophagus combines the iconographies of the two Santa Costanza *traditio* scenes,<sup>691</sup> the more important point is that there may have been a pre-existing image of Christ with attributes similar

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<sup>688</sup> Cf. Pasquale Testini, 'Osservazioni sull'iconografia del Cristo in trono fra gli apostoli', *Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte* 11/12 (1960), 234-35; Walter N. Schumacher, 'Traditio legis', in Günter Bandmann, Wolfgang Braunfels, Johannes Kollwitz, and Engelbert Kirschbaum (eds.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie, Volume 4* (Rome, 1972), 347-51.

<sup>689</sup> It is difficult to be certain of the date for Santa Costanza since the exact details of its construction and the restorations to the mosaics are unclear. For fuller treatment, see: Stern, 'Les mosaïques de Sainte-Constance', 160-218; Amadio, *I mosaici di S. Costanza*; Stanley, 'New Discoveries at Santa Costanza', 257-261.

<sup>690</sup> It is possible that at some point in its history Paul was removed by some form of 'restoration.' For an attempt to identify the restored areas, see: David J. Stanley, 'The Apse Mosaics at S. Costanza', *Römische Mitteilungen* 94 (1987), 29-42.

<sup>691</sup> Cf. Nikolasch, 'Zur Deutung der "Dominus-legen-dat"-Szene', 71-73; Charles Pietri, *Roma Christiana: Recherches sur l'Église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Militade à Sixte III (311-440)*, Volume 2 (Rome, 1974), 1413-42; Mikael Bøgh Rasmussen, 'Traditio Legis—Bedeutung und Kontext', in Jens Fleischer, John Lund, and Marjatta Nielsen (eds.), *Late Antiquity: Art in Context* (Copenhagen, 2001), 36; Snelders, 'The Traditio Legis on Early Christian Sarcophagi', 321-33.

to the Bassus sarcophagus. Moreover, an abridged version of the exercise undertaken to determine the viewing audience for the sarcophagus Junius Bassus yields the same conclusion for the mosaics at Santa Costanza—that is, it is difficult to imagine that non-Christians would not have seen the *traditio* mosaics.

In AD 354 Santa Costanza would have been the site of Constantina's funeral. We know that Constantina had been a Christian since around AD 324, when she converted after supposedly being cured by Saint Agnes (hence the name of the adjoining basilica, Sant'Agnese). Constantina surely had non-Christian friends and family (her father only truly converted on his deathbed after all), but even if she did not, her family necessarily had relations with many of the same non-Christian members of the gentry that would have been present at Junius Bassus' funeral. For example, Constantina's sister, Helena, who died roughly five years later, would marry the eventual arch-pagan Julian only a year after Constantina's death. Although it is by no means clear that Julian would have attended his Constantina's funeral (he probably would not have left his responsibilities in Gaul), Helena's marriage provides a strong case in support of the position that non-Christians may have seen the mosaics of Santa Costanza.<sup>692</sup>

Apart from the mosaics of Christ already discussed, the barrel-vaulted ambulatory of Santa Costanza was decorated with mosaics of youths harvesting grapes, putti and female figures dancing in roundels, and richly ornamented scenes of vegetation and animals (Figures 172, 173). It is probably not a coincidence that Constantina's sarcophagus (which ultimately she would share with her sister) depicted many of the same scenes including a grape harvest, putti in roundels (partaking in the harvest), animals (peacocks and sheep), vegetation, and female heads

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<sup>692</sup> For an argument that Santa Costanza was constructed by Julian, see: Gillian Mackie, 'A New Look at the Patronage of Santa Costanza, Rome', *Byzantion* 67 (1997), 383-406.

(Figure 174).<sup>693</sup> The overlap between the iconography of the sarcophagus and the mausoleum was so pronounced that during the Renaissance the two were called ‘the Tomb of Dionysos’ and ‘the Temple of Dionysos’ respectively.<sup>694</sup>

Constantina’s coffin so clearly interacted with the space in which it was placed that someone familiar with the ‘intertextuality’ between a sarcophagus and its place of rest may have looked for similar relationships between the Bassus sarcophagus and its burial context.<sup>695</sup> If that were the case, a viewer would have potentially drawn three connections between our sarcophagus and its burial site. First, if the viewer were aware that Peter was shown both in the central scene and arrested in an adjacent scene, then s/he could connect Peter’s narrative with the saint’s tomb behind which Junius Bassus was buried.<sup>696</sup> The basilica in which the internment took place, after all, was known as ‘St. Peter’s’ from the time of its consecration. The relationship between the sarcophagus and its burial location would have been further strengthened by the similarity of the columns surrounding Peter’s tomb with those separating the scenes of the sarcophagus. Although the two were not identical, the alternating helical fluting and vegetal-and-putti-laden ornamentation on the shrine’s columns are mirrored by the details given to the Bassus sarcophagus (cf. Figures 175, 176). The third connection, and the most speculative, is that *if* the apse mosaic of Old Saint Peter’s did depict a *traditio legis* (as argued elsewhere), then that scene would have been situated directly above the Bassus sarcophagus.<sup>697</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> Cf. Alexander A. Vasilev, ‘Imperial Porphyry Sarcophagi in Constantinople’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 4 (1948), 21-22.

<sup>694</sup> See especially: Karl Lehmann, ‘Sta. Costanza’, *The Art Bulletin* 37 (1955), 193-96.

<sup>695</sup> On ‘intertextuality’ and the Bassus sarcophagus, see: John Matthews, ‘Four Funerals and a Wedding: This World and the Next in Fourth-Century Rome’, in *Transformations of Late Antiquity*, 134.

<sup>696</sup> Cf. Toynbee and Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter*, 210. On the effect this would have had in strengthening Christianity’s claim to the ‘classical’ Christian past of Rome, see especially: Elsner, ‘Inventing Christian Rome’, 92-94.

<sup>697</sup> Cf. Walter N. Schumacher, ‘Eine römische Apsiskomposition’, *Römische Quartalschrift* 54 (1959), 137-202; Tilmann Buddensieg, ‘Le coffret en ivoire de Pola, Saint-Pierre et le Latran’, *Cahiers Archéologiques* 10 (1959), 157-200; Davis-Weyer, ‘Das Traditio-Legis-Bild und seine Nachfolge’, 7 ff.; Johannes G. Deckers, ‘Konstantin und

What all of this means, put simply, is that there was probably a class of viewer for the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus who, although not Christian, may have recognised the iconography on the Bassus sarcophagus from another Christian setting. For those viewers it would have been clear that the enthroned figure on the central scene of the top register was Christ. Even for those viewers who had not been to Santa Costanza (or who did go but did not pay attention or did not remember), however, the intimate relationship between our sarcophagus, its immediate Christian context, and its Christian patron would have made it clear that the magisterial central figure of the upper scene was a figure of seminal importance to Christianity, and it is entirely possible that the image would have been interpreted as Christ.

Apart from communicating the identity of the central figure as the Christian god, the iconography of the *traditio legis* scene on the Bassus sarcophagus makes more nuanced claims about Christ that also would have been accessible to Christians and non-Christians alike. In order to appreciate these claims, consider the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus in comparison to one of several similar fourth-century sarcophagi,<sup>698</sup> ‘Lateran 174’ as it is often called (Figure 140). Lateran 174, despite its close similarities to the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus in quality, style and iconography, has some important differences worth comment. The most notable difference for our purposes is the appearance of Caelus: whereas Caelus wears a beard on the Bassus sarcophagus, on Lateran 174 the god of the sky is clean-shaven. During Late Antiquity the bearded image of *Caelus* would have been identified a syncretic deity known as *Jupiter Caelestis* who combined Jupiter’s omnipotence and an association with the heavens. As Geir Hellemo explains:

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Christus: Der Kaiserkult und die Entstehung des monumentalen Christusbildes in der Apsis’, in Giorgi Bonamente and Frana Fusco (eds.), *Costantino il Grande, dall'antichità all'umanesimo: Colloquio sul cristianesimo nel mondo antico*, Macerata, 18-20 dicembre 1990, Volume 1 (Macerata, 1992), 357-62.

<sup>698</sup> Cf. *Repetorium* 26, 28, 58, 116, 200, 288, 528, 676, 677, 724, and 1008.

[*Jupiter Caelestis*]... had his abode in the world's most elevated region, above the planets and the stars... Conceptions of a deity above the vault of heaven emphasize the superior as well as the cosmic perspective of the deity. So we see that in a Roman context images of Jupiter above the veil of Coelus [sic] symbolize alike that Jupiter is the foremost god and has universal sovereign power.<sup>699</sup>

To a non-Christian viewer of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus it would have been clear then that the supreme deity, *Jupiter Caelestis*, was subordinate to the beardless, enthroned figure treading on the syncretic deity's head. Several extant artworks from imperial contexts show the emperor raised above Caelus, presumably as a proclamation of the emperor's power over the universe (cf. Figures 177, 178).<sup>700</sup> The depiction of *Jupiter Caelestis* underfoot, therefore, would have identified the enthroned figure not only as a sort-of emperor, but more specifically as the king of the gods—that is, a deity more senior even than the head of the Roman pantheon.<sup>701</sup> The power relations are further encoded by the conspicuous absence of a neck in the depiction of *Jupiter Caelestis*, an absence which gives the visual impression that he is being forced downward by the enthroned figure's left foot.

While none of this imagery suggests in any way that the beardless figure necessarily would have been understood as Christ, viewers of the sarcophagus would have known that the patron was Christian and that his supreme deity would have been Christ. Indeed, instead of being seen as a religious 'attack' by non-Christian viewers, Christ's superiority over *Jupiter Caelestis* may have functioned primarily as a clarifying signifier to the non-Christian viewer that this image is the Christian God. As we saw with Arnobius' polemic *Against the Sabellians*, which argued that Christ was the supreme Lord without denying the existence of the Roman gods, the notion of Christ's coexistence with 'pagan' deities was not an altogether alien one.

<sup>699</sup> Geir Hellemo, *Advents Domini: Eschatological Thought in 4th-Century Apses and Catecheses* (Leiden, 1989), 25.

<sup>700</sup> Cf. Morey, *Early Christian Art*, 135; Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 248.

<sup>701</sup> Cf. Andreas Alföldi, *Zum Panzerschmuck der Augustusstatue von Primaporta* (Frankfurt, 1937), 58.

Notwithstanding the possibility that the image may have been identified as Christ, there is a compelling analogy between the figure on the Bassus sarcophagus and the sitting emperor at the time of Bassus' death, Constantius II. One obvious cause for comparison would have been that a number of monuments indicate that Constantius looked quite similar to our image of Christ (cf. Figure 90). It is hard to know the degree to which Constantius' official portraits depict his actual appearance, but to the extent that there was any resemblance it would not have been lost on the elites of Rome who were visited by Constantius in 357, just two years prior to Junius Bassus' funeral.<sup>702</sup> Likewise, a large issue of bronze medallions, probably minted in Rome,<sup>703</sup> depicts the emperor seated frontally, holding a scroll in his left hand, and flanked by personifications of Roma and Constantinopolis, the latter of which he showers with gold coins (Figure 179). The scene, which is identified as a *largitio* and which has some affinities to the image of the emperor from the Chronography of 354 (Figure 90), shares a number of iconographical similarities to the scene from the Bassus sarcophagus.

While neither scene is a perfect facsimile of the scene on the Bassus sarcophagus, the similarity between the depiction of Christ and images of the contemporaneous emperor suggest two related points. First, a non-Christian's initial reaction to the enthroned image of Christ very well could have carried strong imperial overtones. Second, the similarity between Christ and Constantius was a visual device that functioned in the same way that earlier dynastic portraiture (even among unrelated emperors) operated—that is, 'likeness' establishes a claim to continuity.<sup>704</sup> While the association of Christ with Constantius may have been received as a communication of Christ's imperial attributes, it is also possible that Christ may have been

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<sup>702</sup> See especially: Robert Owen Edbrooke, Jr., 'The Visit of Constantius II to Rome in 357 and Its Effect on the Pagan Senatorial Aristocracy', *The American Journal of Philology* 97 (1976), 40-61.

<sup>703</sup> Cf. Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee, 'Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-Antique Art from 312 to 365', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), 135-44.

<sup>704</sup> Cf. Nodelman, 'How to Read a Roman Portrait', 10-24.

associated more specifically with the Constantinian dynasty. The similitude of Christ to Constantine's son and successor may have directed the viewer of our sarcophagus to a *synkrisis* with the most enduring monument to that dynasty in Rome, the Arch of Constantine.<sup>705</sup>

#### IV. The Bassus Sarcophagus and the Arch of Constantine: A *Synkrisis*

Discussions of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus often look to imperial monuments for iconographical comparisons; few, however, consider monuments that would have been familiar to the likely viewers of the sarcophagus. For example, the central scene of the upper register is almost always analogised to both the Arch of Galerius with its depiction of Caelus (Figure 180) and the Missorium of Theodosius (Figure 28).<sup>706</sup> It is not clear which is a less appropriate comparison, an object in Thessalonike, more than 600 miles away, or an artwork created more than two decades later. In order to make an argument about a *synkrisis* between objects, we must be reasonably sure that both objects probably were known by viewers. By this logic the Arch of Constantine is one of the more appropriate choices for comparison. Erected in AD 315, The Arch was built to commemorate Constantine's defeat of Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312.<sup>707</sup> By the time that Junius Bassus was interred, therefore, the Arch would have been in place for nearly 45 years—longer than Junius Bassus had lived (42 years). The Arch would have been a key part of the Roman cityscape both as a central point on the imperial

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<sup>705</sup> While it may be contended that a focus on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus in relation to the Arch of Constantine privileges the 'emperor mystique,' the equivalence of the emperor with the divine and the philosophical discussed in the first chapter would have been particularly pronounced on the Arch of Constantine with its use of *spolia* from the reigns of Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and Hadrian, all of whom had conspicuous monuments to their divinity built in Rome and of which the latter two had well-known philosophical proclivities.

<sup>706</sup> Cf. Niels Hannenstad, 'How did rising Christianity cope with Pagan Sculpture', in Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood (eds.), *East and West: Modes of Communication, Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida* (Leiden, 1999), 177.

<sup>707</sup> A strangely persistent strand of scholarship maintains the arch was in fact built before Constantine's reign. For the best summaries, see: Mark Wilson Jones, 'Genesis and Mimesis: The Design of the Arch of Constantine in Rome', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59 (2000), 50-77; Fred Kleiner, 'Who Really Built the Arch of Constantine?', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 14 (2001), 661-63.

triumphal route and, more important from a practical perspective, as ‘...one of the most heavily trafficked [intersections] in the city.’<sup>708</sup> It is also worth noting that a fairly convincing case has been made that some of the workshops that produced sarcophagi would have been involved in the production of the Constantinian reliefs.<sup>709</sup> While the Bassus sarcophagus was produced decades later, it is not insignificant that a connection between the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the relief sculpture on the Arch of Constantine would have been suggested by the similar media and techniques that the two monuments shared.

A *synkrisis* between the arch and the sarcophagus, however, would have been primarily facilitated by the iconographical parallels between the two. The seated, frontal figure of Christ has much in common with the Aurelian *liberalitas* and *justitia* reliefs (Figures 181, 182) as well as the Constantinian *largitio* (Figure 183).<sup>710</sup> The *liberalitas* shows Marcus Aurelius seated on a *sella curulis*, an unbacked chair associated with magistrates and on which the Emperor sat in the Senate.<sup>711</sup> Marcus—who is raised above his subjects on a platform, is flanked by two junior officials and two attendants and extends his right hand towards a figure on the lower-register—presumably is shown in the act of distributing largesse to his subjects. A similar iconography in the *justitia* scene shows Marcus raised on a podium, dispensing justice to a barbarian beneath him. Marcus’ throne again lacks a back but in this scene features legs that curve into lion’s paws (Figure 184) like Christ’s chair on the Bassus sarcophagus. The lion’s feet at the base of Christ’s

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<sup>708</sup> Elizabeth Marlowe, ‘Framing the Sun: The Arch of Constantine and the Roman Cityscape’, *The Art Bulletin* 88 (2006), 223.

<sup>709</sup> Cf. Johannes G. Deckers, ‘Constantine the Great and Early Christian Art’, in Jeffrey Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (Fort Worth, 2007), 104.

<sup>710</sup> On an implicit *synkrisis* between the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the Arch of Constantine, see: Gerke, *Der Sarkophag des Junius Bassus*, 30; Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, 150-52.

<sup>711</sup> On the *sella curulis*, see especially: Ole Wanscher, *Sella Curulis: The Folding Stool, an Ancient Symbol of Victory* (Copenhagen, 1980).

throne were fairly atypical in Late Antique Christian art,<sup>712</sup> a fact that may have further facilitated an equation with the *justitia* scene.<sup>713</sup> In the later *largitio* scene, Constantine is seated frontally on a podium in the centre of a symmetrical composition. Four smaller scenes, two on each side of the emperor, comprise the upper register of the relief; each of the four depicts a state representative seated on an unbacked chair and holding a *rotulus*. A similar composition and iconography characterizes the upper register of the Bassus sarcophagus, which has a central image of Christ—seated on an unbacked seat with a scroll—halving the four other scenes. The *rotulus* also appears in the two *adlocutio* (or *oratio*) scenes from the Arch,<sup>714</sup> one of which shows Marcus Aurelius addressing soldiers from a *rostrum* while the other shows Constantine on a raised dais flanked by attendants (Figures 185, 186). Although *adlocutio* scenes show the emperor standing rather than seated, they establish a connection between the *rotulus* and rhetorical skill and *paideia* that may have been extended to the reading of the Bassus sarcophagus.

Continuing on with our *synkristic* reading, it is of note that the scenes on the Arch of Constantine analogise the emperor to a deity as well. A Hadrianic roundel from the arch shows a scene depicting a sacrifice to a cult statue of Diana. Diana is shown on a podium not discernibly different from a *rostrum* and, although she clutches a spear with her left hand, she holds her right

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<sup>712</sup> In addition to the sarcophagi already mentioned, a sarcophagus from Ancona (see n. 712 below) and from Perugia (*Repertorium* 123) seem to feature similar lion-footed stools. Apart from these examples, however, the lion-footed throne remains scantily used in Christian art until fifth century ivory diptychs and actual thrones, such as Maximian's from Ravenna.

<sup>713</sup> The fourth-century sarcophagus of Flavius Gorgonius from Ancona shows an enthroned Herod seated on the *sella curulis*.

<sup>714</sup> Penelope Davies has also associated the *rotulus* with the *largitio*, an argument that is based on the identification of a scene now on the Arco di Portogallo as Hadrian's dispersal of wealth. Normally, the scene is identified as either Hadrian's funerary oration for his wife (Sabina) or the declaration of her apotheosis, both of which seem more reasonable. The iconography of the scene in question, with the emperor holding one hand aloft (here holding a scroll) from a *rostrum* while addressing a crowd, has more in common with depictions of the emperor performing a speech than with scenes showing the *largitio*. Cf. Davies, *Death and the Emperor*, 105. Compare with: Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage (Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, Volume 14)* (New Haven, 1963), 165-70.

aloft in a gesture not dissimilar to the formula used in *adlocutio* scenes. The cult statue of Diana from the Arch's roundel and the scene of the Emperor addressing a crowd are not perfect mirrors of one another, but the similarity speaks to the potential association of the two and, more important, the possibility for interpreting the emperor as a deity (Figure 187). Other roundels depicting sacrifice scenes show nude male cult images—one standing and in profile and one seated and frontal—that closely correspond to the *adlocutio* and *largitio* images respectively (Figure 188).

The correspondences between the reliefs of earlier emperors and reliefs depicting Constantine, of course, were not accidental. These earlier 'good emperors' all had their own (very visible) monuments in the city of Rome dedicated in honour of their divinity.<sup>715</sup> Both Trajan and Marcus Aurelius had columns erected in their memory while Hadrian had a temple on the Campus Martius dedicated under his predecessor, Antoninus Pius. By the time Junius Bassus passed away, Constantine also would have been deified and his triumphal Arch would have been his most visible Roman monument. The situation is more nuanced still in that, as we have seen, certain reliefs from the Arch of Constantine also depict the emperor in the act of sacrifice (cf. Figures, 187, 188). The emperor's religiosity, highlighted by these reliefs, would point towards his role as chief priest (*pontifex maximus*), a role in which the emperor not only proclaimed his *pietas* but also acted as the representative of God on earth. The visual affinities between Christ on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the imperial image(s) on the Arch of Constantine, in other words, may also have led the viewer to contemplate the figure's 'religious' claims to divinity and *pietas*.

A similar set of associations were possible between the emperors shown on the Arch and philosophers, most notably in the Constantine's *adlocutio* scene. Positioned over one of the side

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<sup>715</sup> Cf. Davies, *Death and the Emperor*, esp. 13 ff.

arches and directly across from the *largitio* scene, at the edge of the dais from which Constantine addresses the people two seated statues show the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Hadrian seated on unbacked chairs, raised on podia and wearing the same philosopher's costume that Christ wears. Although the philosophical associations are not so pronounced as the religious ones, a *synkrisis* between the images of the Arch of Constantine and the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus nonetheless could associate Christ with an imperial, divine figure characterised by *pietas* and embedded in a classical philosophical tradition. Any viewer of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus familiar with the Arch of Constantine and with the central concepts of *paideia*, regardless of religion, could have identified any one or all of these interpenetrating meanings. How these meanings may have been combined by non-Christians is the subject of the next section.

## **V. Non-Christian Interpretations the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus**

The number of different and overlapping meanings available from a *synkrisis* with the Arch of Constantine ensures that the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus would have been understood in many different ways by many different viewers. The question we must confront then is an open-ended one: what rhetorical arguments can we imagine the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus put forward about Christ?

The force of the association between Christ and the emperor suggests that at least one such reading, particularly for a non-Christian, would have begun with an analogy between Christ and a beneficent, all-powerful ruler. While the notion of Christ's munificence very well could have been triggered by an iconographical *synkrisis* with the Arch of Constantine, the image of a seated Christ would have called to mind the other images of the emperor on that same monument

as a dispenser of justice or as an orator.<sup>716</sup> The full suite of laudatory claims being made of Christ thus included: ‘Christ is generous’; ‘Christ is fair’; ‘Christ is a great *rhetor*’; and ‘Christ is the ruler of the world.’ The extolment of these virtues closely aligns such an interpretation of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus with the rhetorical trope of panegyric.

Although the fourth century saw the emergence of Christian epic poetry, which, after a fashion, approached panegyric, it is not necessarily fair to assume non-Christian knowledge of these works. The visual analogy between the image of Christ and the emperor, and in particular with Constantine and his heirs, suggests that one plausible framework for understanding the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is through panegyrics to Constantine.<sup>717</sup> Although only one panegyric to Constantine performed in Rome has been recorded, a number of the so-called *Panegyrici Latini* preserve Gallic panegyrics to the emperor. While the topics of these panegyrics are related to local concerns,<sup>718</sup> their form and foci provide insights into how the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus may have acted in a similar way for Christ.

The fundamental purpose of a panegyric, of course, was to praise the virtues of its subject, and, as we have seen, the associations called to mind by the enthroned image of Christ, particularly in juxtaposition with the Arch of Constantine, would have underlined some of Christ’s important and laudable attributes. The panegyric, however, was not simply a catalogue of virtues; it was a formulaic speech composed both to extol the qualities of its subject in a systematic way and to display the rhetorical skill of the speaker. The formula employed by

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<sup>716</sup> As a signifier of rhetorical skill, the *rotulus* in its way may have addressed Celsus’ critique of Christ’s apparent silence during his trial in front of Pilate. Cf. Elsner, ‘Image and Rhetoric in Early Christian Sarcophagi’, 378-80.

<sup>717</sup> Although the focus here is on panegyrics to Constantine, there was also the possibility for apologetic and polemical *synkriseis*. For a Late Antique apology addressed to Constantius II, see: Athanasius, ‘Apologia ad Constantium’, trans. M. Atkinson and Archibald Robertson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 4*, 238 f. For Lucifer of Caligari’s polemic concerning the same ruler, see: Christopher Wordsworth, *A Church History, Volume 2: Containing the History of the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Constantinople* (New York, 1887), 121.

<sup>718</sup> Cf. Brian H. Warmington, ‘Aspects of Constantinian Propaganda in the Panegyrici Latini’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 104 (1974), 371-84.

panegyrics in Late Antiquity most often followed the prescription of Menander Rhetor.<sup>719</sup>

Menander outlined a structured approach to what he termed *basilikos logos*, which proceeded in six parts: (1) the amplification of the topic, (2) a focus on the forbears of the subject, (3) a discussion of the occupation and character of the subject, (4) the acts or deeds of the subject, (5) comparisons with others, particularly as they relate to fortune, and (6) a recapitulation of the argument.<sup>720</sup>

The amplification of topic on the Bassus sarcophagus is provided by the placement of Christ's image(s). In particular, the location of the enthroned image of Christ—at the centre of the upper register between two columns discernibly different from the rest—and his frontal depiction make it clear what the focal point of the object should be. The viewer's focus is further directed to the sarcophagus' central axis by the inscription on the lid, which describes Bassus' funeral, and is located directly above the enthroned image of Christ. This text, it should be noted, may provide further guidance for a *synkrisis* with the Arch of Constantine. The poem notes: 'Everyone wept, married women, children and old men. Then too the reverent senate wept, discarding their togas. Then too the highest buildings of Rome seemed to weep...'<sup>721</sup> We have already noted that the funeral party would have included Bassus' friends and family as well as important Romans, potentially some of which were Senators. The poem, however, is quite clear that 'the highest buildings of Rome'—i.e., Rome's monuments—wept as well. What 'monument(s)' the poem had in mind is irrelevant. The point is that the poem would have prompted the viewers of this sarcophagus to think about its relation to the monuments of Rome,

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<sup>719</sup> On Menander in general, see especially: Russell and Wilson (eds.), *Menander Rhetor*; Malcolm Heath, *Menander: A Rhetor in Context* (Oxford, 2004); Raffaella Cribiore, 'Menander the Poet or Menander the Rhetor? An Encomium of Dioscoros Again', *Journal of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 48 (2008), 95-109.

<sup>720</sup> Cf. Samuel N.C. Lieu and Dominic Montserrat, *From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Byzantine Views, A Source History* (London, 1996), 159-61; Braund, 'Praise and Protreptic in Early Imperial Panegyric', 53 f.

<sup>721</sup> Translation in: Cameron, 'The Funeral of Junius Bassus', 290.

and as we have seen, the Arch of Constantine would have been one of the first such monuments to come to mind.

The relationship between the image of Christ and the reliefs from the Arch of Constantine fits with the second element of a panegyric: the association of emperors with their forbears. In panegyrics addressed to Constantine, several orators go to great lengths to legitimise his rule by proclaiming him the rightful heir to Constantius. Thus, for example: ‘And it was you whom that great man [Constantius], an Emperor on earth and a god in heaven, fathered in the first flower of his youth.’<sup>722</sup> Or less explicitly:

Among all who share your majesty, I aver you have this distinction, Constantine, that you were [born] an Emperor, and so great is the nobility of your lineage that the attainment of imperial power has added nothing to your honor, nor can Fortune claim credit for your divinity, which is rightfully yours without campaigning or canvassing.<sup>723</sup>

Other rhetors stressed the antiquity of Constantine’s lineage by attempting to tie his family to the emperor Claudius. As one anonymous panegyrist put it thus:

And so I shall begin with the divinity who is the origin of your family, of whom most people, perhaps, are still unaware, but those who love you know full well. For an ancestral relationship links you to the deified Claudius, who was the first to restore the discipline of the Roman Empire when it was disordered and in ruins...<sup>724</sup>

The emphasis on the lineage of the emperor is paralleled on the Arch of Constantine by the use of *spolia* from earlier ‘good’ emperors with whom the emperor wanted to be associated. Through its association with the Arch of Constantine and, in particular, as a result of the affinity between Christ and Constantine and/or Constantius II, the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus situates Christ as part of this lineage. Moreover, since it would not have escaped notice that Christ

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<sup>722</sup> ‘Panegyric of Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 222.

<sup>723</sup> ‘Panegyric of Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 221.

<sup>724</sup> ‘Panegyric of Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 219-20.

predated the Constantinian dynasty, the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus subtly claims Christ as an ancestor to Constantine and his successors in the same way that the panegyrists claim Claudius as a relation. This claim is further articulated by the style of the sarcophagus, which is more ‘classical’ than the Constantinian reliefs from the Arch.<sup>725</sup> In other words, while the composition of the scenes on the sarcophagus has a close correspondence with the scenes carved during Constantine’s reign, the style of the Bassus scenes has more in common with the earlier emperors. This stylistic affinity does not undermine the Constantine-Christ connection, but it places Christ as Constantine’s predecessor and, after a fashion, establishes the ‘true’ divine origins of the dynasty.

The ‘divine’ origins of the Constantinian lineage are also relevant here since the Bassus sarcophagus claims through its iconography that Christ is a ‘good’ emperor. In this way, the focus on forbears also establishes Christ’s imperial occupation while at the same time implying the beneficence of Christ’s acts; it is on the basis of what an ‘emperor’ does, after all, that s/he qualifies as either a good or bad ruler. In the same way that the use of Trajanic, Aurelian, and Hadrianic reliefs analogise Constantine’s acts and virtues to the best traits of these good emperors, the iconography of the Bassus sarcophagus and its overlap with several scenes from the Arch of Constantine establish Christ as an emperor-like figure that disburses wealth, dispenses justice, and is versed in philosophy. Each of these themes is explicitly mentioned in Constantinian panegyrics. For example, Constantine’s distribution of largesse is so-recorded: ‘Your gifts, Constantine, are clearly pleasing to your soldiers... This kind of largesse cannot be matched, when the reward for the soldier is the commander himself!’<sup>726</sup> Constantine’s

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<sup>725</sup> See especially: Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, 130-31.

<sup>726</sup> ‘Panegyric Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 243.

dispensation of justice has already been alluded to in his ‘restoration of order,’ and his relationship to philosophy and *paideia* is expressed in the following way:

The rare virtue of restraint, adhered to with difficulty, yet adhered to from time to time, by a few teachers of philosophy, has become, thanks to you, Constantine, common to all men, not only those whom reason, letters and a quiet life have civilized, but even soldiers, fierce of disposition, who out of respect for you have come to despise monetary gain.<sup>727</sup>

The parallels also extend to the central scene of the lower register, where Christ’s entry to Jerusalem could be equated to Constantine’s victorious entry into Milan after defeating Maxentius. One panegyrist exclaims:

What a day when you entered Milan! What rejoicing there was among the chief men of the city, what applause of the populace! What security there was for mothers and maidens gazing at you, and what a twofold delight they enjoyed, when they looked upon the form of a most beautiful emperor and feared no license!<sup>728</sup>

While another tells a similar story that equates Constantine to a god:

It is the mark of a good ruler that he is happy to see his subjects prosperous, but of a better one that he visits them even when they are suffering. Immortal gods! What a day then shone upon us (for now my speech has reached in its course the celebration of your divinity’s assistance), when you first entered the gates of this city, which was the first sign of salvation for us.<sup>729</sup>

Other of Constantine’s deeds, such his procurement of goods, also are compared to divine acts. These comparisons not only fulfil the fifth of Menander’s panegyric requirements; they also establish a relationship between Constantine and the deities that, in the process of the *synkrisis* explored here, would have been transferred to the figure of Christ. Thus one panegyrist praises: ‘That largesse of yours is for us what Earth is, mother of crops, and Jupiter, master of

<sup>727</sup> ‘Panegyric of Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 242-43.

<sup>728</sup> ‘Panegyric of Constantine Augustus’, trans. Barbara S. Rodgers, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 306.

<sup>729</sup> ‘A Speech of Thanks to Constantine’, trans. C.E.V. Nixon, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 277.

winds; whatever they had given too sparingly is produced for us from your benefaction.’<sup>730</sup>

Another trumpets Constantine’s approachability: ‘Of your own accord you deigned to invite us to approach your divinity, of your own accord you deigned to address us, you were the one to ask us what help we needed.’<sup>731</sup> Constantine’s divinity is cause for praise from several panegyrists as in the case of an anonymous orator who proclaimed:

For it is a wonderful thing, beneficent gods, a heavenly miracle, to have as Emperor a youth whose courage... dazzles us... Not without reason do learned men claim that Nature herself metes out bodily domiciles worthy of great minds, and that it can be gauged from a man’s countenance and the beauty of his limbs how great a heavenly spirit has entered them as a tenant.<sup>732</sup>

It is at this point, however, that the panegyric on the Bassus sarcophagus diverges. Whatever Constantine’s divinity, and however magnificent his acts, Constantine is still subservient to more powerful gods. One rhetor, pleading for Constantine’s preservation, exclaims it thus:

For this reason, you, supreme creator of things, whose names you wished to be as many as the tongues of nations (for what you yourself wish to be called we cannot know), whether you are some kind of force and divine mind spread over the whole world and mingled with all the elements and move of your own accord without the influence of any outside force acting upon you, or whether you are some power above all heaven which look down upon this work of yours from a higher pinnacle of nature: you, I say, we beg and beseech to preserve this prince for all ages.<sup>733</sup>

On the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, as we have seen, Christ’s omnipotence is clearly is proclaimed; he is, after all, enthroned atop what most would have identified as the supreme deity, *Jupiter Caelestis*. Despite the similarities that Christ and Constantine share, Bassus’ sarcophagus claims a superior power and divinity for Christ. The *synkrisis* between the sarcophagus and the Arch of Constantine, which would have precipitated a *synkrisis* between the

<sup>730</sup> ‘A Speech of Thanks to Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 286.

<sup>731</sup> ‘A Speech of Thanks to Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 278.

<sup>732</sup> ‘Panegyric to Constantine’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 243.

<sup>733</sup> ‘Panegyric of Constantine Augustus’, in *The Panegyrici Latini*, 332-33.

emperor and Christ, thus ultimately leads to the *topos* that differentiates Constantine from his forbear. Christ is claimed not only as an emperor, a god and a philosopher: he is visually lauded as an omnipotent ruler and omniscient thinker. It is easy to see how this visual rhetoric could have been interpreted as potentially polemical by non-Christians, but in the context of Junius Bassus' funeral, it is also possible that the sarcophagus would have been seen as a panegyric glorifying the deceased's deity.

The implications of these conclusions do not bear on the intent behind the sarcophagus' iconographic program. It was not necessary, however, to understand the Christian intent behind the work to make sense of the imagery. Non-Christian elites ensconced in a culture that valued *paideia* would have endeavoured to understand the iconography of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus through *synkrisis*, and the similarities in iconography, composition, medium and style would have directed a viewer towards a *synkrisis* with the Arch of Constantine. The ensuing meditation on power, justice, generosity, divinity, *paideia* and the interconnection of these virtues by Christians and non-Christians alike would have both established Christ as a king and antecedent to Constantine who at the same time was differentiated as a sovereign with no equal.

## Chapter VI

### The Hinton St. Mary Mosaic: A Polemical Reading of an Ambiguous Iconography

Whereas the previous chapter took as its starting point an image that clearly was intended to depict Christ, this chapter looks at an image that is more problematic: the mosaic floor from Hinton St. Mary in Dorset, England (Figure 8). The mosaic, now in the British Museum, may be the only extant mosaic of Christ from Late Antique Britain, although some scholars question whether the image does in fact depict the Son of God.<sup>734</sup> It is not this chapter's purpose to determine the relative merits of arguments over whether the central image of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic illustrates Christ. As the very existence of the debate underscores, the mosaic can be interpreted in multiple ways by different viewers. Thus, while the mosaic in question is very different from the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus—the former, a stone floor from a domestic context at the Empire's periphery, depicts an ambiguous image seemingly unrelated to the figures adjacent to it; the latter, a marble relief sculpture from a funerary context in the Empire's capital, depicts a dozen juxtaposed biblical scenes—the possibility of variable understandings unifies both artworks.

The *type* of variability explored in the case of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic, however, is substantively different from that discussed for the Bassus sarcophagus. The previous chapter elucidated some of the possible interpretations of a Christian object by non-Christians. By contrast, this chapter's project is to provide some plausible Christian interpretations for an ambiguous and potentially non-Christian image for which we have a dearth of evidence

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<sup>734</sup> While the literature on the Hinton St. Mary mosaic is particularly extensive, the first studies of the floor summarise much of the discussion. See especially: Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee, 'A new Roman mosaic pavement found in Dorset', *Journal of Roman Studies* 55 (1964), 7-14; Marcel Simon, 'Bellérophon chrétien', in *Mélanges offerts à Jérôme Carcopino* (Paris, 1966), 890-904; Hugo Brandenburg, 'Bellerophon Christianus? Zur Deutung des Mosaiks von Hinton St. Mary und zum Problem der Mythendarstellungen in der kaiserzeitlichen dekorativen Kunst', *Römische Quartalschrift* 63 (1968), 49-86; Stefan Hiller, *Bellerophon: ein griechischen Mythos in der römischen Kunst (Münchner Archäologische Studien 1)* (Munich, 1970), esp. 66 ff. For an important early summary that identifies the image as Christ, see: Huskinson, 'Some Pagan Mythological Figures', 73-78.

concerning the artist's and patron's intents. Nevertheless, the same rhetorical-individual framework used in our analysis of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus will generate new interpretations for Hinton St. Mary as well. The chapter proceeds by first describing the mosaic, its iconography, and its archaeological context in two sections. The third section broadens the context in which the mosaic is discussed to Late Antique Britain in order to demonstrate that the Second Sophistic interest in *paideia* should be extended to the discussion of Hinton St. Mary. The final section proposes both a general Christian reading of the mosaic floor and a more specific *synkristic* reading that would have been particular to a certain sub-group of Late Antique Christians.

### **I. The Hinton St. Mary Mosaic**

The mosaic's remains, which were found in 1963 in the village of Hinton St. Mary in Dorset, in the south of England, spread over the floors of two rooms (sometimes called a 'bipartite room').<sup>735</sup> Together, the whole mosaic measures nearly 550 square feet. In the larger room a central roundel depicts the bust of a man, flanked by pomegranates, with a chi-rho monogram behind his head (Figure 189). Busts of four men, which probably were meant to represent the four winds but perhaps depict the four seasons, surround the central figure in each corner of the room, while four lunettes on each side of the floor show three images of dogs chasing deer and one image of a tree. In the smaller room the floor mosaic consists of three panels. In the central panel a roundel, larger in size than the one with the chi-rho monogram,

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<sup>735</sup> On the topographical details and archaeological context of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic, see especially: Kenneth S. Painter, 'The Roman Site at Hinton St. Mary, Dorset', *The British Museum Quarterly* 32 (1967), 15; Christopher C. Taylor, 'The Later History of the Roman Site at Hinton St. Mary, Dorset', *The British Museum Quarterly* 32 (1967), 31-35.

shows Bellerophon mounted on Pegasus and in the act of slaying the Chimera with his spear.<sup>736</sup>

The flanking scenes show dogs in jewelled collars chasing stags. The borders and gaps between these major panels are filled with geometric and vegetal decorations.<sup>737</sup>

The mosaic may have been commissioned by the owner of the ‘villa’ or it may also have been repurposed for the individual’s floor; there has been some discussion over whether the mosaic was intended originally for a vault (perhaps at some other location), although that suggestion seems rather unlikely.<sup>738</sup> Whoever commissioned it, the mosaic was manufactured by a local British workshop, one of several working in Late Antiquity.<sup>739</sup> The specific workshop has been identified on the basis of style, iconography, and method as the same that laid floors for a number of other southern British villas.<sup>740</sup> The mosaic has been dated roughly to the 50 years between AD 325 and AD 375 with at least one scholar suggesting on the basis of the bust-figure’s hairstyle (which parallels that on coinage of Constantius II) that the mosaic dates from circa AD 345 (Figure 190).<sup>741</sup>

There has been some debate concerning whether the mosaic served a ritual function, a suggestion that in turn has resulted in some speculation that the Hinton St. Mary site may have

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<sup>736</sup> Cf. Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee, *The Christian Roman Mosaic, Hinton St. Mary, Dorset: Dorset Monographs No. 3* (Dorset, 1964), 5.

<sup>737</sup> On the iconography of the Hinton St. Mary Mosaic, see: Toynbee, ‘A new Roman mosaic pavement’, esp. 8-10.

<sup>738</sup> For the suggestion, see: Kenneth S. Painter, ‘The Design of the Roman Mosaic at Hinton St. Mary’, *Antiquaries Journal* 56 (1976), 49-54.

<sup>739</sup> For a discussion of Romano-British mosaic workshops, see especially: David J. Smith, ‘The Mosaic Pavements’, in Albert L.F. Rivet (ed.), *The Roman Villa in Britain* (London, 1969), 71-125; David E. Johnston, ‘The Central Southern Group of Romano-British mosaics’, in Julian Munby and Martin Henig (eds.), *Roman Life and Art in Britain: A Celebration in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Jocelyn Toynbee, Volume 1* (Oxford, 1977), 195-215; Peter Johnson, ‘Town mosaics and urban *officinae*’, in Stephen J. Greep (ed.), *Roman Towns: The Wheeler Inheritance* (London, 1993), 147-65. On specific workshops, see: Peter Johnson, ‘The Ilchester-Lindinis officina’, *Mosaic* 8 (1983), 5-8; Stephen R. Cosh, ‘The Lindinis branch of the Corinian Saltire Officina’, *Mosaic* 16 (1989), 14-19.

<sup>740</sup> David J. Smith, ‘Three fourth-century schools of mosaic in Roman Britain’, in Henri Stern (ed.), *La mosaïque gréco-romaine I* (Paris, 1965), 101-2; Martin Henig, *The Art of Roman Britain* (London, 1995), 124-25.

<sup>741</sup> Cf. Richard Reece, ‘A date for Hinton St. Mary?’, *Mosaic* 2 (1980), 21-22; W.H.C. Frend, *The Archaeology of Early Christianity: A History* (Minneapolis, 1996), 351. See also: T. Sam N. Moorehead, ‘The Hinton St. Mary Head of Christ and a Coin of Magnentius’, in Nina Crummy (ed.), *Image, Craft and the Classical World: Essays in Honour of Donald Bailey and Catherine Johns* (Montagnac, 2005), 209-12.

been a shrine or church of some sort.<sup>742</sup> Although scholarly consensus falls against the position, the better rebuttal is that even if Hinton St. Mary did serve a religious function, it also served as a house—that is, at the very most Hinton St. Mary was a ‘house-church.’<sup>743</sup> As such, even if the room served a religious purpose, it was also a functional room in a wealthy individual’s villa.

Armed with this information, what can we say about the mosaic in question? Most of the discussion to date has focused on whether the image in the central medallion of the larger room is or is not Christ. Those in favour of understanding the image as Christ draw on several pieces of evidence, most notably the presence of the chi-rho monogram behind the figure’s head.<sup>744</sup> The chi-rho, as we saw in Chapter 2, was a symbol of Christ’s resurrection and triumph over death throughout the empire. The association between the chi-rho and Christ in Britain is given further weight by a roughly contemporaneous wall-plaster from Lullingstone, which shows the monogram flanked by an *alpha* and an *omega* (Figure 191), an apparent scriptural citation referring to *Revelation 22:13*.<sup>745</sup> Also marshalled by the ‘Christ camp’ are iconographical similarities including: (1) the bust’s facial features (which are similar to other images of Christ as a beardless youth), (2) the figure’s *tunica* and *pallium* (in which Christ was frequently depicted), and (3) the flanking pomegranates (which were used in early Christian art as an allusion to paradise and, more generally, salvation).<sup>746</sup> The final piece of evidence in support of interpreting the figure as Christ is a law passed by Theodosius II and Valentinian III, dated to AD 427 that

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<sup>742</sup> See especially: Charles Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (Berkeley, 1981), 181-83.

<sup>743</sup> Cf. Kenneth S. Painter, ‘Villas and Christianity in Roman Britain’, *The British Museum Quarterly* 35 (1971), 166-67.

<sup>744</sup> See especially: Toynbee, *The Christian Roman Mosaic*, 11-14.

<sup>745</sup> On Lullingstone, see especially: Geoffrey Wells Meates, *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone* (Maidstone, 1987). On the wall-plaster in question, see especially: Kenneth S. Painter, ‘The Lullingstone Wall-Plaster: An Aspect of Christianity in Roman Britain’, *The British Museum Quarterly* 33 (1969), 131-50.

<sup>746</sup> On the pomegranates, see: Dominic Perring, ‘“Gnosticism” in Fourth-Century Britain: The Frampton Mosaics Reconsidered’, *Britannia* 34 (2003), 107-8. On the relationship with Orphism, see: Paul Arthur, ‘Eggs and Pomegranates: An Example of Symbolism in Roman Britain’, in *Roman Life and Art in Britain, Volume 2*, 370-71.

seems to prohibit the depiction of Christ on floors.<sup>747</sup> Such a decree may imply that there was a substantial enough practice of depicting Christ on floors in the years before AD 427 to warrant such a piece of legislation.

Despite the seemingly compelling grounds for identifying the figure in question as Christ, each of these arguments can be questioned. The chi-rho monogram could have been seen as a general sign of victory associated, above all else, with the emperor and, more specifically, with the Constantinian dynasty.<sup>748</sup> The iconographical parallels with Christ, while all true, are also all probably overstated. The *tunica* and *pallium* were used frequently to depict philosophers or nobility encoding their *paideia* through their idealised costuming; the pomegranate is non-specific to Christian iconography; and, as we have already seen, the image in the roundel is similar enough to imperial imagery on coinage to at least give pause to anyone seeking to designate the figure as Christ beyond a shadow of a doubt. As far as the law prohibiting floor mosaics of Christ is concerned, the law could also be read literally as evidence for the disapproval of such a practice. Given that the floor at Hinton St. Mary is possibly the only image of Christ from the Roman Britain, it seems dangerous to extrapolate a tradition of floor representations of Christ on the basis of this one, ambiguous image.

In other words, the figure in question certainly could have been interpreted as Christ; it equally could have been interpreted as an emperor, a hybrid deity, or perhaps something that would have been obvious that is now lost to us (i.e., the owner the villa whose appearance we can never know).<sup>749</sup> Even using the systematic methodology of interpretive juxtaposition

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<sup>747</sup> *Codex Iustinianus* 1.8.1, ‘...signum Salvatoris Christi nemini licere vel in solo vel in silice vel in marmoribus humi positus insculpere vel pigere, sed quodcumque reperitur tolli...’,

<sup>748</sup> Cf. Hiller, *Bellerophon*, 82. On the chi-rho’s association with victory (although he identifies the bust as Christ) see especially: Brandenburg, ‘Bellerophon christianus?’, 81-85.

<sup>749</sup> For the most compelling argument that the figure represents an emperor, see: Susan Pearce, ‘The Hinton St. Mary Mosaic: Christ or Emperor?’, *Britannia* 39 (2008), 193-218. For an argument that the figure represents a syncretic

discussed in the first chapter, there is no obvious reason to identify the beardless image from Hinton St. Mary as Christ. As we shall see, there was a rich tradition of *synkrisis* between Bellerophon and Christ, but none of this helps to identify the ambiguous figure as the Son of God; after all, Bellerophon *synkriseis* were possible with the emperor, a noble villa-owner, or any number of possible individuals that the Hinton St. Mary floor could be thought to illustrate.

The remainder of this chapter will explore how a Late Antique ‘Christian’ visitor to the villa at Hinton St. Mary may have made sense of this ambiguous mosaic. In the course of this discussion, a new *synkristic* interpretation of the floor will be offered that all Christian visitors to the Hinton St. Mary villa may have shared. Late Antique Christianity, however, was comprised of different sub-groups, many of which had somewhat different theologies. As such, within the broadly standard reading offered here, a more nuanced variant will be offered that can accommodate one possible interpretation by viewers who adhered to one particular ‘type’ of Late Antique Christianity. Before building these arguments though, it is necessary to look at the physical and intellectual contexts that would have shaped viewers’ interpretations of the Hinton St. Mary floor.

## II. The Physical Context: The Function of the ‘Mosaic Rooms’

Whatever the intellectual and religious contexts for interpreting the Hinton St. Mary mosaics in Late Antiquity, all viewers, regardless of background, would have experienced our floor in a way circumscribed by the architectural setting of the villa.<sup>750</sup> Although concerned with

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deity, see: Roy T. Eriksen, ‘Syncretistic symbolism and the Christian Roman mosaic at Hinton St. Mary: a closer reading’, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 102 (1980), 43-48.

<sup>750</sup> Cf. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, ‘The Social Structure of the Roman House’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988), 43-97; Rolf A. Tybout, ‘Roman wall-painting and social significance’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 14 (2001), 33-56. For a Romano-British case study, see: Sarah Scott, *Art and Society in Fourth-Century Britain: Villa Mosaics in Context*, *Oxford University School of Archaeology Monographs* 53 (Oxford, 2000), esp. chap. 5.

Spanish and North African mosaics, Susanne Muth's *Erleben von Raum—Leben in Raum*, the theoretical equivalent in mosaic studies of Koortbojian's *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi*, provides one model for how to approach viewer experience at Hinton St. Mary. Like Koortbojian's work, Muth's book criticizes attempts to enforce overly reductive, monolithic readings onto mosaics preferring instead to allow many possible interpretations to arise from viewer experience.<sup>751</sup>

The rooms paved with our mosaic have been likened both to a *triclinium* and a forecourt. Although it is entirely possible that the room may have been used for either purpose (or both), it is more likely that the rooms were intended to function as reception chambers.<sup>752</sup> During the fourth century, Roman Britain saw the introduction of apsidal *triclinia* and *stibadia* as well as the semi-circular marble table, the *sigma*, which appeared alongside them.<sup>753</sup> Bignor villa in Sussex and the villas from Lullingstone and Frampton, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section, provide only some of the many local examples of a trend that appears to have been widespread across the Empire.<sup>754</sup>

The Hinton St. Mary rooms, however, are plainly rectangular, a fact that suggests either that the larger room housing the so-called Christ mosaic was not intended as a ceremonial dining room or that it diverged from the general trend of including an apsidal niche. While the latter

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<sup>751</sup> Susanne Muth, *Erleben von Raum—Leben in Raum: zur Funktion mythologischer Mosaikbilder in der römisch-kaiserzeitlichen Wohnarchitektur* (Heidelberg, 1998).

<sup>752</sup> Patricia Witts calls the room a 'non-dining', 'non-private' reception room, although the dismissal of dining activities may be overly restrictive. See: Patricia Witts, 'Mosaics and Room Function: The Evidence from Some Fourth-Century Romano-British Villas', *Britannia* 31 (2000), 320. On the possibility for the use of our room in dining though, see: Stephen R. Cosh, 'Seasonal Dining Rooms Romano-British Houses', *Britannia* 32 (2001), 219-42. Cosh actually agrees with Witts that the primary function of the Hinton St. Mary room was probably not related to dining, but he does admit that his conclusion is uncertain (p. 239) and he also provides a compelling argument for multiple uses of Roman-British villa rooms.

<sup>753</sup> Cf. Katherine Dunbabin, 'Convivial spaces: dining and entertainment in the Roman villa', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9 (1996), 66-80; Simon P. Ellis, 'Late-antique dining: architecture, furnishings and behaviour', in Ray Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (eds.), *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond—Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series Number 22* (Portsmouth, 1997), 41-42.

<sup>754</sup> Cf. Sarah Scott, 'The power of images in the late Roman house', *Domestic Space in the Roman World*, 53-59.

possibility cannot be ruled out categorically, it seems unlikely for two reasons. First, the mosaic's style and the majority of the iconography are similar to other Late Antique villas from Britain. While the beardless figure is important, discrepant, and the focus of much of the scholarship on the floor, the image of Bellerophon occurs in several other mosaics from Roman Britain (see the following section). Scenes of the hunt, geometric ornament, vegetation, and personifications were also mainstays of British mosaic decoration, as they were across the Empire.<sup>755</sup> In short, the Hinton St. Mary mosaic is more similar to other mosaic floors than it is different, so it is difficult to understand why its owners may have retained a rectangular *triclinium* against the prevailing trend of the time. Second, one 'functional' purpose of the apsidal structure (and its sigmoidal seating) is that by setting the diners back, they could see the entire room; by contrast, it would be difficult not to obstruct a floor mosaic in a rectangular dining room.<sup>756</sup> Perhaps the floor was made to be covered, although such a suggestion seems somewhat counterintuitive.

While the iconography itself remains constant whatever the use of the room, the viewers' experiences of the images change dramatically depending on the room's use, not least because in the case of a meal it is not clear how much or what parts of the floor may have been obstructed. Complicating matters still further, the use of rooms in Late Antiquity appears to have been less standardised than we might imagine. What may have functioned as a reception hall on one visit may have been the location of a dinner the next. As the owners and repeat visitors experienced the images on the floor in different situations, alternative meanings may have presented themselves. It is impossible to document all these various (re-)interpretations; however, it is important to acknowledge that the exigencies of 'real life' do detract from what we can intuit

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<sup>755</sup> Cf. Richard Brilliant, 'The Hunt', in Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), in *Age of Spirituality, Catalogue*, 83-91.

<sup>756</sup> Katherine Dunbabin, 'Triclinium and stibadium', in William J. Slater (ed.), *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 125-28 and 135; Witts, 'Mosaics and Room Function', 309-10.

about Late Antique art and its reception. We can still say with a modicum of certainty that at least some visitors would have experienced the rooms housing the Hinton St. Mary floor mosaic as a reception hall.

Such a conclusion is strengthened by the similarity of our rooms to other reception areas, like the rooms from the villa from the site of Woodchester (Figure 192). The British Museum excavations of Hinton St. Mary found that the mosaics come from a set of rooms at the north-eastern edge of a structure some 30 meters in length. At Woodchester the reception hall contained a considerably larger mosaic of Orpheus (about 100 meters in length) that also was found at the northern edge of a villa (Figure 193). Both sets of rooms, despite their differing sizes, have similar layouts featuring smaller, thinner vestibules decorated with ‘dynamic’ action scenes that sit in front of larger, main rooms with ‘static’ images set in large roundels. This layout, which was typical of reception areas in Romano-British villas,<sup>757</sup> ensures a certain experience of the space. As an individual entered the vestibule, s/he would have been propelled forward by the movement of the dynamic scenes into the main reception hall where a larger, static, well-framed mosaic would offer an opportunity for contemplation. In interpreting the image in the main reception area, however, a viewer inevitably would have referred back to the mosaic in the vestibule; the juxtaposition of the two images and the order in which they were viewed would have affected the how the iconographical program as a whole was understood. It is this dissertation’s contention that the specific framework for such a comparison was *synkrisis*, but that argument presumes *paideia* among the likely viewers of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic. As we have seen, *paideia* was largely an elite-level phenomenon, and we are probably on firm ground assuming that the viewing audience for our mosaic included many members of the elite.

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<sup>757</sup> Scott, ‘The power of images in the late Roman house’, 61-66.

Whether in Britain the upper classes were socialised in the traditions of *paideia* is another, understudied, question, and it is to that question to the next section turns.

### III. The Intellectual Context: *Paideia* in Late Antique Britain

In the case of the Bassus sarcophagus, we were on relatively secure ground in positing the importance and existence of *paideia* among its probable viewers since Second Sophistic values were well-known components of Roman elite culture in Late Antiquity. The Romano-British case, however, has received far less attention. To state the obvious, *paideia* was not a British invention, and if *paideia* made its way to Britain then it stands to reason that it would have been imported, if not directly from the eastern Empire than ‘down-the-line’ by successive waves of cultural transmission originating in the East.<sup>758</sup> Mechanisms supporting either type of import are not hard to imagine. Movements of people and the transportation of goods through trade provide somewhat stochastic methods of transferring certain cultural attributes from one locale to another. Other, more clearly defined channels existed as well, such as the appointment of governors. As late as the early fifth century, non-British governors were still being appointed to manage the province: Chrysanthus, who probably served under Honorius, was born in Constantinople and spent time in Italy before being appointed governor of Britain.<sup>759</sup> More direct still, nearly a century earlier an imperial presence was established near York when Constantius Chlorus retired to the northern British city.<sup>760</sup> Although York was certainly never

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<sup>758</sup> See especially: W.H.C. Frend, ‘A note on the influence of Greek immigrants on the spread of Christianity in the West’, in Alfred Stuiber and Alfred Hermann (eds.), *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum—Ergänzungs Volume 1* (Münster, 1964), 125-29; Edward Champlin, *Fronto and Antonine Rome* (Cambridge, 1980), 29-44. See also: Johannes Hahn, *Der Philosoph und die Gesellschaft: Selbstverständnis, öffentliches Auftreten und populäre Erwartungen in der hohen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 1989), 175-76.

<sup>759</sup> Michael E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca, 1998), 154.

<sup>760</sup> Cf. Paul Bidwell, ‘Constantius and Constantine at York’, in Elizabeth Harley, Jane Hawkes, and Martin Henig (eds.), *Constantine the Great: York’s Roman Emperor* (York, 2006), 31-40. For an earlier and more general account, see: R.G. Collingwood and John N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and English Settlements* (New York, 1928), 277-79.

the equivalent of Rome, we can imagine a certain courtly infrastructure emerging around the new capital.<sup>761</sup>

However *paideia* crossed the Channel, its presence would indicate that the thought structures associated with it would have been in use. As we saw in Chapter 4, this implies that rhetoric and its attendant concepts, especially *synkrisis*, would have been part of the interpretive discourse. As such, for viewers of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic familiar with the central concepts of *paideia*, a *synkrisis* of the two roundels may have been a perfectly natural framework for understanding the iconography. The question then is: although we may be able to imagine mechanisms for transmitting *paideia* at an abstract level, do we have firm material evidence that *paideia* was important in Britannia?

Little had been written on the role of *paideia* in Britannia until the past several decades.<sup>762</sup> An increasing number of scholars, however, have turned their focus to the existence of classical learning in Roman Britain, a trend that reached its culmination with Ruth Leader-Newby's important and recent contribution on Late Antique British silver marked.<sup>763</sup> The importance of Newby's study (as well as those that preceded hers) is that it argues that *paideia* was pronounced, among other places, in the elite domestic sphere.<sup>764</sup> Several pieces of evidence

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<sup>761</sup> Cf. Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain* (London, 1962), 198; Roger Ling, 'Brading, Brantingham and York: A New Look at Some Fourth-Century Mosaics', *Britannia* 22 (1991), 154-57.

<sup>762</sup> For exceptions, see; Anthony A. Barrett, 'Knowledge of the Literary Classics in Roman Britain', *Britannia* 9 (1978), 307-13; Sarah Scott, 'Elites, Exhibitionism and the Society of the Late Roman Villa', in Neil Christie (ed.), *Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 2004), 52. On the Latin Provinces, see: Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971), 115-22; Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 54-77.

<sup>763</sup> Ruth E. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Aldershot, 2004), 123 ff. For an earlier work that implies the expression *paideia* occurred across the empire, see: Katherine M.D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge, 2003), 141 ff. For the 'phenomenon' driving Dunbabin's observations, see: Simon P. Ellis, 'The End of the Roman House', *American Journal of Archaeology* 92 (1988), 565-76.

<sup>764</sup> Nicholas F. Hudson, *Dining in the Late Roman East*, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Minnesota, 2006). On the expression of personal identity in houses more generally, see: Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Social Structure of the Roman House', 43-97; Ellis, 'Late-antique dining: architecture, furnishings and behaviour', 41-52. For a critique pointing out the use of *paideia* in non-domestic settings, see: Anthony Cutler, 'Review: *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity*:

support the assertion that *paideia* was present among the upper classes in Roman Britain, including a number of mythological scenes from floor mosaics.<sup>765</sup> One scholar has gone so far as to suggest that the mosaic scenes and their compositional similarity to the literary sources from which they were excerpted suggest an intimate understanding of ancient Greek literature.<sup>766</sup> Indeed, a familiarity with Greek language is implied by a set of inscriptions found on mythological floor mosaics from a villa at Aldborough in Yorkshire,<sup>767</sup> perhaps partially explained by the proximity to Constantius' court. The inscriptions, which some have argued are a signal of a 'classical education,'<sup>768</sup> identify Mount Helicon (ΕΛΗΚΩΝ) and, in fragmentary but clear Greek lettering, a muse.<sup>769</sup> Of the Aldborough inscriptions, Roger Ling sums up the situation admirably:

Did the diners who saw the figures while reclining on a *stibadium* in the room's apse all really know Greek, or were the labels designed to show off the patron's bilingualism? There are very few inscriptions in Greek on mosaics in the North-Western provinces. The exceptions known to me are a third-century pavement at Cologne with labelled portraits of Greek dramatists and thinkers, and a late second-century one in Autun containing portraits of Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Anacreon accompanied by lengthy quotations in Greek. In each case there is a conscious display of literary culture, and the Aldborough Muses must be seen in a similar light. Even if the labels were conventional, being taken without comprehension from copy-books, the very use of Greek made a statement about cultural affiliation.<sup>770</sup>

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*Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries* by Ruth E. Leader-Newby', *American Journal of Archaeology* 109 (2005), 820-22.

<sup>765</sup> Cf. David J. Smith, 'Mythological figures and scenes on Romano-British mosaics', in Julian Munby and Martin Henig (eds.), *Roman Life and Art in Britain, Volume 1*, 105-58; Bryn Walters, 'Fourth Century "Orphic" Halls in Britain', *Mosaic* 7 (1982), 23-26; Sarah Scott, 'An outline of a new approach for the interpretation of Romano-British mosaics, and some comments on the possible significance of Orpheus mosaics in fourth-century Roman Britain', *Journal of Theoretical Archaeology* 2 (1991), 29-35; Anthony J. Beeson, 'Venus and the Fan', *Mosaic* 22 (1995), 4-14; Patricia Witts, 'Bacchus on Romano-British Mosaics', *Mosaic* 22 (1995), 15-19.

<sup>766</sup> Cf. Barrett, 'Knowledge of the Literary Classics', 307 ff. See also: Roger Ling, 'Roman mosaics in fourth-century Britain: Classical values in a disintegrating world', *Apollo* 144 (1996), 16-22; Roger Ling, 'Three inscriptions on Romano-British mosaics', in Thomas Ganschow and Matthias Steinhart (eds.), *Otium: Festschrift für Volker Michael Strocka* (Remshalden, 2005), 219-22.

<sup>767</sup> Janine Lancha, *Mosaïque et culture dans l'Occident romain Ie-IVe s.* (Rome, 1997), 318-23; David S. Neal and Stephen R. Cosh, *Roman Mosaics of Britain, Volume 1: Northern Britain* (London, 2002), 314-18.

<sup>768</sup> See especially: Smith, 'Mythological figures and scenes', 119 f. See also: Reinhard Stupperich, 'A Reconsideration of Some Fourth-Century British Mosaics', *Britannia* 11 (1980), 290.

<sup>769</sup> Roger Ling, 'Inscriptions on Romano-British Mosaics and Wall-Paintings', *Britannia* 38 (2007), 71-74.

<sup>770</sup> Ling, 'Inscriptions on Romano-British Mosaics and Wall-Paintings', 87.

It is perhaps not surprising that Autun appears as a parallel; Eumenius' panegyric *For the Restoration of the Schools*, delivered in and concerned with Autun, has already been discussed as an example of *paideia* in Gaul. As mentioned previously, Eumenius claims to have had an Athenian grandfather, an indication that there was some degree of movement across the Empire. With such movement, of course, traditions would have been carried from place to place. Is there any British parallel to Eumenius—that is, do we have any evidence for a direct transmission from the east to Britannia?

Although far from direct, a key iconographic element of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic, the use of pomegranates, implies a cultural movement between the halves of the empire. Pomegranates, of course, are not autochthonous to Britain; their relatively accurate representation, however, suggests cultural interchange with areas from which they are harvested. The conduit for such exchange may have been through the circulation of elite cultural artefacts since the only known examples of pomegranates from Roman Britain are found either on villa mosaics or silver jewellery.<sup>771</sup>

More robust evidence for cultural exchange between the east and the west has been found at the site of Corbridge in Northumberland (near Newcastle). Corbridge is perhaps best-known as the find-spot for the much discussed 'Corbridge Lanx,' an object that several scholars have suggested includes distinctly 'eastern' characteristics (Figure 194).<sup>772</sup> The lanx, a silver tray, depicts an unidentified but transparently mythological scene set in a bucolic landscape.<sup>773</sup> Two registers of carefully modelled figures—animals on the bottom and anthropomorphic figures on

<sup>771</sup> Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, 95; Arthur, 'Eggs and Pomegranates', 367 ff.; Catherine Johns, *The Jewellery of Roman Britain: Celtic and Classical Traditions* (London, 1996), 142.

<sup>772</sup> Cf. P. Gardner, 'A Silver Dish from the Tyne', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 35 (1915), 71; Otto Brendel, 'The Corbridge Lanx', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 31 (1941), 106 and 125. For a discussion of the potential eastern influence on other silverwork, see: W.H.C. Frend, 'Syrian parallels to the Water Newton treasure?', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 27/28 (1984-85), 146-50.

<sup>773</sup> In all likelihood the composition presents Artemis approaching Apollo at his shrine with an oracle seated above an altar; who the other two female figures represent is less clear.

the top—are encircled by a finely detailed vegetal border that runs around the periphery of the platter. Whatever the relationship of this object with eastern workshops, the more interesting piece of evidence for direct contact with the east is an inscription from the same site that records a Greek dedication from a priestess of Herakles of Tyre to her patron deity.<sup>774</sup> Although the relationship between the inscription and the lanx can only be a subject for speculation, the latter provides insight into how an object like the lanx may have been commissioned.

As with the mosaics from Aldborough, the Corbridge Lanx was a domestic object that would have been used in an elite setting presumably for entertaining (perhaps for service during a meal). Whatever its functional purpose, the lanx also served to communicate the wealth and *paideia* of its owners through its mythological iconography and classicizing style. The inscription, on the other hand, attests to the presence of an eastern cult as well as some understanding of the Greek language. The diffusion of this cult from Tyre to Corbridge and the language of the inscription both imply a movement of people and ideas that may have served as the same channel by which *paideia* was transferred. That is, the demand for an object like the lanx in many ways presupposes a certain type of client whose existence is implied by our inscription.

The inscriptions from Corbridge and Aldborough are complemented by a number of engraved gemstones, many of which were incorporated into rings that also featured Greek text.<sup>775</sup> The gems and rings almost certainly would have been owned by members of the elite; many are made of extremely rare and precious materials, such as the ring from Stonham Apsal in Suffolk (now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Figure 195), which is set in gold (of 97%

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<sup>774</sup> Cf. Eve Harris and John Richard Harris, *The Oriental Cults in Roman Britain, Volume 6* (Leiden, 1965), 26.

<sup>775</sup> Cf. John Boardman and Diana Scarisbrick, *The Ralph Harari Collection of Finger Rings* (London, 1977), no. 36; Martin Henig, *A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites, British Archaeological Reports—British Series 8* (Oxford, 1978[1974]), esp. nos. 742-43.

purity) and is one of the few examples of a sapphire found in the Western provinces.<sup>776</sup> In conjunction with the Aldborough and Corbirdge inscriptions, these gems indicate a degree of linguistic heterogeneity not normally discussed in the case of Roman Britain. More important, the use of Greek occurs on objects that would have been commissioned by aristocrats. The premium placed on language and its juxtaposition with mythological scenes in various media provides compelling evidence that the Second Sophistic values enshrined in *paideia* had followed the route of Herakles' priestess or Hinton St. Mary's pomegranates and found their way to Late Antique Roman Britain. It follows then that the Hinton St. Mary floor, which after all was located in a domestic elite setting, would have been situated within this same cultural matrix.

More specific to our mosaic, scenes like the mythological *emblema* of Bellerophon and Pegasus slaying the Chimera were embedded in the elite literary culture of prosaic commentary. An example, albeit a much earlier one (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), that encapsulates the type of conversation that occurred around these subjects is recorded by the epigrammatic poet Posidippus who recounts an artist's production of a gem engraved with the image of Pegasus. As Kathryn J. Gutzwiller translates the epigram:

Pegasus etched upon misty jasper—the artist's  
 Hand and mind working together, have caught it,  
 superbly: Bellerophon has fallen to Cilicia's  
 Aelian Plain, his colt has pranced off into the deep  
 blue sky—and so he carved him, on this ethereal stone,  
 free of the reigns, shuddering, still, at the bit.<sup>777</sup>

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<sup>776</sup> C. Frances Mawer, 'A Lost Ring from Suffolk', *Britannia* 20 (1989), 237-41. On an earlier, potentially imperial ring, see: Martin Henig, 'The Victory-Gem from Lullingstone Roman Villa', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 160 (2007), 1-7.

<sup>777</sup> Posidippus, II.33-38, in Frank Nisetich, 'The Poems of Posidippus', in Kathryn J. Gutzwiller (ed.), *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book* (Oxford, 2005), 20. For the Latin, see: Posidippus, II.33-38, in Colin Austin and Guido Bastianini (eds.), *Posidippi Pellaei quae supersunt omnia* (Milan, 2002), no. 14.

While the subjects of the epigram and the Hinton St. Mary mosaic correspond closely, the more important point here is that there was a well-developed tradition of interpreting elite objects with mythological scenes in erudite ways that continued throughout Late Antiquity. Consider as an example Ausonius, a 4<sup>th</sup> century AD rhetor and epigrammatic poet (to whom we will return in greater detail below), who composes a poem in which he wishes ‘May Pegasus hereafter run on your right side...’<sup>778</sup> Although Ausonius’ poem refers to Pegasus as one of the four horses in Phosphorus’ *quadriga*,<sup>779</sup> the point is that excurses on mythology were an appropriate means for articulating *paideia*. The scene of Bellerophon from Hinton St. Mary was exactly the type of scene with an entrenched history in this interpretive discourse. It thus seems that there is good reason to suppose that *paideia* was an important component of elite Romano-British culture, and that the subject of the Hinton St. Mary floor may have facilitated discussions that would have allowed individuals to express their knowledge.

What remains unclear, however, is whether Christians in Late Antique Britain necessarily would have shared the *paideia* that can be imputed to certain non-Christian elites. Fortunately, there is some evidence for Christian elites—or at least, elites with knowledge of Christian tradition and iconography. One important example comes from a floor mosaic at Frampton, also in Dorset (Figure 196).<sup>780</sup> Like Hinton St. Mary, Frampton has images of a chi-rho (in this case isolated in its own *emblema*) as well as a roundel featuring Bellerophon slaying the Chimera.

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<sup>778</sup> Ausonius, ‘Epigram 7’, in Nigel M. Kay (ed.), *Ausonius: Epigrams—Text with Introduction and Commentary* (London, 2001), 82.

<sup>779</sup> On the potential relationship between (Christ-)Helios and Belleophon, see: Simon, ‘Bellérophon chrétien’, 890 ff.

<sup>780</sup> For the first publication of the mosaics, see: Samuel Lysons, *Reliquiae Britannico-Romanae, Volume 1, Part 3* (London, 1813), pls. 3-7. On Frampton in general, see: R.A.H. Farrar, ‘The Frampton “Villa”, Maiden Newton’, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 78 (1956), 81-83; Martin Henig, ‘James Engleheart’s drawing of a mosaic in Frampton, 1794’, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 106 (1984), 146. On Frampton’s Christian iconography, see especially: Perring, ‘“Gnosticism” in Fourth-Century Britain’, 97 ff. On the pagan iconography, see: Stephen R. Cosh, ‘A Possible Achilles at Frampton’, *Mosaic* 23 (1996), 13-15; Anthony J. Beeson, ‘The Frampton Trident Bearer’, *Mosaic* 27 (2000), 4-7.

Lullingstone in Kent, another equally important example, also features scenes of Bellerophon slaying the Chimera and, as we have already seen, a chi-rho monogram flanked by an *alpha* and an *omega* on its wall (the rape of Europa, with Jupiter disguised as a bull, is also part of the Lullingstone mosaic; Figure 197).<sup>781</sup> While the chi-rho monogram from Hinton St. Mary can be explained as a non-Christian symbol, the argument is harder for Lullingstone, whose chi-rho monogram is juxtaposed with an obvious scriptural citation. The juxtaposition of this symbol with scenes of Bellerophon and Europa suggest knowledge of classical mythology and, perhaps more important, the inscription accompanying the Europa mosaic suggest a certain facility with ‘classical’ literature.<sup>782</sup> As Arthur A. Barrett notes, the inscription alludes to Vergil through the use of an Ovidian couplet; in one deft move, the owner of the Lullingstone villa establishes his or her *paideia* alongside knowledge of Christian iconography.<sup>783</sup> Other examples of Christian symbolism on objects of elite patronage include engraved gemstones, some of which incorporate chi-rho monograms alongside standard invocations such as ‘May you live.’<sup>784</sup> Likewise, some of the silver found in British hoards appears to have been used in the Eucharistic liturgy. For example, the Water Newton hoard includes a silver bowl with the inscription: ‘O Lord, I Publianus, leaning upon you (or prostrating myself) honour your sacred altar.’<sup>785</sup> The

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<sup>781</sup> On Lullingstone in general, see: Geoffrey W. Meates, *The Lullingstone Roman Villa* (London, 1955). On Lullingstone’s Christian iconography, see especially: Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee, *Art in Britain under the Romans* (Oxford, 1964), 221-27; Painter, ‘The Lullingstone Wall-Plaster’, 131-50.

<sup>782</sup> For a brief overview of the Bellerophon iconography in Roman Britain, see: Katherine, M.D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge, 1999), 95-98.

<sup>783</sup> Cf. Barrett, ‘Knowledge of the Literary Classics’, 307 ff. On Vergil’s influence on the Frampton mosaics, see: Antony A. Barrett, ‘A Vergilian scene from Frampton villa, Dorset’, *Antiquaries Journal* 57 (1977), 312-14. More generally, see: Roger Rees, ‘Introduction’, in Roger Rees (ed.), ‘Romane Memento’: *Virgil in the Fourth Century* (London, 2004), 1-16. On Vergil’s influence on Christian thought, see: Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil and the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley, 1998), esp. 45 ff.

<sup>784</sup> Frederick H. Marshall, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings, Greek, Etruscan and Roman, in the Departments of Antiquities, British Museum* (London, 1907), no. 626.

<sup>785</sup> Cited in W.H.C. Frend, ‘Pagans, Christians, and “the Barbarian Conspiracy” of A.D. 367 in Roman Britain’, *Britannia* 23 (1992), 122.

inscription—written in dactylic hexameter, which was associated with epic poetry—is a further indication of *paideia* among Christians.<sup>786</sup>

The majority of our mosaic's viewers would have been members of the elite,<sup>787</sup> and in light of the overlap between Christians and the upper class evidenced by the material remains it is not difficult to imagine that at least some of the viewers may have been Christian. It is also overwhelmingly likely that in Late Antique Britain, with its diverse religious landscape,<sup>788</sup> no single form of Christianity would have been adopted by all Christians. Instead, as was common elsewhere in the Later Empire, we should expect that a number of different forms of Christianity were in circulation. What this means in practical terms is that any Christian interpretation of the Hinton St. Mary floor must accommodate different forms of Christianity and not reduce Christian viewers to a monolithic whole. Even allowing for this diversity, however, the *paideia* that viewers shared, regardless of their religious affiliations,<sup>789</sup> meant that one of the structuring principles of any interpretation probably would have been *synkrisis*.

#### IV. Interpreting the Hinton St. Mary Mosaic: *Synkrisis* as Anti-Priscillianic Polemic

What then might a Christian think upon seeing an image of Bellerophon slaying the Chimera? Anyone with *paideia* immediately would have identified the scene in the roundel since the Chimera cannot be confused for any other creature and since Bellerophon was

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<sup>786</sup> See also: Kenneth S. Painter, *The Water Newton Early Christian Silver* (London, 1977), 14-16.

<sup>787</sup> In the same way servants may have seen the Projecta Casket or worksmen may have seen the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, so too we may imagine that servants in the villa and perhaps non-elites with whom the owners did business may have at one point or another had access to the Hinton St. Mary floor.

<sup>788</sup> See especially: Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain*, 20 ff.; Dorothy Watts, *Religion in Late Roman Britain: Forces of Change* (London, 1998), 115 ff.

<sup>789</sup> See especially: Martin Henig, 'Ita intellexit numine inductus tuo: some personal interpretations of deity in Roman religion', in Martin Henig and Anthony King (eds.), *Pagan Gods and Shrines of the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 8 (Oxford, 1986), 159-69.

identified as its slayer as early as Homer's *Iliad* and Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>790</sup> In spite of the close association of Bellerophon with the Chimera, many different versions of the myth were in circulation. For example, in the *Iliad*, Pegasus is not mentioned while in *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius satirises the confrontation:

I reflected that it was panic more than anything which had induced the celebrated Pegasus to take to the air, and that the tradition that he had wings was justified because he leapt upward as high as heaven in his fear of being bitten by the fire-breathing Chimaera.<sup>791</sup>

Although these variations are noteworthy, it is also important to realise that the image of Bellerophon slaying the Chimera was not necessarily important for the symbolism of that act. The story of the Chimera's defeat is but a single component a larger myth about Bellerophon. The slaying of the Chimera, as the most famous part of the myth, was both a defining and recognisable act as well as a metonym for the entire myth. Any *synkrisis* involving the Bellerophon roundel would extend beyond the story of the Chimera's death to the entire narrative. That narrative, pieces of which will be elucidated below, are particularly important in understanding how the Hinton St. Mary floor may have been understood by Christian viewers.

The image of Bellerophon slaying the Chimera, like the story behind it, was not necessarily standardized,<sup>792</sup> and the iconographic formula used at Hinton St. Mary is especially important to the interpretation of the mosaic. Bellerophon, whose face has been removed, rides a galloping Pegasus and thrusts a spear into the Chimera's goat head. It is worth recalling that the roundels are flanked by two scenes of dogs hunting stags. Bellerophon's task, which any elite

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<sup>790</sup> Hesiod, 'The Theogony', VII.20, in Hugh G. Evelyn-White (trans.), *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, and Homeric* (Cambridge, 1914), 159; Homer, 'The Iliad', VI.190-290, in Ian Johnston (trans.), *The Iliad* (Arlington, 2006), 127-30.

<sup>791</sup> Apuleius, 'The Golden Ass', VIII.16, in P.G. Walsh (trans.), *Apuleius: The Golden Ass* (Oxford, 1994), 149.

<sup>792</sup> For a discussion of iconographic variation within the corpus of Bellerophon images as early as the Archaic period, see: Marilyn Low Schmitt, 'Bellerophon and Chimera in Archaic Greek Art', *American Journal of Archaeology* 70 (1966), 341.

viewer would have known was not voluntary, was thrust upon him the Lycian King and in that respect was similar to a hunt. Bellerophon here is like the dogs—not a willing hunter *per se*, but an accomplished hunter fulfilling someone else’s demands. Once the analogy between Bellerophon and the hunt registered with a viewer, however, an interesting observation on the iconography of the roundel might have emerged: Bellerophon, on his steed with the Chimera between Pegasus’ legs, is in the same configuration as scenes of a nobleman’s homecoming (cf. Figure 198).<sup>793</sup> In the context of the villa, with its elaborate and expensive mosaics, it may not have been too far of a leap to see a relationship between Bellerophon and the villa owner. Both had wealth, hunted, and lived on estates (Bellerophon was awarded a vineyard after his successful conquests). Bellerophon had other attributes including ‘the best qualities of men’ and ‘beauty’ with which Hinton St. Mary’s owner would have been only too happy to be associated.<sup>794</sup>

Such a reading changes, however, as the viewer crosses the threshold from the vestibule to the main hall. In a semi-circular mosaic, the viewer is again presented with a hunting scene, which leads the viewer to the central roundel that features the beardless figure flanked with pomegranates and set in front of a chi-rho monogram. The chi-rho’s meaning, even for Christians, had multiple dimensions. On its most general level, the monogram was simply a symbol of victory.<sup>795</sup> The juxtaposition of the chi-rho symbol with a hunting scene—the central roundel is flanked by hunting scenes on three of four sides—would have facilitated the association of the symbol with the scene of Bellerophon. Moreover, the fact that the chi-rho monogram and the figure in front of it, like the Bellerophon mosaic, are circumscribed by

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<sup>793</sup> Cf. Katherine M. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford, 1978), 118-21; Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 34-35.

<sup>794</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.193-95.

<sup>795</sup> On the association with the labarum and victory, see: Rudolph H. Storch, ‘The Eusebian Constantine’, *Church History* 40 (1971), 148-49; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 109-11. See also n. 203.

roundels also would have linked the two images. The identification of the chi-rho monogram, the potential association of the symbol with victory, and the formal connections between the roundels in both rooms would have helped to transfer the meaning of the Bellerophon mosaic from an allusion to the nobleman's hunt to an illustration of victory. In such a reading, the viewer may have reinterpreted the image of the hero on Pegasus not as a gentleman hunting but, rather, as a sort of *adventus* with the vanquished foe, in this case the Chimera, underneath his horse's feet (cf. Figures 199, 200).

The interpretation of the mosaic floor would have shifted once more for a Christian viewer the moment that the beardless bust was interpreted as Christ. Although it is by no means beyond doubt that the image was intended to depict Christ, for the reasons cited above there are some compelling reasons to suppose that at least some viewers of our mosaic would have understood the beardless figure as an image of Christ. If a viewer did interpret the beardless image in the roundel as Christ, how would that have affected the viewer's understanding of the floor in its entirety? The most obvious effect, in light of the aforementioned compositional similarities between the two roundels, would be to visually link Bellerophon with Christ. The result would have been a *synkrisis* of the two not dissimilar to the approach Plutarch used in his *Lives*. Fortunately, several extant early Christian sources provide insights into the shape that such a *synkrisis* could take.<sup>796</sup>

Justin Martyr, who was as much a part of an elite of literati as he was a Christian 'apologist',<sup>797</sup> provided the earliest and most explicit *synkrisis* between Christ and

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<sup>796</sup> While we cannot be certain that visitors to Hinton St. Mary necessarily were familiar with writings by the Church Fathers, some of the authors' reflections may be indicative of the types of interpretations available to Christians who shared the same *paideia*.

<sup>797</sup> Cf. Guerra 'The Conversion of Marcus Aurelius and Justin Martyr', 171-87; Nasrallah, 'The Rhetoric of Conversion', 467-74.

Bellerophon.<sup>798</sup> The basis for Justin's *synkrisis* was a tradition that after Bellerophon had completed his heroic acts, he became disenchanted with the world, disbelieving of the existence of the Gods and, in a fit of rage, he resolved to scale Olympus on Pegasus. The hero's attempt to ascend to heaven failed; he and Pegasus fell to earth and were wounded. At the end of Euripides' tragic version of the myth, Bellerophon repents for his actions and dies shortly thereafter.<sup>799</sup> Despite the superficial similarity of Bellerophon's and Christ's ascents to heaven, it is clear that the myth of former differs radically from that of the latter. Bellerophon was a man who attempted to assail heaven and was rebuffed; Christ was the Son of God, descended to earth, and was welcomed back to heaven after his own sacrifice. The juxtaposition of these two roundels, therefore, may have called to mind not only the similarities between the two figures but also their differences.

In *The First Apology*, Justin spends his twenty-first chapter analogising Greco-Roman myths, including Bellerophon's, to Christ's ascension. Bellerophon '...who, though of mortal origin, rose to heaven on the horse Pegasus'<sup>800</sup> is further likened to Christ in Chapter 54 when he writes:

And since through the prophecy of Moses it had not been expressly signified whether He who was to come would be the Son of God, and whether, mounted on a foal, He would remain on earth or ascend into heaven, and because the name of 'foal' could signify either the foal of an ass or of a horse, they, not knowing whether the predicted one would bring the foal of an ass or of a horse as the sign of His coming, nor whether He was the Son of God or of a man, as we said before, said that Bellerophon, a man born of men, had himself gone up to heaven on the horse Pegasus.<sup>801</sup>

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<sup>798</sup> On the expansion of Justin's ideas by later Church fathers, see: Yves-Marie Duval, 'Bellérophon et les ascètes chrétiens: "Melancholia" ou "otium"?', *Caesarodunum* 2 (1968), 189-90.

<sup>799</sup> Cf. Christoph Riedwieg, 'The "Atheistic" Fragment from Euripides' *Bellephrontes* (286 N<sup>2</sup>)', *Illinois Classical Studies* 15 (1990), 39-53; Christoph Riedwieg, 'TrGF 2.524 - A Euripidean Fragment', *The Classical Quarterly* 40 (1990), 124-36.

<sup>800</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, XXI, 28

<sup>801</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, LIV 62.

Justin's *synkrisis*, which identifies the tradition of ascending to heaven as the salient similarity shared by Christ's and Bellerophon's stories, seems particularly relevant to the case of Hinton St. Mary, in part since the excerpt suggests that among the elite that were the likely viewers of the Hinton St. Mary floor Bellerophon would have been recognisable, even to Christians. Likewise, Justin's *synkrisis* ties Bellerophon to Pegasus, who in turn was intimately tied to Bellerophon's defining act, the slaying of the Chimera (recall how Pegasus equally called to mind Bellerophon for Posidippus). It follows from Justin's excerpt then that Pegasus functions as a sort of 'scriptural symbol' for Bellerophon—that is, the presence of Pegasus would have identified the figure on its back as Bellerophon. As Justin's *synkrisis* demonstrates, such an identification could have been made by a Christian. The barrier to such an interpretation was not religion, it was education. Whether or not the viewers were aware of Justin Martyr's comparison is almost beside the point. Justin is in certain respects generalizable; *The First Apology* simply articulates a possible *synkrisis* that those with *paideia* may have drawn given the juxtaposition of the roundels on the Hinton St. Mary floor. On our floor, this *synkrisis* is visually expressed in the shared form of the roundel and the similar iconographies of the men, presumably both beardless.<sup>802</sup>

At this point, however, the *synkrisis* between the two figures morphs into a *topos*. Bellerophon's ascent to heaven, whatever his victories on earth against beasts like the Chimera, was ultimately a failure. Thus the 'signs' of Bellerophon's victory—Pegasus and the Chimera—are ultimately related to his earthly acts; Christ's victory, by contrast, was signified by the chi-rho, which symbolised his triumph over death and his ultimate ascent to heaven. Justin

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<sup>802</sup> Although Bellerophon's face has been lost to us, other Romano-British mosaics show him without a beard. If the trend held at Hinton St. Mary, then the beardless appearance of both human figures may have further facilitated the possibility of seeing one in terms of the other.

explicates this difference with an explicit comparison of Bellerophon as ‘a man born of man’ with Christ, the ‘Son of God.’

To leave the analysis there, however, would be to fall into one of the traps highlighted in Chapter 3. The notion that the Bellerophon and Christ roundels were subject to a *synkrisis* that ultimately resulted in a *topos* is a plausible Christian reading of the mosaic floor; however, Late Antiquity featured multiple different types of Christianity. We must ask then what type of Christians these viewers might have been. While we can probably never know the answer with certainty, certain clues present themselves from the archaeological context and the material costs necessary to produce the villa.

Whatever the precise date of the Hinton St. Mary villa, it seems fairly clear that by the end of the fourth century, the site was either less intensively used or abandoned.<sup>803</sup> The general population of Dorset falls off dramatically near the turn of the fifth century, a fact evidenced by the near-disappearance of coins from the archaeological record.<sup>804</sup> In the previous chapter the Arch of Constantine was selected over alternatives for comparison with the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus for its proximity and relevance to potential viewers. Likewise, the type of Christianity imagined for (some of) the viewers of the Hinton St. Mary floor must be consistent with the forms of Christianity circulating in the Western provinces at least by the end of the fourth century; other readings would be inappropriate and/or anachronistic. For this reason, the

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<sup>803</sup> Painter, ‘The Roman Site at Hinton St. Mary, Dorset’, 26.

<sup>804</sup> Painter, ‘The Roman Site at Hinton St. Mary, Dorset’, 27. Painter suggests that the fall-off might have to do with the *conspiratio barbarica* of AD 367, for which see: Roger Tomlin, ‘The Date of the “Barbarian Conspiracy”’, *Britannia* 5 (1974), 303-9; R.C. Blockley, ‘The Date of the “Barbarian Conspiracy”’, *Britannia* 11 (1980), 223-25; Friend, ‘Pagans, Christians, and “the Barbarian Conspiracy” of A.D. 367’, 121 ff.

remainder of this section will explore an ‘orthodox’ reading of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic as an anti-Priscillianic polemic.<sup>805</sup>

Priscillianism was a ‘heresy’ introduced in the fourth century by Priscillian, who, according to the contemporaneous historian Sulpicius Severus, was a rich layman from Galicia (modern-day Spain). Priscillian was well-versed in the classics and had an ‘excellent intellect.’<sup>806</sup> Priscillianism is often called a ‘Gnostic-Manichean’ synthesis for its dualistic theology; however, as Raymond Van Dam has documented, neither Gnosticism nor Manichaeism was particularly widespread in the Western provinces during the fourth century.<sup>807</sup> Some of Priscillianism’s interpretation is a function of revisionist fifth and sixth century heresiologies.<sup>808</sup>

Priscillianism stands apart from other ‘heresies’ as perhaps the most notorious ‘heterodoxy’ of its time.<sup>809</sup> The cult’s popularity and influence is attested to both by its longevity—Priscillianism retained adherents into the sixth century—as well as the morbid fact that Priscillian was the first ‘heretic’ to be killed. Jerome, in a polemical digression that forms part of a letter concerning Pelagianism, speaks to Priscillianism’s notoriety while likening the cult to Manichaeism when he writes: ‘Then there is Priscillian in Spain whose infamy makes him as bad as Manichæus, and whose disciples profess a high esteem for you.’<sup>810</sup> Or, as Jerome puts it

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<sup>805</sup> The argument here is neither than an anti-Priscillianic polemic was the only reading possible nor that the mosaic was intended as such; rather, the argument is that one possible meaning to at least one potential viewer may have been as an anti-Priscillianic polemic.

<sup>806</sup> Sulpicius Severus, ‘Sacred History’, II.46, trans. Alexander Roberts, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11* (Buffalo, 1894), 119.

<sup>807</sup> Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, 1992[1985]), 105.

<sup>808</sup> See especially: Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley, 1995), 126 ff.

<sup>809</sup> On the Priscillianism in general, see: Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1976).

<sup>810</sup> Jerome, ‘Letter 133: To Ctesiphon’, trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W.G. Martley, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6*, 273.

elsewhere: ‘Priscillian [was] an enthusiastic votary of Zoroaster and a magian before he became a bishop.’<sup>811</sup>

Apart from its dualistic theology, Priscillianism became the object of animosity for its ascetic mysticism, which advocated for a withdrawal from the evils of material society. Priscillianism, it appears, was at least as dangerous for its subversion and critique of the social order as it was for its dogma.<sup>812</sup> Although Priscillianism was an important fourth-century religious development, it is not clear that Priscillianism itself would have spread to Britain. Indeed, only circumstantial evidence can be offered in support of the cult’s presence. Even if Priscillianism crossed the Channel, the expense that went into producing (and presumably maintaining) Hinton St. Mary makes it extraordinarily unlikely that the villa’s inhabitants were Priscillianic devotees given the sect’s interest in renouncing the trappings of wealth.<sup>813</sup>

Even if the cult did not make its way to Britain in any meaningful way, it is probable that late fourth-century viewers of the Hinton St. Mary mosaic would have been aware of Priscillianism and the controversy around it. Two particular sources of evidence support this assertion. First, Priscillian’s persecution was an inter-provincial affair: while Priscillian himself came from Galicia, he was first tried in AD 384 in Bordeaux and executed the following year in Trier. The trial at Trier was adjudicated by the emperor, Magnus Maximus, who was a British usurper. The notoriety of Priscillianism encapsulated in Jerome’s polemic, which shows knowledge of the cult as far away as Antioch by AD 415, was due in part to the fluid politics of the time and to the multiple locations that hosted episodes in the Priscillianic controversy.

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<sup>811</sup> Jerome, ‘Letter 133’, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6*, 273.

<sup>812</sup> Cf. Kimberly Bowes, “‘...*Nec sedere in villam.*’ Villa-churches, rural piety and the Priscillianist controversy’, in Thomas S. Burns and John W. Eadie (eds.), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (East Lansing, 2001), 323-48. It is interesting that the ascetic impulse so widely condemned in the fourth century later would become an important component of mainstream Christian worship (consider ascetic ‘stylite’ saints and the status that they achieved in Byzantine pilgrimage).

<sup>813</sup> Perring, “‘Gnosticism’ in Fourth-Century Britain’, 121-22.

Second, a number of textual and in particular epistolary sources suggest the widespread knowledge of (if not adherence to) Priscillianic theology; the best known of these documents is a series of letters written between Paulinus of Nola and his teacher, Ausonius, whom we have already encountered.<sup>814</sup> Both men came from Bordeaux, and the occasion of their letters was Paulinus' decision to travel to Spain, where Ausonius feared that his student would be corrupted by Priscillianic doctrine. As Dennis Trout has argued convincingly, Ausonius aired this fear through a metaphor to the story of Bellerophon.<sup>815</sup> Ausonius writes:

But who has encouraged your long silence? Let the impious one turn no sound to advantage; let no joys enliven him, no sweet songs of the poets, no shifting melody of the plaint; let no wild beasts, no cattle or birds delight him, nor Echo, who hidden in the woody groves of the shepherds, consoles us, returning our words. Sad, needy, let him dwell in deserted wastes and in silence roam the vault of the Alpine ridge, as it is said once Bellerophon, out of his mind, avoiding the company and traces of men, vagrant, wandered through trackless places.<sup>816</sup>

Perhaps more striking than Ausonius' letter was Paulinus' response. Paulinus was clearly quite offended by the comparisons drawn between him and Bellerophon and, as we will see below, between his wife Therasia and the power-thirsty early Roman queen Tanaquil. Paulinus responds: 'Therefore, revered father don't rebuke me for having turned to these pursuits wrongly or revile me for my wife or the imperfection of my mind; I have neither the troubled mind of Bellerophon nor a Tanaquil, but a wife like Lucretia.'<sup>817</sup> Trout explains the correspondence as follows:

In Bellerophon's demented wandering Paulinus detected, as Ausonius perhaps intended, not a curse to be called down on some other but an allusion to his own way of life, to the new, socially subversive *mores* to which Ausonius feared Paulinus had become (unwitting) victim.<sup>818</sup>

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<sup>814</sup> See also the polemics of Jerome and Augustine. On Jerome, see: n. 819. On Augustine, see: Augustine, 'To Consentius: Against Lying', trans. H. Browne, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2* (Buffalo, 1887), 481 f. For a general discussion, see: Duval, 'Bellérophon et les ascètes chrétiens', 189-90.

<sup>815</sup> Dennis Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley, 1999), esp. chap. 4.

<sup>816</sup> Ausonius, 'Letter to Paulinus', translated in *Paulinus of Nola*, 70.

<sup>817</sup> Paulinus, 'Letter to Ausonius', translated in *Paulinus of Nola*, 71.

<sup>818</sup> Paulinus, 'Letter to Ausonius', translated in *Paulinus of Nola*, 71.

The ‘socially subversive *mores*’ to which Trout refers is Priscillianism’s asceticism, a religious approach that saw a general surge in popularity during the fourth century.<sup>819</sup> That asceticism should have been associated with Bellerophon—both by the anti-ascetic Ausonius and the pseudo-ascetic Paulinus—indicates that the equation between Bellerophon and asceticism had a real cultural resonance among those who knew the myth. For those with *paideia*, in other words, Bellerophon could have served as a potential symbol for Priscillianism as well as a critique of one of the group’s central practices.

The equivalence between Bellerophon and asceticism was picked up in the early fifth century by the Roman poet Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, whose elegiac poem *De Reditu Suo* describes a voyage from Rome to Gaul in which the monks (*monachoi*) on the Tuscan island of Capraria are alluded to as follows:

As we advance at sea, Capraria now rears itself — an ill-kept isle full of men who shun the light. Their own name for themselves is a Greek one, *monachoi* (monks), because they wish to dwell alone with none to see. They fear Fortune’s boons, as they dread her outrages: would anyone, to escape misery, live of his own choice in misery? What silly fanaticism of a distorted brain is it to be unable to endure even blessings because of your terror of ills? Whether they are like prisoners who demand the appropriate penalties for their deeds, or whether their melancholy hearts are swollen with black bile, it was even so that Homer assigned the ailment of excessive bile as cause of Bellerophon’s troubled soul; for it was after the wounds of a cruel sorrow that men say the stricken youth conceived his loathing for human kind.<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>819</sup> Cf. Dennis Trout, *Secular Renunciation and Social Action: Paulinus of Nola and Late Roman Society*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Duke University, 1989), 144-70. It is possible that the threat posed by asceticism resulted in the levelling of other, more damning but less accurate charges (such as the association with Manichaeism) in order to more quickly stamp out the Priscillianic ‘threat.’ See: Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, 82-85. Consider also Martin of Tour’s opposition to Priscillian’s condemnation. See: Sulpicius Severus, ‘Sacred History’, II.50, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11*, 121.

<sup>820</sup> Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, ‘de Reditu suo’, I.441-54, in John Wight Duff and Arnold Mackay Duff (eds.), *Minor Latin Poets, Volume 2* (Cambridge, 1934), 805.

Namatianus in this passage, like Ausonius before him,<sup>821</sup> likens Bellerophon and his joylessness to asceticism. The relationship between the ascetic and Bellerophon continued throughout the fifth century; the metaphor between the two has been well documented by, among others, Yves-Marie Duval.<sup>822</sup> What emerges then is a transitive relationship: Priscillianism was associated with asceticism and asceticism, particularly the Priscillianic brand of asceticism, was associated with Bellerophon.

To these already established arguments, there is another reason to think that the Hinton St. Mary mosaic may have brought to mind the association between Bellerophon and Priscillianism. Priscillian in particular was thought to have a particular sway over women. Sulpicius records that ‘...women, who were fond of novelties and of unstable faith, as well as of a prurient curiosity in all things, flocked to him in crowds.’<sup>823</sup> Although Priscillian advocated celibacy, his proximity to women and insistence on their inclusion in his cult earned him accusations of sexual misconduct. As Sulpicius notes later: ‘In fact, Priscillian did not deny that he had given himself up to lewd doctrines; had been accustomed to hold, by night, gatherings of vile women, and to pray in a state of nudity.’<sup>824</sup>

Bellerophon, like Priscillian, had an association with females and, more specifically, had a reputation for sexual misconduct, even if it was undeserved. Bellerophon’s exile was the result of his rebuff of sexual advances from queen Anteia, who in fury and embarrassment over his rejection of her accused Bellerophon of attempted rape, a charge that ultimately results in his being tasked to kill the Chimera, itself a female creature. Visual depictions of the slaying the

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<sup>821</sup> Trout speculates that Ausonius was an influence. Cf. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola*, 71. For a more recent and more confident assertion, see: Garth Tissol, ‘Ovid and the Exilic Journey of Rutilius Namatianus’, *Arethusa* 3 (2002), 435-46.

<sup>822</sup> See especially: Duval, ‘Bellérophon et les ascètes chrétiens’, 183-90.

<sup>823</sup> Sulpicius Severus, ‘Sacred History’, II.46, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11*, 119.

<sup>824</sup> Sulpicius Severus, ‘Sacred History’, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11*, 121. See also: Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, esp. 136-40.

Chimera are, after a fashion, quite sexual: Bellerophon is shown with a long, phallic spear he plunges into the beast. As we have already seen, a number of variations of the Bellerophon myth were in circulation, none of which characterised the method of Chimera's death as a stabbing by spear.<sup>825</sup> Whatever the iconographic precedent, the disjunction between the myth and its depiction may have accentuated the sexual parallels between Priscillian and Bellerophon.

Bellerophon's relationship to women is further established by the elaboration of his myth, first by Pindar and later by the likes of Apollodorus, to include Bellerophon's successful campaigns against the Amazons.<sup>826</sup> Ausonius himself seems to imply the relationship between Bellerophon and Priscillian two figures when, in a letter to Paulinus, he likens his pupil's Spanish wife to Tanaquil, an 'imperious' Roman queen 'skilled in pagan religious ritual.'<sup>827</sup> The analogy on its surface may seem appropriate—after all, like Tanaquil, Paulinus' wife, Therasia, seems to have engineered her husband's relocation—but the analogy quickly breaks down. Tanaquil was interested in her husband's seizing power; Therasia's motive was less certain. Trout suggests that Ausonius invoked Tanaquil to emphasise Priscillianism's association with the occult,<sup>828</sup> but for anyone who knew the mythology of the city of Rome it would not have been lost on them that Tanaquil's husband, Tarquinius Priscus, and Priscillian had names sharing the same root—*priscus* ('ancient'). The association of Bellerophon with Priscillian himself through references to sexual conquest and deviance were not necessary to connect Bellerophon with Priscillianism; however, there is some reason to think that such a meaning could have been ascribed to an image of Bellerophon based on these secondary and tertiary similarities. After all,

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<sup>825</sup> This is not to suggest that the image was intended to carry a sexual meaning, but see: Scott, *Art and Society in Fourth-Century Britain*, 157. Some scholars have argued more generally that domestic mosaics were open to erotic interpretations where the iconography warranted. Cf. Muth, *Erleben von Raum*, 177 f. On the sympotic associations of domestic (and potentially erotic) imagery, see: Ezio Pellizer, 'Outlines of a Morphology of Sympotic Entertainment', in Oswyn Murray (ed.), *Sympotica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (Oxford, 1994), 177-84.

<sup>826</sup> Cf. Pindar, 'Olympian Ode', 13, in Geoffrey S. Conway (trans.), *The Odes of Pindar* (London, 1972), 63 ff.

<sup>827</sup> Ausonius, 'Letter to Paulinus', cited in *Paulinus of Nola*, 69.

<sup>828</sup> Trout, *Paulinus of Nola*, 69.

it was just this sort of wordplay that was cultivated by the rhetorical exercises of the *progymnasmata*.<sup>829</sup>

An association between Bellerophon and Priscillian(ism) had the potential to recast the Hinton St. Mary floor as a polemic against Priscillianic doctrine rather than a straightforward *synkrisis* and *topos* of the hero and Christ. The roundel showing Bellerophon is both a triumphant account of the nobleman's hunt and, at the same time, a warning that such wealthy individuals, even those of heroic repute, stand to lose grace by following a route of Priscillianic asceticism. The anti-Priscillianic polemic would have only been heightened by the context of the scene: a sumptuously decorated villa owned, presumably, by a wealthy member of the elite.

It is important to note that there is almost no doubt that the mosaics were not *intended* to comment on Priscillianism, which very well may not have existed at the time the floor was laid. However, a late fourth-century Christian with *paideia* may have understood the mosaic in the context of contemporaneous religious developments. Indeed, the fact that the association between Bellerophon and Priscillianism was made by the likes Justin and Ausonius and recognised as an appropriate metaphor by Paulinus and Namatianus demonstrates the potential resonance of such a *synkrisis* among elite Christians in Late Antiquity. The anti-Priscillianic interpretation offered here is consistent with the socio-historical and intellectual contexts of Roman Britain and thus provides one potential reading for the mosaic floor from Hinton St. Mary. Whether such an interpretation was ever undertaken is almost beside the point: the plausibility of such an understanding gets to the complications of decoding how ambiguous Late Antique images were understood.

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<sup>829</sup> Cf. Aelius Theon, 'The Exercises', 81-82, in George A. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Leiden, 2003), 31.

## Conclusion

This dissertation began by exploring the nature of the earliest Christian art. In addition to problematizing some of the assumptions and logic that have been used to argue for its emergence around AD 200, it was suggested that the art produced by (and for) Christians in the first century-and-a-half after Christ's death was undifferentiable from contemporaneous non-Christian art. Although this is as far as the introduction pushed the proposition, there is more to say in light of the arguments made in each of the preceding three sections. Namely, the fact that the earliest Christian art may not be clearly identifiable to us does not mean that it was not clearly identifiable to some early Christians. Any given image could have had the potential to signify 'Christ'; however, the interpretation of an image as such was contingent upon the individual looking at it. We have focused on the role that a rhetorical education in general and *synkrisis* in particular played in conditioning elite responses to images, but we can say more broadly that an image's interpretation is a function of the viewer. This may seem an obvious statement, especially since, as we saw in Chapter 4, there is a strong semiotic argument to be made that interpretation occurs on the level of the individual, but it leads us to an interesting question worth considering as a conclusion to our investigation: what is an individual?

In order to get at an answer to the question, it is worth reconsidering some elements of our discussion on the image of Christ. As the first section of the dissertation went to great lengths to show, the image of Christ could be interpreted in multiple ways. Christ could be seen as an emperor, a philosopher, a god or any permutation of these. Thus, the images of Christ from the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the Hinton St. Mary mosaic could have alluded to Constantine, Constantius II, or the entire Constantinian dynasty, and a bearded image of Christ could have brought to mind parallels with Jupiter, Sarapis, or Asklepios. In order to avoid

confusion between Christ and his prototypes, a set of conventional signifiers eventually developed to help facilitate the process of identification. Those signs, however, did nothing to erase the multiple meanings that each iconography implied. Although Christ was a single person, he had multiple identities, or, said differently, even if Christ were a single entity, he was nevertheless a composite of multiple attributes. The notion that a single identity is composed of multiple 'micro-identities' is exactly the situation that we find among our Late Antique viewers. As we saw in Chapter 3, individuals are combinations of different identities, some of which are shared with others (these are the group affiliations that history and art history make so much about) but which recombine in a novel way in each person. Interpretation, in this reading, is not a function of each person's unique *Gestalt* of identities; instead, interpretation is a consequence of which micro-identities within an individual are actualised at any given time.

The line of argumentation adopted to this point leads us to three inferences. First, individuals are unique combinations of multiple identities. Second, different identities have different bearings on interpretation; this is the mechanism that explains why each individual has the potential to understand an image differently. Third, in the context of the ambiguous iconography of images before AD 300, there is good reason to believe that at least some individuals would have had micro-identities that would have facilitated their understanding of an ambiguous image as Christ. The logical question that follows from these deductions is what sort of identity/identities might contribute to understanding an image as Christ? The answer which comes to mind immediately is a 'Christian' identity, a point that would seem to derive support from the primary sources discussed in the Introduction. As we saw with the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus though, it was entirely conceivable that non-Christians could identify an image of Christ. Consider, for example, that Severus Alexander, the early third century emperor whose

diverse religious preferences we have already encountered, reputedly worshipped a statue of Christ.<sup>830</sup> Although it would be fascinating to know what this sculpture looked like, we actually learn more about early Christian imagery without knowing its exact iconography. The reason, simply put, is that we can reasonably assume on the basis of the diversity within the corpus of early Christ images that the statue could have been bearded or beardless, with or without a forked beard, and with or without a wand or scroll. In other words, the statue could have looked like virtually anything. The identity of an image in the earliest centuries of Christian art was not conferred by adherence to a standardised form nearly so much as it was determined on an individual basis through the process of naming—the so-called *interpretatio romana* discussed in Chapter 4. The key point here is that the individualised nature of identifying Christ highlights the ontological ambiguity of the concept of the Christian god. With a substrate of ontological ambiguity—that is, with no boundaries on what could or could not qualify as an image of Christ—epistemological ambiguity was the dominant force of Christian image production. Said more precisely, Late Antique images of Christ were sufficiently ambiguous to allow nearly all interpretations of a given image to be valid.

It is through this lens that we approached the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the Hinton St. Mary mosaic. The interpretations offered in the preceding section diverge markedly from the standard understandings of those objects and may even seem arbitrary and whimsical. Whether or not that is true, it does not invalidate the methodology employed here, which has only attempted to provide an instantiation of the individualised rhetorical play that would have typified the Late Antique elite interpretive process. The two key ingredients that allowed for this model to be employed were the arbitrariness of interpretation and the ambiguity of the images being considered here. Arbitrary interpretations of unambiguous images are far less compelling,

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<sup>830</sup> Cf. n. 458.

and maintaining that an interpretation is ‘right’ in the face of incomplete information is a symptom of undue overconfidence. Both arbitrariness and ambiguity deserve special consideration, and it is to these two topics that we next turn.

### Some Thoughts on Arbitrariness

The traditional approach to art history tries to identify the interpretation that is most widely accepted by the largest relevant group (e.g., ‘early Christians’) at any given time. Such an approach is adequate for assessing high-level, ‘macro-trends’ but lacks sensitivity to the individual, ‘micro’ level variation within these trends. What emerges from such an art history is a broad-based approach that often drowns-out discrepant positions. In the preceding chapters, no pretensions were made to understand how a whole group of viewers responded to an artwork in part because, as argued above, the notion of groups is a useful heuristic that provides only a partial explanation for how interpretations are generated. Although I might be accused of considering only a single group—members of the upper class with a classical education—the point of that focus, as it relates to this dissertation, was to identify a group affiliation that modulated individual interpretations (through *paideia*). The fact that a single reading was offered for the objects discussed here does not mean that there was only one possible interpretation among elite viewers; each individual could come up with any number of possible interpretations. *Paideia* may have pointed viewers towards protreptic interpretations of images of Christ, but whether a given image was understood as a panegyric, a polemic, and/or an apologetic was a personal decision.

Embedded in this logic is another potential critique of the approach advocated here. If interpretations differ from individual to individual, and if most ancient individual identities have

been lost to us over time, then it follows that there is almost nothing at the micro-level that we can know with certainty about how an object was interpreted, a position that is at odds with the traditional art historical rhetoric of systematic inquiry and certainty of results.<sup>831</sup> Far from undermining the art historical enterprise, this is a necessary admission if the discipline is to advance. Art history is not a subject where complete knowledge can ever be fully acquired; the best we can do is piece together likely interpretations for certain audiences at specific moments in time. The job of the art historian in this frame is to be supremely historicist—although to which period is a matter of choice—and to be sensitive to the variations that exist between individual interpretations.

The likely interpretations of an image do change over time, and I have been careful to confine myself to an analysis of viewers of objects within a very narrow set of circumstances.<sup>832</sup> The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the Hinton St. Mary mosaic were subject to many more interpretations in Late Antiquity and even more since; the interpretations that I have elucidated were confined to elite viewers of explicitly defined religious persuasions that lived around the time that the objects themselves were created. In other words, the interpretations offered are just some of many overlapping understandings of the objects discussed.

Of course, the artworks considered were able to be so deeply interpreted because a substantial amount of supporting evidence, archaeological and otherwise, exists to help

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<sup>831</sup> This is not to suggest that macro-level art history does not pick up on real, important trends; rather, it is to say that these trends are often extended to an entire society without any acknowledgement of variation among smaller groups or individuals. Such an approach is grounded in Hegel's philosophy of art and his notion of *Geist*; the thought structure was translated into art history, and specifically into Late Antique art history, by Alois Riegl more than any other scholar. On the intellectual development of this art historical framework, see especially: Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*. On Hegel, see especially: Gombrich, "The Father of Art History", 51-69. For a critique of Gombrich, see: Gaiger, 'Hegel's Contested Legacy', esp. 179 f. On Riegl's methodology (*Kunstwollen*—lit. 'will-to-form'), see especially: Elsner, 'From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture', 741 ff. For an argument that Hegelianism is indispensable to the (art) historical enterprise, see: Elkins, 'Art History without Theory', 354 ff.

<sup>832</sup> The notion of interpretive changes over time has been more fully developed in the anthropological literature. See especially: Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 2003[1986]); within which, see especially Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', 64-75. See also: Gell, *Art and Agency*, esp. 96-220.

contextualise both the Bassus sarcophagus and the Hinton St. Mary mosaic.<sup>833</sup> Detailed readings like the ones provided above are not possible for all objects. Far from invalidating the methodology used in the third section of this dissertation, this observation only serves to reinforce one of the central methodological points made here: the closer one inspects the actual state of things in place of the simple heuristics frequently used, the more complicated things appear.

One of the key points of this dissertation then is that although compelling overarching narratives, such as those provided in the first section, can provide interesting insights into the art history of a given period, those diachronic discussions inevitably overlook a more complicated and nuanced picture.<sup>834</sup> A framework for analysing the individuals that art history readily aggregates into groups, cultures, and societies was laid out in the second section and applied in the third. The continued variation in Christ's image throughout our period underscores the interpretive possibilities available to viewers whose guiding thought structures would have been conditioned through *paideia* by rhetorical notions such as *synkrisis*. The image of Christ was not only ambiguous; it was also an open-ended sign capable of multiple interpretations—that is, *ekphraseis*. What I have offered here are some of those *ekphraseis*, and while they may not seem more rigorous than standard art historical narratives, the point is that *they are no less*

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<sup>833</sup> Simply because contextual information for many pieces has been lost over time should not be confused with the idea that such information never existed—it obviously did at some point. This does nothing to enable analysis of objects whose context has been lost, but it is worth acknowledging that deep readings of objects are circumscribed by the type of extant evidence and not by the type of object. For example, in the past few decades certain archaeologists have begun to focus on theories of garbage. See: William Rathje, 'Integrated archaeology: A garbage paradigm', in Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (eds.), *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* (London, 2001), 63 ff. For a more explicit application to ancient archaeology, see: Travis W. Stanton, M. Kathryn Brown, and Jonathan B. Pagliaro, 'Garbage of the Gods? Squatters, Refuse Disposal, and Termination Rituals among the Ancient Maya', *Latin American Antiquity* 19 (2008), 227 ff.

<sup>834</sup> However, see: Margaret Iversen, 'Alois Riegl: The Synchronic Analysis of Stylistic Types', in Barry Smith (ed.), *Structure and Gestalt: Philosophy and Literature in Austria-Hungary and Her Successor States* (Amsterdam, 1981), 45 ff.

*rigorous*.<sup>835</sup> The interpretations of the Bassus sarcophagus and Hinton St. Mary mosaic advocated above may not have been widespread, but they were possible, and that tells us something important about the Late Antique imagination and the Late Antique way of understanding images.

The reader will have noticed that this conclusion, to this point, has amounted to an apology for the detailed, textured analysis of a small set of objects. Whether this is seen as a polemic against more standard, wider-lensed art histories is up to the reader, but such a polemical framing was not my intent. Whereas the standard model is able to trace the trajectory of change, the more detailed model is able to tease out some of the mechanics of interpreting ambiguous imagery.<sup>836</sup> It is ambiguity, the subject with which this dissertation began, to which we return.

### Some Thoughts on Ambiguity

Although our focus has been primarily on epistemological ambiguity among Christ's images during the first half of Late Antiquity, as we have seen, the material evidence for this ambiguity—variant images of Christ—persisted well after AD 500. The image of Christ has never been and will never be fully standardized. An image as powerful as Christ's will always be subject to manipulation; variation within Christ's image is the norm. Thus an image like the wooden sculpture of the *Cristo Negro* ('Black Christ') from Portobelo, Panama can sit alongside the sinewy, Slavic figure from Emil Nolde's painted crucifixion scene and Michelangelo's

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<sup>835</sup> Jaś Elsner, 'Art History as *Ekphrasis*', *Art History* 33 (2010), 10 ff.

<sup>836</sup> One area that carries some promise for understanding the mechanics of interpretation is the emergent sub-field of 'neuroarthistory.' In particular, it increasingly appears that memory is associative, and, by definition, associations are defined at the individual level (we do not have access to each other's neocortices), a fact that goes some way to undermining the focus on groups as art history's unit of analysis. Moreover, the notion that interpretation would be associative maps closely onto notions such as *synkrisis* and typology as well as earlier notions such as *analogia* (for which see Koortbojian, *Myth and Memory*). On neuroarthistory, see especially: John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki* (New Haven, 2007).

overly-muscled, beardless hero from the Sistine Chapel's 'Last Judgment.' However discrepant these images may seem, there is no doubt in the case of any of them that they are meant to depict Christ, a fact attributable thanks to the well-defined corpus of signifiers that have developed for depictions of Christ (Figures 201, 202, 203). Yet, what is perhaps most astonishing about the image of Christ, is that in spite of this tremendous variation, a widespread consensus on what Christ looked like has emerged. As evidence, consider the actor cast to play Christ at the Holy Land Experience, a Christian theme park in Orlando, Florida (Figure 204): the bearded and moustached gentleman wears shoulder length, centrally-parted brown hair in an image altogether reminiscent of the Jovian image. Christ may be black or beardless to some, but an overwhelming majority of Christians seem to share the same interpretant for the Son of God. In the face of the deeply embedded tradition of ambiguity, it is remarkable that the image of Christ has become even remotely standardized.

The reasons for this standardisation are the subject of their own dissertation, but what is most compelling for us here is what the standardisation implies about Christianity. As the second chapter argued, variant images of Christ were a material trace of epistemological ambiguity. While variant images continue to circulate, they do so in fewer numbers and on more confined scales, which, in turn, implies decreasing epistemological variation. In other words, individual interpretations of Christ have converged. The reasons behind this convergence are not obvious, and it is unclear whether or not this development is beneficial for Christianity.<sup>837</sup> One thing, however, is certain: the framework for understanding images of Christ in Late Antiquity was so different from the framework used today that it is difficult for us to fully comprehend.

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<sup>837</sup> Presumably the standardization of Christ's image means that Christianity's iconography appeals only to a smaller set of micro-identities. Perhaps the number of micro-identities has converged in the past two millennia; perhaps Christianity has found other ways to attract to the micro-identities once appealed to through the production of variant images; or perhaps appealing to certain micro-identities is less important.

The notion that ambiguity would be a central, structuring concept of understanding is not only a foreign one for modern individuals; it also seems like a contradiction in terms. Yet all of the evidence seems to suggest that in Late Antiquity the act of interpreting Christ's image was highly individual and was abetted by an open-ended iconography that allowed viewers to transpose their own meanings onto objects. Nowhere was this truer than among the members of the elite in Late Antiquity, whose educational regime valued just such a *mentalité*.

By exploring the individual responses to images of Christ, variation within groups is further heightened. 'Christianity' is fractured not just into different types of Christians but into different people with different affiliations—religious and otherwise. With the explosion of a monolithic Christianity, the theoretical Late Antique Christian is no longer buffered from his/her society and culture; s/he is embedded firmly within it and develops out of it. Multiple Christianities and multiple images of Christ ensure a complicated web of potential meanings (i.e., the 'network' described in Chapter 3). The results of all this are decidedly messy, and the messiness is made worse by the observation that while this dissertation has focused on images of Christ in Late Antiquity, it does not take very much strain to see how the arguments about ambiguity in interpretation can be extended to other images from other times.

The key point that prevents such analyses from cascading into whimsy is that interpretations must be bound by the signifiers within a picture plane. That is, it is one thing for someone to argue that an image of Christ is actually an image of an emperor; it is quite another to argue that the same image depicts a goat, an automobile, or any other entirely unrelated (or anachronistic) image. Such interpretations technically are possible (they can be thought up after all), but they are wrong. All of this is to say that while this dissertation may be advocating a looser interpretive framework than is normal, the approach espoused here is not without a frame.

Interpretation of Christ's images is flexible since it is conditioned by individual identities and ambiguous iconography, but there are still 'rules' to be followed. In semiotic terms, a sign may be open-ended, but any sign acts as a signifier for a *finite* number of meanings.

This dissertation has done its best to stay within the 'rules' spelled out in Chapter 1 and to accommodate the ambiguity that inhered in Late Antique images of Christ. The ambiguity resulted in a number of important features of early Christian artwork, including its adaptability to various contexts, its ability to communicate multiple meanings at once, and its potential appeal to a wide audience. The overlapping, complementary, and perhaps, at times, competing interpretations were too numerous to discuss in depth here, but hopefully by providing two such interpretations, a roadmap has been laid out for a new approach to Late Antique objects that can provide new, more granular insights into the artworks produced in this dynamic and volatile period.

#### Some Future Directions for Study

No study ever answers more questions than it poses, and much more careful thought and analysis needs to be dedicated to the study of Late Antique images of Christ, the methodology employed here and the application of the latter to the former. As new material is unearthed, new sources found and new and better dates are ascribed to already known objects, the contours of the discipline may shift; so too may some of the arguments offered here. With or without new primary evidence, a great deal more effort on top of the substantial work undertaken in the past decade or so needs to be put in to resituate Christianity in the broader Late Antique socio-religious landscape. Likewise, more work is needed on the relationship between ontological and epistemological ambiguity. It is perhaps noteworthy that a modicum of standardisation in

Christ's image appeared around the time that 'authenticity' became a leitmotif of the Iconoclastic arguments over image-production. Once the role for individual interpretation was superseded by theological necessity, experimentation among Christ's image may have diminished.

This dissertation has attempted to contribute in all of these areas with the end-goal of understanding images of Christ between AD 200 and 500 as they would have been understood by some Late Antique viewers. The scope of the project is huge—only two perspectives on two objects were able to be considered—but the granularity of the analyses provided here and the texture that they hopefully have given should align more closely with the actual process of interpretation. I hope that if nothing else the individualised and dynamic process of interpretation imagined here is intuitive to the reader and corresponds to the way that s/he (and anyone else for that matter) generates an 'understanding' of any image; to think that the process would have been otherwise at any point in history, let alone during the syncretic three centuries looked at here, seems a difficult argument to make. Interpretation is and always will be arbitrary, and this arbitrariness will be more pronounced when the images being interpreted are ambiguous. More fully comprehending the nature of iconographic ambiguity and more deeply exploring the principles that guided the forms of arbitrariness that interpretation took can, with any luck, greatly advance the study of Late Antique images of Christ and art history alike.

## Figures

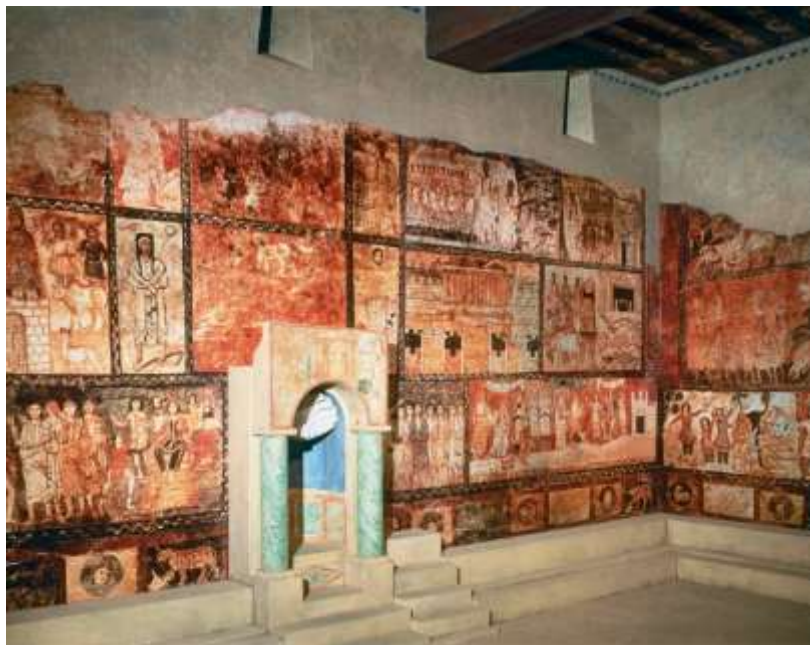


Figure 1- Wall Painting from the Synagogue at Dura-Europos, Syria, ca. AD 244



Figure 2- Floor Mosaic Depicting the Binding of Isaac, Beth Alpha Synagogue near Beth Shean, Israel, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 3- Floor Mosaic of Zodiac from the Synagogue at Hamat Tiberias, Israel, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD



Figure 4- Detail of Endymion from a Roman Sarcophagus, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 5- Vault Painting with Jonah at Rest under the Vine (at Bottom),  
Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 6- Mosaic of Christ Standing on Lion and Serpent,  
Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. AD 425



Figure 7- Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, Rome, ca. AD 359



Figure 8- Mosaic Floor, Hinton St. Mary in Dorset, England, AD 325-375



Figure 9- Mosaic of Christ as the Good Shepherd, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. AD 425



Figure 10- Veronica's Veil, Domenico Fetti, ca. AD 1620



Figure 11- The Shroud of Turin,  
Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Turin, Italy probably 14<sup>th</sup> century AD



Figure 12- Icon of Abgar Holding the *Mandylin*,  
St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt, 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD

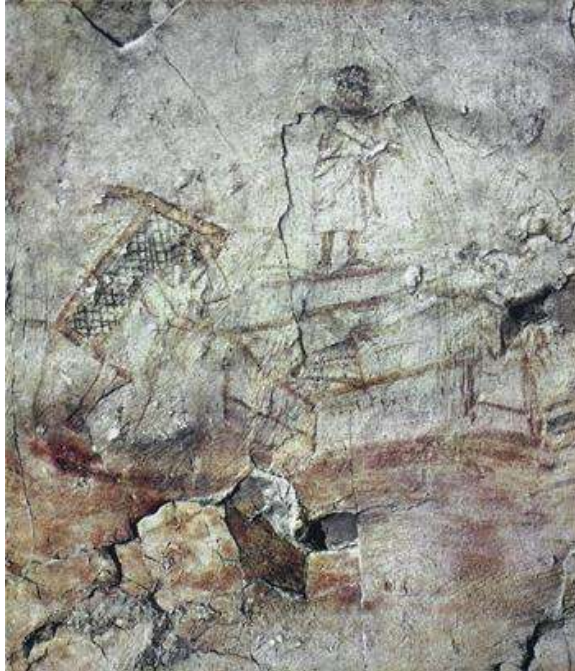


Figure 13- Christ Healing the Paralytic,  
Christian House, Dura Europos, Syria, ca. AD 240



Figure 14- Christ Walking on Water,  
Christian House, Dura Europos, Syria, ca. AD 240



Figure 15- Adam and Eve and Good Shepherd with Flock,  
Christian House, Dura Europos, Syria, ca. AD 240



Figure 16- Painting of Christ Enthroned between Peter and Paul (Detail of Figure 82),  
Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, AD 325-350



Figure 17- Sarcophagus with *Traditio Legis*, Arles, France, AD 375-400



Figure 18- Silver Vase, Homs, Syria, Early 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 19- Dome Mosaic of the Baptism of Christ, Ravenna, Arian Baptistery, Late 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 20- Detail of Christ from Silver Chalice, from Antioch, ca. AD 550



Figure 21- Panel Portrait Icon of Virgin and Child,  
from St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 22- Triumphal Arch Mosaic of the Adoration of the Magi,  
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, ca. AD 440

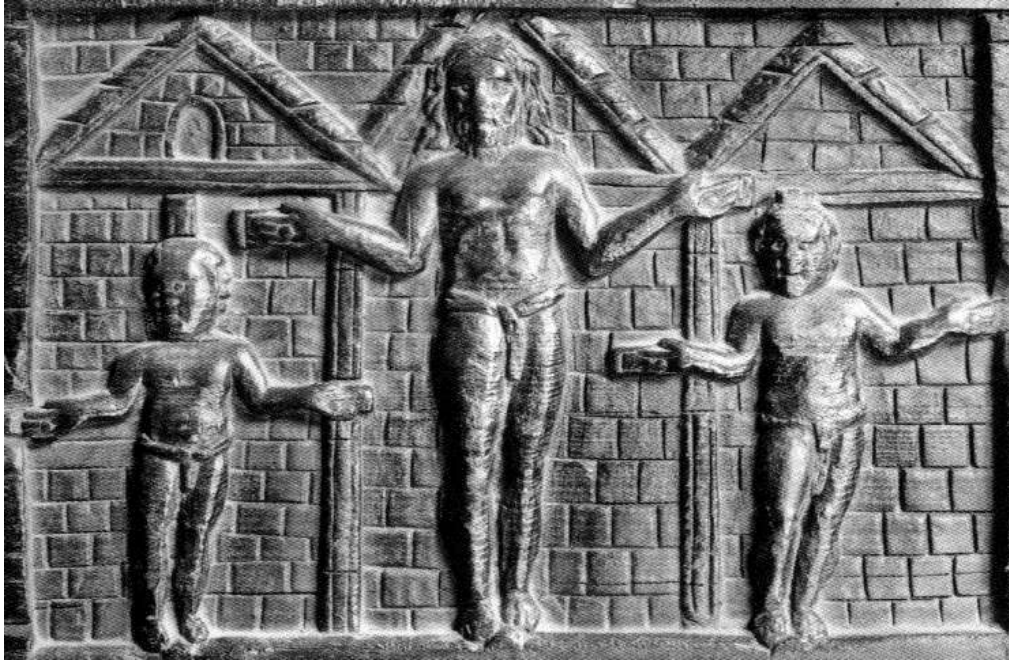


Figure 23- Wooden Door-Panel of the Crucifixion, Santa Sabina, Rome, ca. AD 432



Figure 24- Crucifixion Scene from the Maskell Ivories,  
from Lombardy, ca. AD 420



Figure 25- Apse Mosaic of *Traditio Legis*, Santa Costanza, Rome, ca. AD 350



Figure 26- Apse Mosaic of *Traditio Clavium*, Santa Costanza, Rome, ca. AD 350



Figure 27- Wall Painting of Christ Enthroned Teaching Apostles, Catacombs of Domitilla, Rome, ca. AD 250



Figure 28- Missorium of Theodosius, from Constantinople, ca. AD 388



Figure 29- Christ Enthroned among the Apostles, Basilica of San Lorenzo Maggiore, Milan, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 30- Relief of *Adlocutio*, Column of Trajan, Rome, ca. AD 117



Figure 31- Sarcophagus with Christ Entering Jerusalem and Performing Miracles, Rome, ca. AD 325



Figure 32- Bronze Medallion with Constantine's *Adventus*, from Rome, ca. AD 313



Figure 33- Marble Sarcophagus with *Wunderkind*, Rome, ca. AD 280



Figure 34- Marble Statue of Claudius in the Guise of Jupiter, Rome, ca. AD 50



Figure 35-Marble Bust of Commodus in the Guise of Herakles, Rome, ca. AD 192



Figure 36- Marble Bust of Septimius Severus with Sarapean features, Rome, AD 193-211



Figure 37- 'Tondo' Portrait of Severan Royal Family, probably from Egypt, ca. AD 200



Figure 38- Silver Denarius of Aurelian as Sol Invictus, AD 274-275



Figure 39- Silver Denarius of Probus as Sol Invictus, ca. AD 280



Figure 40- Medallion with Constantine and Sol Invictus, from Rome, ca. AD 313



Figure 41- Apotheosis of Antoninus Pius and Faustina, Column Base of Antoninus Pius, Rome, Italy, ca. AD 161

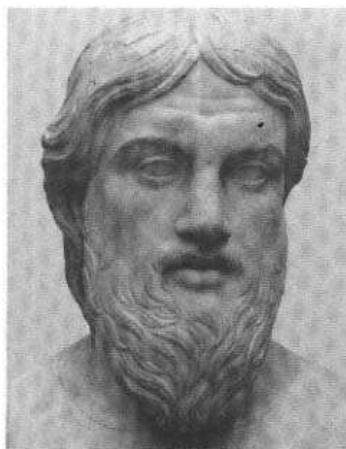


Figure 42- Eastern Portrait of a Charismatic Philosopher, probably 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD



Figure 43- Charismatic Philosopher, from Gortyn, Crete, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD



Figure 44- Marble Bust of Hadrian, Rome, ca. AD 117

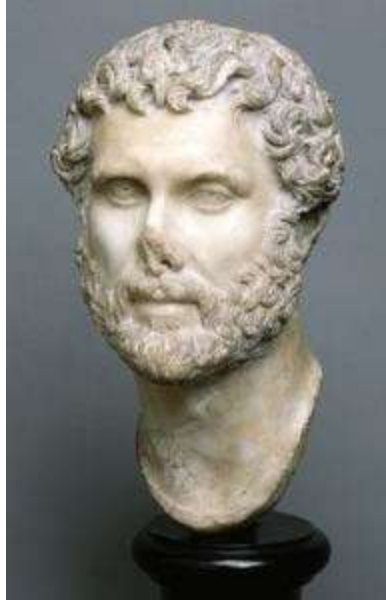


Figure 45- Marble Bust of Antoninus Pius, Rome, AD 140-150

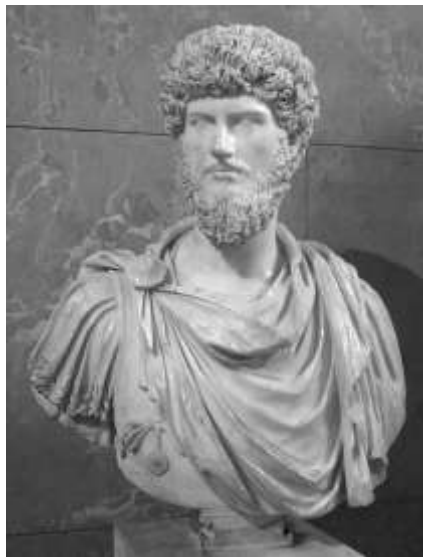


Figure 46- Marble Bust of Lucius Verus, Rome, AD, 161-169



Figure 47- Marble Bust of Marcus Aurelius, Rome, AD 170-180



Figure 48- Marble Bust of Gordian I, Rome, AD 220-230



Figure 49- Marble Bust of Probus, probably from Rome, ca. AD 280



Figure 50- Marble Bust of Numerian, probably from Rome, ca. AD 283



Figure 51- Solidus of Julian the Apostate, ca. AD 362



Figure 52- Follis of Julian the Apostate, ca. AD 362



Figure 53- Marble Lekythos with Hermes as *Psychopomp*, Athens, ca. 420 BC



Figure 54- Marble Statue of the *Moschophoros*, Athens, ca. 570 BC



Figure 55- Painted Bust of Christ, Catacomb of Commodilla, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 56- Detail of Sarcophagus with Christ Entering Jerusalem, Rome, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 57- Painting of *Traditio Clavium*, Catacomb of Commodilla, Rome, 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 58- Mosaic of *Traditio Legis*, Naples, Baptistery, AD 362-405



Figure 59- Christ Healing the Blind Man, Sinope Gospels, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 60- Ivory Plaque of Christ as Ancient of Days, probably from Constantinople, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 61- Sarcophagus with *Agnus Dei*, Basilica of Sant' Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna, Italy 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 62- Mosaic of *Agnus Dei*, Presbytery of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, ca. AD 547



Figure 63- Marble Sarcophagus, from the Basilica of Sant' Ambrogio, Milan, Italy, ca. AD 395



Figure 64- Detail of Figure 63 (Christ Preaching)



Figure 65- Detail of Figure 63 (Charioteer)



Figure 66- Detail of the Ascent of Elijah, on sarcophagus, from the Mausoleum of Anicii under St. Peter's, Rome, AD 390-400



Figure 67- Detail of Figure 64



Figure 68- Detail of Figure 65



Figure 69- Vault Mosaic of Christ as Helios, Tomb of the Julii, Rome, Early 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 70- Mosaic of Apollo, El Djem, Tunisia 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD



Figure 71- Funerary Stele of Saturn-Baal, Tunis, Tunisia, Late 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 72- Relief Showing Jupiter Dolichenus, Aventine Hill, Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD



Figure 73- Sculpture of Asklepios-Helios (?), from Rome, Probably 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD



Figure 74- Apse Fresco from the Monastery of Apollo, Bawit, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 75- Watercolor of Apse Fresco from Chapel 17 of the Monastery of Apollo, Bawit, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 76- Apse Mosaic of the Transfiguration, St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 77- Gilded Silver *Imago Clipeata* of Augustus, possibly from Thrace, ca. AD 25



Figure 78- Fresco of Bust of Christ Carried by Two Angels, the Monastery of St. Apollo, Bawit, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 79- Fresco of Virgin and Child Flanked by Saints,  
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Figure 80- Icon Panel Painting of the Ancient of Days,  
St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 81- Icon Panel Painting of the 'Syro-Palestinian' Type, St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 82- Vault Painting of Christ Enthroned above a Lamb, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 83- Marble Portrait Head of Constantine,  
probably from Constantinople, ca. AD 325



Figure 84- 'Polychrome Plaques,' Rome, ca. AD 300





Figure 87- Painting of 'Anatomy Lesson,'  
Chapel 1, Catacomb of Via Latina, Rome, Mid-4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 88- Detail of Strigillated Sarcophagus,  
from Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura, Rome, ca. AD 370



Figure 89- Apse Mosaic of Christ *Pantokrator*, Cefalù, Sicily, 12<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 90- Constantius II Distributing Largesse,  
from the *Chronography of 354* (from Barberini MS, 17<sup>th</sup> Century)



Figure 91- Medallion of Constantine Enthroned with His Sons, from Rome, ca. AD 315



Figure 92- *Opus Sectile* Mosaic, from the 'Porta Marina,' Ostia, Italy, Mid-4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 93- Fresco Ceiling Panel of Jeweled Woman Looking into a Mirror, from the Imperial Palace, Trier, Germany, Early 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 94- Mosaic of Dionysos Discovering Ariadne, probably from Syria, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 95- Hematite Magical Amulet with Crucifixion, probably from Syria, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 96- Alexamenos Graffiti, Palatine Hill, Rome, ca. AD 200



Figure 97- Inscription with Cross-Anchor, Catacombs of Domitilla, Rome, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 98- Leaf with Christogram, Gospel of St. John, Italy, Late 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 99- Processional Cross, from Antioch, Early 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 100- 'Dogmatic' Sarcophagus, Rome, Early 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 101- Christ between Saints Felix and Adauctus, Cubiculum Leonis, Catacomb of Commodilla, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 102- Mosaic of Jacob and His Flock, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, ca. AD 440



Figure 103- Apse Mosaic of Christ Enthroned, Santa Pudenziana, Rome, ca. AD 400



Figure 104- Relief of Christ, from St. Polyuktos, Constantinople, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 105- Painting of Christ *Pantokrator*, Pontian Catacomb, Rome, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 106- Apse Mosaic of Christ Flanked by Saints, Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Rome, ca. AD 530



Figure 107- Remains of Charioteer Mosaic,  
Basilica of San Lorenzo Maggiore, Milan, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 108- Doors of Santa Sabina, Rome, ca. AD 432



Figure 109- Elijah's Ascent (Detail of Figure 108)



Figure 110- The 'Parousia' (Detail of Figure 108)

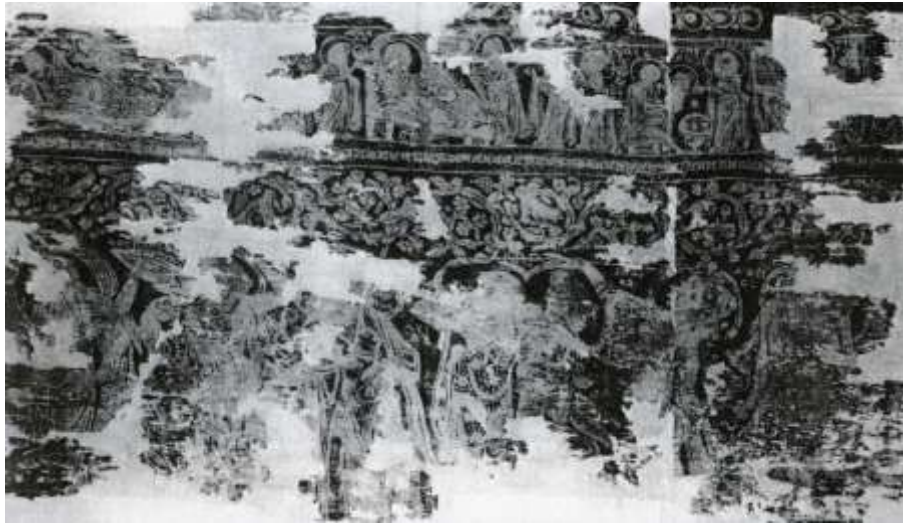


Figure 111- Textile with 'Biography of Dionysos',  
from Antinoë, Egypt, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 112- Mosaic of the Triumph of Dionysos, from Sousse, Tunisia, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 113-Marble sarcophagus with the Triumph of Dionysos and the Seasons, probably from Rome, ca. AD 260-270



Figure 114- Mosaic of Orpheus and Wild Animals, from Piazza Armerina, Sicily, Early 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 115- Fresco of Orpheus-Shepherd, Catacombs of Domitilla, Mid-3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 116- Silver Ewer with Biblical and Apocryphal Scenes, from Rome, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 117- Ivory Leaf of the Andrews Diptych, probably from Italy, 5<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 118- Painting of Christ Raising Lazarus, Catacomb of Callixtus, Rome, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD

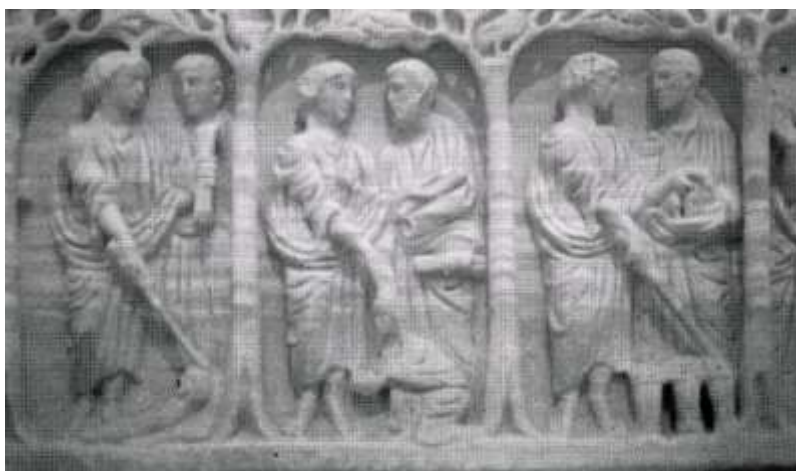


Figure 119- Sarcophagus with Scenes of Christ's Miracles, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 120- Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus, Rome, ca. AD 330-35



Figure 121- Sarcophagus with Biblical and Apocryphal Scenes, Rome, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 122- Sarcophagus with Man with Wand, Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD



Figure 123- Gold Glass of Christ Raising Lazarus, Rome, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD

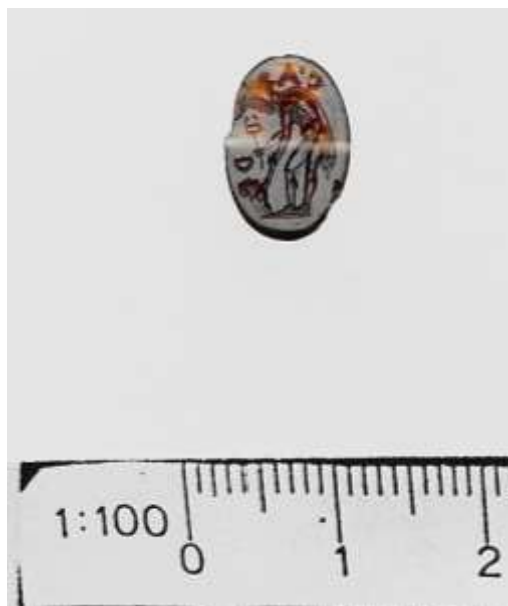


Figure 124- Agate Ring Stone with Hermes Raising the Dead, Italic, probably 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC



Figure 125- Lictor with *Fasces* before Agrippa from the Ara Pacis, Rome, 9 BC



Figure 126- Bronze Statue of a *Camillus*, probably from Rome, ca. AD 50



Figure 127- Brescia Casket, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 128- Christ Raising Lazarus (Detail of 127)



Figure 129- Side of a Sarcophagus with Christ Raising Lazarus, Ravenna, Italy, 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 130- Engraved Gem with Crucifixion, probably from Syria, Mid-4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 131- Plaster Cast of a Gem, probably from Syria, probably 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 132- Scene of the Women at the Tomb from the Maskell Ivories, from Lombardy, ca. AD 420



Figure 133- 'Lateran 171' Sarcophagus, Cemetery of Domitilla, Rome, Mid-4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 134- *Solidus* with Constantine Holding a *Labarum* with a Christogram, ca. AD 326-327



Figure 135- Fresco of St. Januarius, Catacomb of San Gennaro, Naples, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 136- Mosaic of Christ in a Roundel,  
Chapel of St. Andrew, Ravenna, Italy, Late 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 137- Apse Mosaic of Christ in Majesty,  
Hosios David, Thessalonike, ca. AD 425-450



Figure 138- Mosaic of Christ in an Aureole of Light between Peter and Paul, Catacombs of Domitilla, Rome, ca. AD 366-384



Figure 139- Panel Portrait Icon of Christ with Saints Sergius and Bacchus, St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 140- Detail of 'Lateran 174' Sarcophagus, Rome, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 141- Columnar Sarcophagus with Biblical and Apocryphal Scenes, from Dellys, Algeria, ca. AD 375



Figure 142- Apse Mosaic from San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, ca. AD 547



Figure 143- Encaustic Painting on Linen of Virgin and Child,  
Private Collection, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 144- Silver Ewer with Biblical Scenes, probably North Italian, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 145- Sarcophagus with Scenes of Christ's Birth and Adoration, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 146- Image of Woman and Boy, Coemeterium Maius, Rome, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 147- Limestone Statue of *Isis Lactans*,  
from Antinoë, Egypt, Late 4<sup>th</sup> or Early 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 148- Painting of the Adoration of the Magi, Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, Late 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD



Figure 149- Sarcophagus with Scenes of Christ's Birth and Adoration, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 150- Sarcophagus with Scenes from Christ's Life, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 151- Fresco of Christ's Baptism, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 152- Sarcophagus with a Bathing Scene, Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD

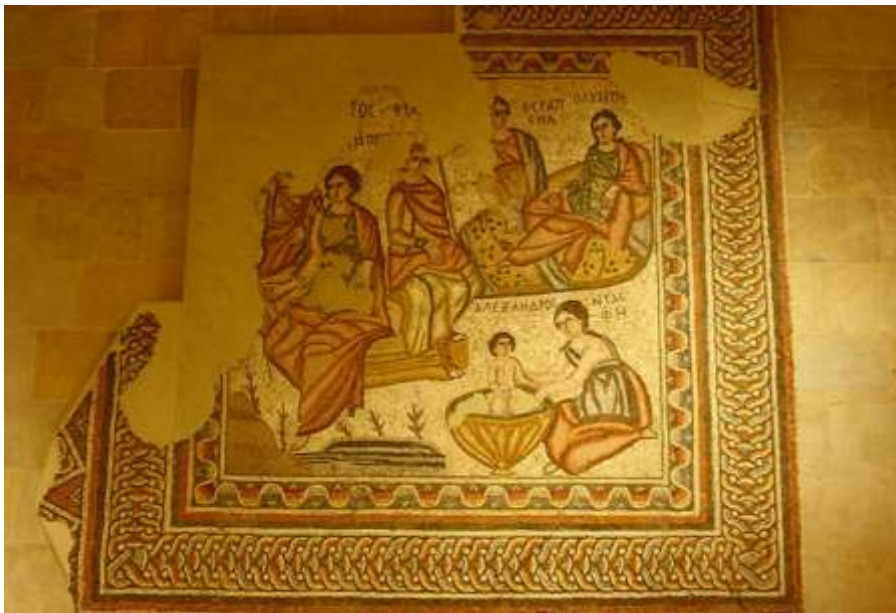


Figure 153- Mosaic of Alexander's Birth, from Baalbek, Syria, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 154- Floor Mosaic from Nea Paphos, Cyprus, First Half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 155- Fresco of Virgin and Child Flanked by Sts. Felix and Adautus, Catacomb of Commodilla, Rome, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 156- Sarcophagus Showing the Adoration of the Magi, San Vitale, Ravenna, 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 157- Fresco of the Adoration of the Magi, Catacomb of Saints Mark and Marcellian, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 158- Apse Mosaic from Poreč, Croatia, 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 159-Ivory Diptych for Consul Asturius, from Darmstadt, Germany, ca. 449 AD



Figure 160- San Nazaro Reliquary, probably North Italian, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 161- Mosaic of Justinian and Officials, San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, ca. AD 547



Figure 162- Mosaic Scenes of the Childhood of Moses, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, ca. AD 440



Figure 163- Parabiago Plate, Milan, Probably 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 164- The Projecta Casket, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 165- Detail of Figure 164 (Lid)



Figure 166- *Olympia*, Edouard Manet, Paris, 1863



Figure 167- *Venus of Urbino*, Titian, Urbino, 1538



Figure 168- Sarcophagus Showing the *Traditio Legis*, Sant'Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna, 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD

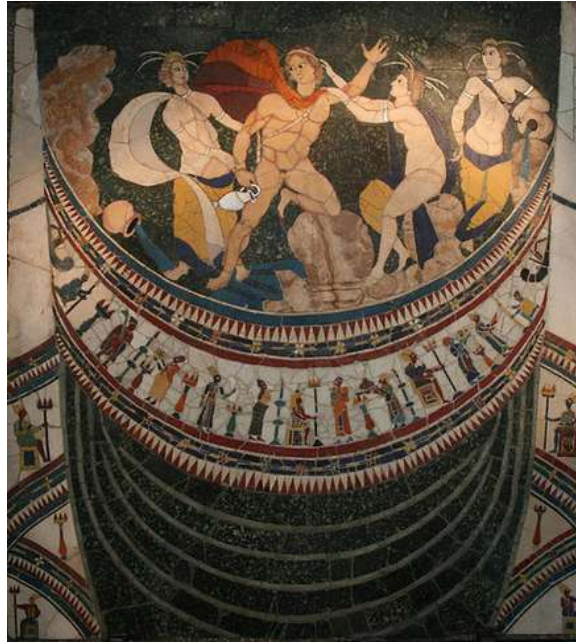


Figure 169- *Opus Sectile* Floor Mosaic, Basilica of Junius Bassus, Rome, 4<sup>th</sup>-Century AD



Figure 170- Symmachorum Leaf, Symmachi-Nicomachi Diptych, Rome, ca. AD 391



Figure 171- Nichamochorum Leaf, Symmachi-Nicomachi Diptych, Rome, ca. AD 391



Figure 172- Ambulatory Mosaic, Santa Costanza, Rome, ca. AD 354



Figure 173- Detail of Figure 172



Figure 174- Side of Constantina's Sarcophagus, Santa Costanza, Rome, ca. AD 354



Figure 175- Detail of Figure 7 (Central Intercolumnation, Upper register)



Figure 176- Column from the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, ca. AD 330



Figure 177- Top of Cuirass Showing Caelus from *Augustus Primaporta*, Rome, ca. 20 BC



Figure 178- Apotheosis of Emperor towards Caelus, Belvedere Altar, Rome, 12-2 BC



Figure 179- Reverse of Medallion of Constantius II between Roma and Constantinopolis,  
Mid-4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 180- Relief of Tetrarchs, Arch of Galerius, Thessalonike, Early 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 181- Relief of *Liberalitas*, Aurelian Relief from the Arch of Constantine, Rome, ca. AD 176



Figure 182- Relief of *Justitia*,  
Aurelian Relief from the Arch of Constantine, Rome, ca. AD 176



Figure 183- Relief of *Largitio*, Arch of Constantine, Rome, AD 312-315



Figure 184- Detail of Figure 182

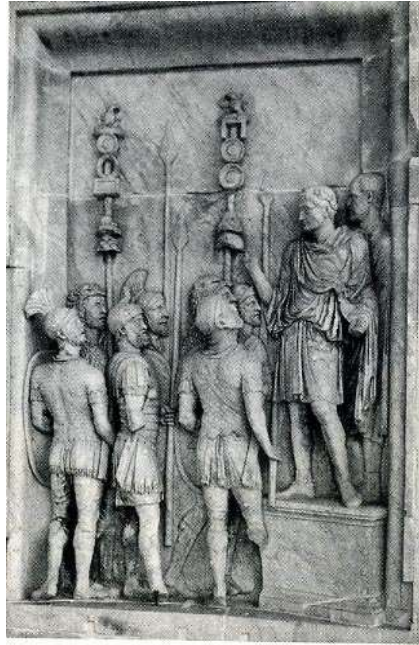


Figure 185- Relief of *Adlocutio*,  
Aurelian Relief from the Arch of Constantine, Rome, ca. AD 176



Figure 186- Relief of *Adlocutio*, Arch of Constantine, Rome, AD 312-315



Figure 187- Relief of a Sacrifice to Diana,  
Hadrianic Roundel on the Arch of Constantine, Rome, AD 130-38



Figure 188- Relief of a Sacrifice to Apollo,  
Hadrianic Roundel on the Arch of Constantine, Rome, AD 130-38



Figure 189- Detail of Figure 8



Figure 190- Solidus of Constantius II, ca. AD 352



Figure 191- Wall-Plaster, Lullingstone, Kent, England, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD

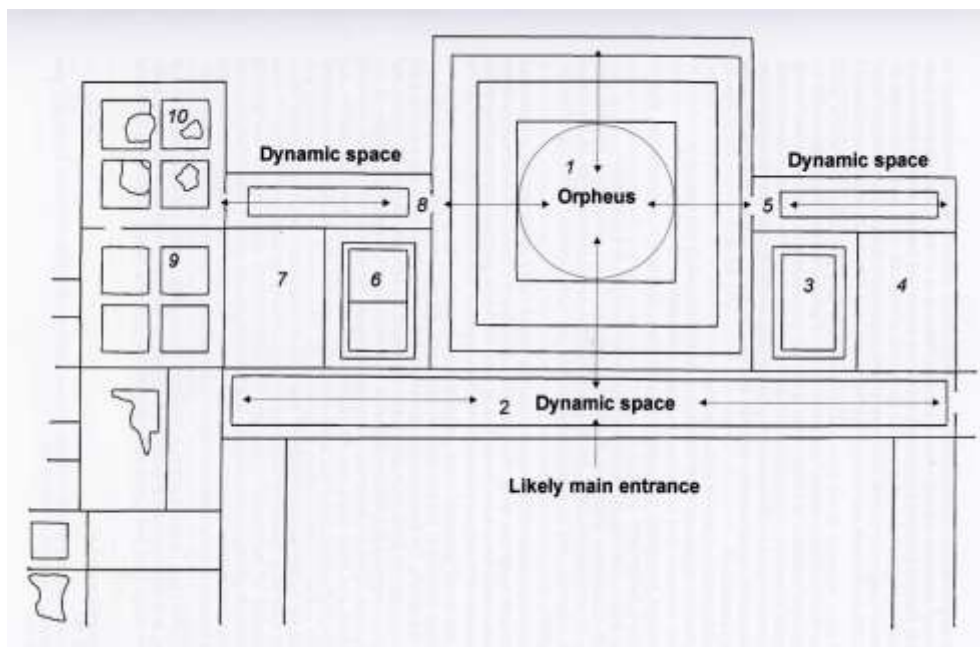


Figure 192- Sketch of Movement Pattern at Woodchester Villa, from Scott, 'The power of images in the late Roman house', 63



Figure 193- Mosaic Floor, Woodchester, Gloucestershire, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 194- Corbridge Lanx, Corbridge, Northumberland, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 195- The Stonham Aspal Ring,  
Stonham Aspal, Suffolk, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD

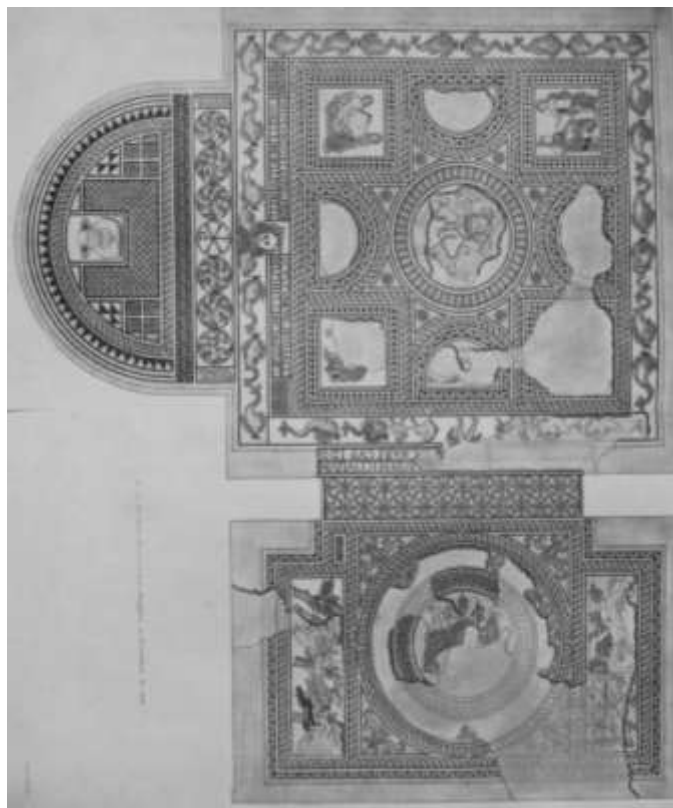


Figure 196- Mosaic Floor, Frampton, Dorset, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 197- Mosaic Floor, Lullingstone, Kent, 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD

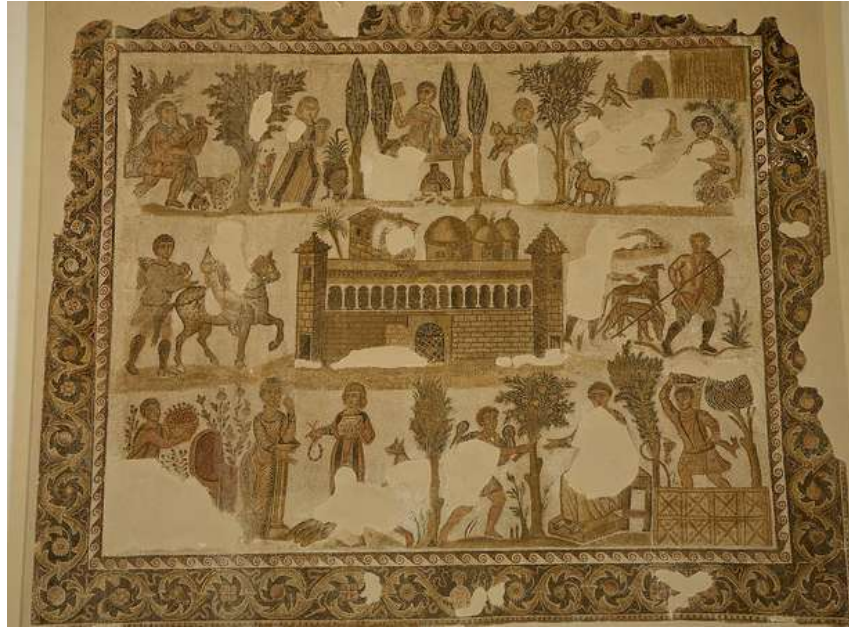


Figure 198- Mosaic Floor Showing Nobleman's Homecoming (Middle Register, Left), Villa of Dominus Julius, Carthage, Late 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 199- *Adventus*, Trajanic Relief from the Arch of Constantine, ca. AD 110



Figure 200- *Adventus*, Reverse of Antoninianus of Probus, ca. AD 276



Figure 201- *Cristo Negro*, Portobelo, Panama, probably 17<sup>th</sup> Century AD



Figure 202- *Crucifixion*, Emil Nolde, 1912



Figure 203- Detail of Christ from *The Last Judgment*, Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, 1541



Figure 204- Actor as Christ,  
from the Holy Land Experience, Orlando, Florida, Photograph from 2004

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