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Detail of an Early Christian sarcophagus, Musei Vaticani Inv. no. 31429
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THE RECRUITING POWER OF CHRISTIANITY

The rise of a religion in the material culture of fourth-century Rome and its echo in history

Edited by
Sible de Blaauw, Eric M. Moormann,
Daniëlle Slootjes

Edizioni Quasar

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Preface

This collection of essays addresses the question of the recruiting power of Christianity within the Roman Empire, seen through the lens of the material and visual culture of the city of Rome. Its making was inspired by the exhibition *Rome: The Dream of the Emperor Constantine* in the De Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam (3 October 2015 – 7 February 2016). The quality and significance of the exposed objects – largely loans from Vatican and Roman museums – offered an exceptional opportunity to grapple with the question why the Christian faith became so attractive to the population and the rulers of the Roman world in the fourth century. Also the wider perspective of the reception of this crucial period in later centuries was included in the exhibition.

In order to create an interplay between the presentation in the Nieuwe Kerk and a high-level scholarly reflection on the subject from different perspectives a colloquium was held in the hall above the former sacristy of the church on January 22, 2016. Six colleagues from various disciplines accepted our invitation to share their insights with an interested audience. This publication presents the results of the meeting, expanded with additional essays covering aspects of the exhibition's theme that could not be addressed in depth during the conference. Besides the speakers at the colloquium, Paul van Geest, Ingo Herklotz, Paolo Liverani, Marianne Sághy, Feyo Schuddeboom and Daniëlle Slootjes, we have invited other distinguished experts, Diederik Burgersdijk, John Curran, Maria Lidova, Arnold Nesselrath, and Alessandro Vella, to write contributions to this volume. Finally, both curators of the exhibition have added a chapter, while Daniëlle Slootjes has joined them in the role of co-editor.

The structure of this book is determined by three different perspectives regarding the central question. After an introductory essay, the chapters are arranged according to their relevance with regard to:

- Early Christianity in the perspective of the Greek-Roman civilization: ch. 2-5
- Early Christianity seen from the inside: ch. 6-8
- Early Christianity in the perspective of history: ch. 9-12

It is with great sorrow that we have to publish this volume after the death of our esteemed colleague Marianne Sághy, who passed away in Budapest in September 2018. We are proud to publish one of her last writings in this volume and remember her with respect and affection.

Thanks are due to the Stichting De Nieuwe Kerk and the Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies of Radboud University Nijmegen for their generous financial and practical support to organise the conference. We are also grateful to the peer reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions. The Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome has been so hospitable to make this publication possible.

Sible de Blaauw
Eric Moormann
Daniëlle Slootjes

4. Christian Concepts and Roman Grammar in Late Antique Art

Paolo Liverani

Abstract

This study is an attempt to reassess our analytical tools for understanding the figural Christian language, not considering its iconographical vocabulary but rather some apparently trivial elements, for identifying long-term phenomena whose articulations and ruptures acquire significance when seen with new eyes. Starting from a couple of mosaic portraits of the mid fourth century, the paper addresses the meaning of some features only rarely considered: the ground colour, the shape of the tondo, the two-dimensionality, and frontality of the portraits. This approach highlights some elements of continuity in the figural language between the Graeco-Roman and Christian world, but at the same time, it makes clear that besides the new images there was a new beholder. In other words, the main novelty is the 'invention' of the beholder: Christian art presupposed and established him in an explicit way, exhorting his response as an essential part of the artistic device.

Introduction

A long series of studies has examined the images of Early Christian art looking for its origin in the figural tradition of the Graeco-Roman visual culture. Many discussions focused on the way pagan iconography adopted new Christian meanings or the influence of official Imperial art. These studies have achieved significant results, but with some limitations: they reconstruct – so to speak – the vocabulary of figural Christian language beginning with the Graeco-Roman one but leaving the grammar in the background. It is as though we studied St. Augustine's Latin only on the base of Cicero's vocabulary: we would lose sight of the specific way in which the bishop of Hippo elaborated his discourse and articulated the new concepts of Christian philosophy and theology.

In an attempt to reassess our analytical tools for understanding the figural Christian language, I will try to examine some apparently trivial elements, which generally do not attract the attention of the beholder. A closer examination, however, reveals precisely how interesting these elements are, as they allow the identification of long-term phenomena whose articulations and ruptures acquire significance when seen with new eyes.

My starting point is a couple of the works of art on display in the beautiful exhibition that offered the opportunity of the Amsterdam colloquium: the mosaic portraits of *Simplicia Rustica* and *Iulius Iulianus* (figs. 1-2), of the mid fourth century (cat. DNK 65).[1] The two portraits were found in Rome in the Catacomb of Ciriaca during the seventeenth century. The restoration carried out shortly after their discovery has integrated all the frames, and even the ground of the male portrait, which has a modern violet colour instead of the original blue, luckily preserved in the *tondo* of his wife.

Although the portraits are among the works that attract the attention of the beholder in a powerful way, I will resist this temptation and will examine the meaning of some features that are seldom considered: the ground colour, the shape of the tondo, the two-dimensionality and frontality of the portraits.

1 Werner 1998, 35-42; Pogliani 2006; Ballardini 2015, 1636-1638, pl. xv-xvi; De Blaauw and Moormann 2015, 198-199.

Fig. 1. Mosaic portrait of Iulius Iulianus. Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Cristiano (cat. DNK 65).

Fig. 2. Mosaic portrait of Simplicia Rustica. Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Cristiano (cat. DNK 65).

Ground colour

Let us begin with the blue ground: at first glance, it may appear normal, an allusion to the colour of the sky. To be honest it is not so natural and immediate to define the sky as blue, rather than – for example – white, as shown in the experiment conducted by the linguist Guy Deutscher with his young daughter Alma.[2] In ancient Greece, the ground of the funerary stelae was always red until the mid-sixth century. Afterwards, the standard ground colour became blue for the next thousand years.[3] During the Hellenistic period backgrounds tinted in light colours also appeared, but blue remained the standard ground colour in Etruscan and Roman art for all those representations intended to bear particular solemnity and monumentality. In short, the blue ground had classic and official connotations, while the light ground of the Hellenistic tradition was more suited for mythical or historical narratives.[4] To limit the discussion to the portraits of Late Antiquity, we can recall some examples. John Chrysostom[5] describes in his homilies the technical process of the painters who painted imperial portraits on a blue ground. Among the archaeological records we can remember in Rome in the Catacomb of Domitilla the panel (*tabula*) with the portrait of a couple of deceased in the arcosolium 39,[6] or the *Orans* in the arcosolium of the "Little Apostles".[7] Even at Viminacium, the capital of the province Moesia (modern-day

2 Deutscher 2010, 71-72.

3 Walter-Karydi 1986; Walter-Karydi 2002; Walter-Karydi 2003.

4 Liverani 2010, 300-301; Liverani 2014c, 14-20.

5 Joh. Chrysost., *Hom. In apostolicum dictum, Nolo vos ignorare* 4 (Migne 1857, 51, 247): Φέρε τὸν λόγον ἐπὶ τὰς εἰκόνας ἀγάγωμεν, ἃς οἱ ζωγράφοι γράφουσι. Εἶδες πολλάκις εἰκόν βασλικὴν κυανῷ κατακεχρωσμένην χρώματι, εἶτα τὸν ζωγράφον λευκὰς περιάγοντα γραμμὰς, καὶ ποιοῦντα βασιλέα, και θρόνον βασιλικὸν, καὶ ἵππους παρεστῶτας, καὶ δορυφόρους, και πολεμίους δεδεμένους καὶ ὑποκειμένους. "Come, let us consider the images that painters delineate. You have often seen an imperial image covered with blue colour. Then the painter traces white lines and makes an emperor, an imperial throne, horses standing by, a bodyguard, and fettered enemies lying underneath" (translation: Mango 1972, 47).

6 Wilpert 1903, 543, pl. 127.3; Zimmermann 2007, 165, pl. 20e; Zimmermann and Tsamakda 2009, 621-622, fig. 8.

7 Nestori 1993, 126, no. 39; Wilpert 1903, pl. 154.1; Zimmermann 2002, 250; Zimmermann 2007, 163, pl. 19a.

Fig. 3. Funerary portrait, Tomb G 2624 from Viminacium (Stari Kostolac, Serbia), National Museum of Pozarevać, fourth century.

Fig. 4. Rome, Ss. Cosma e Damiano, apse mosaic.

Serbia), the fourth-century portrait of a lady stands against a blue background (fig. 3),[8] and so do the portraits in the mosaic medallions of the mid fourth century in the Roman Villa 'La Olmeda' in Pedrosa de la Vega, Northern Spain.[9]

Christian art adopted the blue ground from the Graeco-Roman tradition as the most classic and solemn colour, a metalinguistic sign of the reading mode for these images. Blue was particularly suitable for large mosaic cycles of the Early Christian basilicas. At this point, however, Christian art had to solve a problem: a background sky was required in the depiction of the Savior and saints. The problem then was: how to 'signify' the sky if viewers were used to reading the color blue just as solemn ground? Here we find two innovations.

The first is an iconographic one: the sky of the apse in the basilicas was filled with stars or clouds. The stars are nothing new: we can recall several models in previous centuries.[10] The real novelty lies in the clouds, whose representation virtually had no precedent. Furthermore, there were nuances of meaning between stars and clouds: the stars denoted the night sky and were usually associated with non-figurative images such as the Christogram or the cross. We can recall the dome of S. Giovanni in Fonte in Naples,[11] the vault of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna,[12] the Baptistery of Albenga[13] or the dome of Santa Maria della Croce in Casaranello (near Lecce, Apulia).[14] Clouds, on the other hand, signified the daytime sky, and were associated with images of Christ *Kosmokrator* or the *Traditio legis* and originated from the Old and New Testament, where they were consistently associated with the presence of God (fig. 4). The cloud – in other words – is the element that connotes a scene as heavenly.[15] It was, however, clearly a

8 Tomb G 2624 from Viminacium (Stari Kostolac, Serbia), National Museum of Pozarevać: Korać 1991, 118-121, figs. 11-15; Valeva 2001, 183; Dunbabin 2003, 453-454, fig. 16; Sapsić-Jusić 2005; Korać 2007.

9 Kiilerich 2001; Kiilerich 2015, 59-66.

10 Liverani 2014b, 251-252.

11 Brandt 2012, 86-132.

12 Rizzardi 1996.

13 Marcenaro 1993, 136-165; Brandt 2012, 272-317.

14 Falla Castelfranchi 2005.

15 Liverani 2014b.

Fig. 5. Tondo from Djemila (Algeria), Septimius Severus with Julia Domna, Caracalla and Geta. Tempera on wood, Staatliche Museum zu Berlin, inv. 31.329.

theological and eschatological sky, rather than a physical one. Indeed, blue was not essential and between the late fourth and fifth centuries, it was gradually replaced by the second innovation: the golden ground. We can even find 'bilingual' mosaic cycles in the fifth century: in Rome in the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls[16] the two side-panels of the triumphal arch depicts Saints Peter and Paul on a blue ground, whilst the entire apocalyptic scene above the arch stands against a bright gold ground. The sky changed colour but the clouds remained around Christ and the symbols of the evangelists. Bilingual is also the dome of the Baptistery of Neon in Ravenna,[17] which establishes a hierarchy between the blue ground of the peripheral band with the apostles, and the gold ground of the central medallion with the baptism of Christ. Stars and clouds moved then onto the gold ground and changed one of the most fundamental conventions governing the figural grammar of Greek and Roman civilization until that moment.

Shape of the tondo

Let us return to our portraits: although some doubts exist on their original form, it is clear that they were two tondos, as evidenced by the pattern of the mosaic tiles on the ground of the portrait of *Simplicia Rustica*. This is what Latin sources called *imago clipeata* and the Greek ones – especially Hellenistic – εἰκών ἐν ὅπλῳ / ἐν ἀσπιδίῳ (portrait in a shield).[18] The *imago clipeata* was one of the most honourable kind of portrait: it decorated the civic basilicas of Rome since the Republican age with the portraits of the most important personalities. Even intellectuals were portrayed in this format as shown, for example, in the series of philosophers from Aphrodisias.[19] The type had success in funerary art and was used in the sarcophagi – both pagan and Christian – for the portrait of the deceased.

Beside the *imagines clipeatae* in relief, however, painted ones also existed : some papyri[20] attest the term εἰκονίδιον, which should be interpreted as a variant of εἰκών ἐν ἀσπιδίῳ: an example is probably the famous Severan Tondo of the Museum of Berlin (fig. 5),[21] depicting the family of the emperor Septimius Severus. We recognize similar portraits in late antique ivory diptychs carved for the most illustrious individuals of the Roman Empire.[22]

16 Bordi 2006b. The mosaic was remade after the fire of 1823, but it is faithful to the ancient iconography as the original (440-450) survived the fire.

17 Deichmann 1974, 30-31, III, pl. 88-95; Brandt 2012, 191-241.

18 Blanck 1968; Nowicka 1993a, 13-15; Bresson 2012.

19 Smith 1991.

20 Reich 1903, pt. III 473; *BGU* II 362.

21 Łukaszewicz 1987; Heinen 1991; Nowicka 1993b; Nowicka 1994.

22 Delbrueck 1929, nn. 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 32, 34-35.

Fig. 6. Portrait of pope Sixtus III, watercolour drawing (ca. 1643) from the original fresco at St. Paul outside the walls. Vatican Library, cod. Barb. Lat. 4407.

Fig. 7. Naples, underground basilica of San Gennaro, early sixth-century portraits of Neapolitan bishops (after Galante 1889).

In Early Christian basilicas, the *imago clipeata* acquires a new meaning. It is no longer a portrait honouring individual personalities: now serial portraits appear: long chains of round medallions where the recognition of the single honouree matters less than the overall meaning of the series.[23]

Series of round portraits of apostles and saints are frequent in the intrados of the arches as it happens in Rome in the Basilica of Santa Sabina (432-440),[24] in Ravenna in the Archbishop's Chapel[25] (495) and S. Vitale (540-548), in S. Demetrios at Thessaloniki (late fifth century),[26] in Cyprus in the apse of the Panagia Kanakarià at Lythrankomi (ca. 526-530),[27] at Poreč in the Euphrasian Basilica[28] (ca. 540) or at Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai[29] (550/551 or 565/566). It is possible to find even series of members of the imperial family, as in Ravenna in the cycle of St. John the Evangelist (no longer extant) where Galla Placidia (430) had depicted the portraits of the two dynastic lines from which she was born.[30] The most representative examples, however, are the series of popes in the basilicas of St. Peter in the Vatican and St. Paul outside the Walls, where Pope Leo I had represented the entire series of the bishops of Rome. While the Vatican series[31] was destroyed during the building of the Renaissance basilica, part of the series in St. Paul survives – although damaged by a fire.[32] Luckily, we have also their seventeenth-century reproductions (fig. 6). These portraits are quite conventional and idealized, so that each single pope

23 Liverani 2019.

24 Krautheimer 1987-1988.

25 Moretti 2008.

26 Cormack 1969.

27 Megaw and Hawkins 1977, 38-47, 81-85, figs. 39-41, 72, 137-43.

28 Van den Hoek 2015.

29 Forsyth and Weitzmann 1965, 13, pl. CIII, CXVI-CXXI, CXXXVI-CXXXVII, CLII-CLXX; Nardi 2009-2010.

30 Ihm 1960, 169-171, fig. 2; Amici 2000.

31 Viscontini 2006.

32 Bordi 2006a.

can now be identified solely through the inscription bearing his name, by considering the order of the series, or even by their successive numbers. In the underground basilica of San Gennaro in Naples (fig. 7), there are also traces of a series of portraits from the early sixth century depicting the Neapolitan bishops[33] accompanied by inscriptions of their name and number in the episcopal series. The last document to list is the so-called Veil of Classe, of the late eight century, depicting the tondos of the first bishops of Verona.[34]

What mattered in series such as those mentioned was not just honouring the single individuals, but demonstrating the strength and continuity of a tradition that has its roots in the spiritual community of saints and apostles and was manifested on earth in the unbroken succession of ministry. Whereas in pagan Rome such honours were bestowed according to blood lineage or for services rendered to the *Res publica*, in early Christianity what mattered was a kind of spiritual nobility, obtained through the service of God and the Christian community.[35]

Bidimensionality

The third point to which our portraits draw attention is their two-dimensionality. It is well known that sculptural portraits gradually decreased in number during Late Antiquity until they disappeared altogether in the early seventh century.[36] There were several reasons for this disappearance; the principal one was of a social nature. In short, the honorary portrait lost much of its meaning and function. There was no longer a need to show the link between the honoree and his clients (the group that supported him) as a person's career and political fortunes were mainly linked to the favour of the emperor and court and far less to his social base. As a result, between the fourth and sixth centuries, statues and portraits were fewer in number and represented almost exclusively the emperor, his family and a small elite of the court.[37] In this new context, some types of honorary statues were dramatically emphasised – such as the statue set atop a column – thus maximizing what I would call the potentiality of autonomous focus. They were placed in a dominant position[38] to mark urban nodes as lynchpins to highlight visual alignments in the organization of the city space[39] as well as in connection with the progressing of processions, which in the civic domain – and later in the ecclesiastical one – structured urban life.[40]

Two-dimensional portraits painted on panels – on the other hand – became more and more frequent, although, owing to the perishable nature of wood, only a very small number of them survives. Their frequency is attested by the written sources and some indirect evidence. Some scholars have attempted to explain the scarcity of three-dimensional Christian sculpture on the ground that two-dimensional art was more abstract and thus more suited to express Chris-

33 Galante 1889; Fasola 1975, 133, figs. 87-89; Bisconti 1995b; Bisconti 1998, 253-282.

34 Cipolla 1972; Garbulowska 2005.

35 Bisconti 2004a, 55.

36 Smith 1985, 215-219; Kiilerich 1993; Hannestad 1999; Witschel 2007; Anderson 2008; Machado 2010; Gehn 2012; Liverani 2015b; Kiilerich 2015, 35-40; Anderson 2016; Liverani 2016b.

37 The Oxford on-line database *Last Statues of Antiquity* is fundamental: http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/. Exceptions to this trend are the charioteer statues at Constantinople: Cameron 1973.

38 Jordan-Ruwe 1995.

39 Liverani 2015b.

40 For civic processions Dey 2015; for Christian processions Baldovin 1987; Romano 2014.

tian spirituality. I do not think this is the right explanation. As we have seen, the preference for two-dimensionality is a feature common to all Late Antiquity and not specific to Christian art. It is true, however, that Christian art had specific needs. In the great basilicas, three-dimensional sculptures were rare and almost exclusively limited to the Constantinian age. In the Lateran Baptistery, sources mention a silver statue of the Saviour between a gold lamb, from which water poured out, and the silver statue of St. John the Baptist, completed by seven statues of deer, which also spouted water.[41] A couple of fountains in Constantinople were decorated with gilded bronze sculptures of the Good Shepherd and Daniel between the lions.[42] Amongst the few later examples, there are a few deer, much smaller than those in the Lateran, one dedicated by Sixtus III in the baptistery of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome, and three more dedicated by Hilarus in the Lateran Baptistery.[43] A statue of St. Lawrence was dedicated by Sixtus III in the saint's basilica in Rome.[44] The *fastigium* in the Lateran Basilica, which Sible de Blaauw examined in several crucial contributions, deserves special mention. I shall return to it below.

This small number of statues in precious metals conflicts with the large number of frescoes and mosaics that formed the most important decoration of the churches. The absence of sculptures, however, cannot be attributed to economic issues, since mosaics were not cheaper than statues. Rather, it must have been a deliberate choice owed to the needs of the liturgy. Indeed, the architecture of the Early Christian Basilicas was a powerful device for focusing attention on the place of liturgical celebration or the tomb of the martyr. A statue in the hall of worship would attract the attention of the faithful as an autonomous focus in competition with the liturgical action, and would therefore be unacceptable.

An indication of this phenomenon can be found in the history of the Lateran *Fastigium* of Constantine.[45] It appears to have been a kind of *pergula* at the end of the main nave and consisted of four bronze columns, nearly eight meters tall. The columns and one of the capitals were reused in 1599 in the altar of Holy Sacrament, at the end of the left transept. It is uncertain whether the crowning was a structure with a gable[46] or a simple, linear frame.[47] The top was decorated by a silver group of Christ among the Apostles on the side of the nave, and Christ among four angels on the opposite side.[48] It is not clear whether these were statues or bas-reliefs: in any case, after the removal of the silver by the Goths of Alaric in 410, the *Fastigium* was newly decorated by the emperor Valentinian III, but only in the architectural portion. Valentinian did not replace the figural decoration. Considering the status of the patron, I do not believe this choice was dictated

41 *Liber Pontificalis* 35.13.

42 Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.49; Cameron and Hall 1999, 298; Bauer and Witschel 2007, 14. The interpretation of the group of Paneas as Christ with the hemorrhaging woman (Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 7.18.2-3; Sozom., *Hist. eccl.* 5.21; Philostor., *Hist. eccl.* 7.3) is probably due to the misunderstanding of a reused statue; cf. Leclercq 1907, 248-251; Weber 1996; Wilson 2004, 41-42, 90-103; Stewart 2007, 32-33 (with further sources). A similar misunderstanding is also the later interpretation of a sculptural group in the hippodrome of Constantinople as Adam and Eve in *Parastaseis* 5 (ed. Preger 1901-1907, I, 21) = *Patria* 2.87 (ed. Preger 1901-1907, II, 196); cf. Mango 1963, 63; Dagron 1984, 135; Bassett 2004, 218.

43 Sixtus III: *Liber Pontificalis* 46.4; Hilarus: *Liber Pontificalis* 48.5.

44 *Liber Pontificalis* 46.5.

45 Nilgen 1977; De Blaauw 1994, 117-126; Liverani 1992-1993; Sannibale 1992-1993; Engemann 1993; De Blaauw 1996; De Blaauw 2001; Geertman 2004.

46 De Blaauw 1994, 117-126.

47 Geertman 2004.

48 *Liber Pontificalis* 34.9-10.

by economic difficulties, but rather because it was considered inappropriate to the ecclesiastical context.[49] We must reflect upon the origin of this unique monument: from a typological point of view, its closest precedents are the monumental columns, specifically widespread since the Tetrarchic age. Notable examples are the columns of the Roman Forum from the age of Diocletian,[50] and the *tetrapyla* and *tetrakiona* (four columns monuments) common in the eastern provinces.[51] The *Fastigium*, therefore, was doubly inappropriate: both for its three-dimensionality and its strong imperial connotation. The new decoration, necessitated by the sack of the Goths, allowed the Roman cathedral to acquire an appearance more suitable to the ecclesiastical code, without renouncing the prestige typical of imperial donations.[52]

Frontality

Let us now return for the last time to the portraits of *Simplicia Rustica* and *Iulius Iulianus*, to consider the fourth point: their frontality. It was normal for a portrait to appear in frontal position. However, looking at the sculpted portraits of the early centuries of the empire, we usually find a definite indication of torsion, which gives a sense of movement. In any case, the sculpture itself favours a multiplicity of points of view and a dynamic vision. The flat, two-dimensional portrait, on the other hand, forces the beholder into a single, uniquely possible point of view, so that, in Late Antiquity, frontality becomes more and more rigid and fixed. One gets the impression that the portrait is watching us, questioning us, looking for a sort of dialogue with the beholder: a device that is well known in modern advertising. In semiotic terms, this is an *embrayage* (engagement), an effect of co-presence of addresser and addressee, a simulacrum of dialogue.[53]

I shall have to simplify here an issue that should be discussed in a more detailed and nuanced way, but I hope to convey its essential core.[54] Frontality is a feature common to every genre of late antique art, be it funeral or sacred, private or public, civic or imperial. In Christian circles, however, a novelty becomes evident when we examine together the images and their inscriptions, especially those that accompany the great mosaic cycles in the basilicas.

Often images and inscriptions are studied by different specialists: art historians look at the images and epigraphists read inscriptions. But, in following this division, we loose the most interesting and innovative element of these works: the combination of both image and word in a single message, that we can define as 'iconotexts'. If we compare these inscriptions to those from imperial monuments, we notice a difference. As an example, let us compare the dedication of the Arch of Constantine with the inscriptions in the Constantinian Basilica of St. Peter. On the Arch of Constantine, the inscription[55] is 'impersonally presentational' and uses the third singular

49 *Liber Pontificalis* 46.4; cf. Liverani 2013a, 279.

50 Verduchi 1982-1984; Verduchi 1985; Giuliani and Verduchi 1987, 148-163 No. 24; 166-173 No. 25-31; 174-177 No. 32; 184-187; *LTUR* I 294-295, s. v. 'Colonne onorarie (Forum Romanum)', (P. Verduchi); *LTUR* I, 307, s. v. 'Columna Phocae' (P. Verduchi); *LTUR* IV, 214-217, s. v. 'Rostra Augusti' (P. Verduchi); *LTUR* IV, 217-218, s. v. 'Rostra Diocletiani' (P. Verduchi); Liverani 2007.

51 Jordan-Ruwe 1995; Thiel 2002; Thiel 2006; Liverani 2015b, 101-102.

52 Liverani 2013a, 277-279.

53 Greimas and Courtés 1979, s.v. embrayage, 119-121.

54 Liverani 2014c.

55 *CIL* 6.1139: *Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) Fl(avio) Constantino maximo / p(io) f(elici) Augusto S(enatus) P(opulus)q(ue) R(omanus) / quod instinctu divinitatis mentis / magnitudine cum exercitu suo / tam de tyranno quam de omni eius / factione*

person, an 'objective' form, so to say: "*The Senate dedicated the arch*."

From Old St. Peter's, on the other hand, we have two inscriptions: the one in the apse[56] addresses directly the beholder-reader, showing him the basilica and referring to his 'here' and 'now': "*This is what you see*". In the second inscription – once on the triumphal arch of the church[57] – it were God's people, who addresses the figure of the mosaic: "*Because under your leadership* the world has risen in triumph to the stars, / Victorious Constantine has founded this hall *for you*." In the early sixteenth century, Cardinal Giacobacci described the mosaic on the same triumphal arch depicting the emperor Constantine offering the church to the Saviour and the apostle Peter.[58] If we combine the description with the elements derived from the inscription and compare them with later mosaics of similar subject, we can identify the iconography as representing Christ *Kosmokrator* rising to the heavens (*in astra*), seated on the terrestrial globe (*mundus*) with Constantine, holding the model of the basilica, and Peter to his sides (fig. 8).[59]

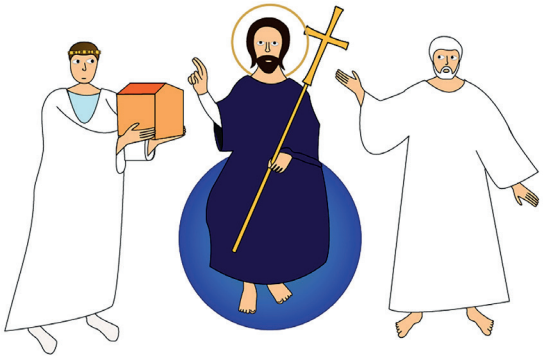

Fig. 8. Rome, St. Peter's, Constantinian mosaic on the triumphal arch, reconstruction proposal (drawing PG Liverani).

Summing up: in the inscription of the apse there is a dialogue with the people gathered in the church, while in the second mosaic the protagonists are the people themselves, who directly address the image of the Saviour. We also must consider that in ancient time reading aloud was normal and even more necessary when a text was in verses (in the above cases elegiac distiches), so as to fully appreciate the expressive potential of the resonance, metrics and prosody.[60]

Both inscriptions from the Vatican basilica were personal and – so to say – 'subjective'. In other words, they employed modes of address (personal and emotional or hortatory) previously known only in funerary inscriptions, in which an addresser or addressee engaged a beholder-reader. There is more: in funerary inscriptions, the deceased could address in a similar way a traveler or vice versa, but in the case of the Vatican inscriptions, the interlocutor is no longer a single person in a private context, but the entire congregation in a para-liturgical situation.

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uno tempore iustis / rempublicam ultus est armis / arcum triumphis insignem dicavit. "To the Emperor Caesar, Flavius Constantine the Great / pious and fortunate Augustus, the Senate and People of Rome, / because by divine inspiration and his own / greatness of spirit with his army / on both the tyrant and all his / faction at once in rightful / battle he avenged the State, / dedicated this arch as a mark of triumph."

56 *ICUR* 2.4094: *Iustitiae sedes, fidei domus, aula pudoris, / haec est quam cernis pietas quam possidet omnis, / quae patris et filii virtutibus inclyta gaudet / auctoremque suum genitoris laudibus aequat.* "Seat of justice, house of faith, hall of modesty, / this is what you see, which is possessed of every piety, / which famously rejoices in the virtues of the father and the son / and renders the one who made it equal in the praises to his parent."

57 *ICUR* 2.4092: *Quod duce te mundus surrexit in astra triumphans / hanc Constantinus Victor tibi condidit aulam.*

58 Giacobacci 1537, 783.

59 About the inscriptions of the Vatican Basilica Liverani 2008; Liverani 2014d; about the chronology Liverani 2015a, for the reconstruction Liverani 2016a, 1395-1396, fig. 1.

60 Knox 1968; Van der Horst 1994; Johnson 2000; Busch 2002.

In front of the Arch of Constantine, the reader of the inscription received a descending, top-down communication. "The emperor is worthy of honour" was an 'objective' and unquestionable statement, as "the sun is in the sky." On the contrary, the conative function dominates the inscription of the apse: a communication that was aimed at the addressee, persuading him to adopt a particular disposition or state of mind toward an image or the basilica itself. In the case of the mosaic with Constantine offering the basilica to Christ, the addressers were the people itself and the communication was intended as bottom-up in a liturgical style as a response to the image of Christ facing his faithful. Thus, in the latter case, the beholder-reader cannot remain passive, he is engaged, forced to take sides, he can no longer remain neutral.[61]

Conclusion

To conclude: I examined some features of Early Christian images that usually remain outside of mainstream scholarship. I intentionally avoided to dealing with the simplification and abstraction of forms, or new meanings attributed to traditional images. I chose to examine the continuity of the figural language between the Graeco-Roman and Christian world. At the same time, however, my aim was also to highlight the fact that besides the new images there was a new beholder.

In other words: the main novelty is the 'invention' of the beholder: Christian art presupposed and established him in an explicit way, exhorting his response as an essential part of the artistic device. We can well imagine the Egyptian pyramids without beholders, but we cannot imagine mosaics in an empty church: they would lose all their meaning.

61 On the entire issue Liverani 2014a.

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Appendix

Exhibition Rome: De Droom van Keizer Constantijn, De Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam, 3 October 2015 – 7 February 2016

Referred to in this volume with cat. DNK and catalogue number

Abbreviations lending institutions

APM: Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam
CC: Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht
DNB: De Nederlandsche Bank, Amsterdam
FSP: Fabbrica di San Pietro, Vatican City
KB: Koninklijke Bibliotheek,.Den Haag
MC: Musei Capitolini, Rome
MNR-PM: Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, Rome
MNR-TD: Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano, Rome
MVAC: Musei Vaticani, Antichità Cristiane = MV MPC Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican City
MVAD: Musei Vaticani, Arti Decorative = MV MC Museo Cristiano, Vatican City
MVMGP: Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano, Vatican City
MVP: Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca, Vatican City
RLT: Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier
RMO: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden
TM: Teylers Museum, Haarlem
UBL: Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden
UB UvA: Universiteitsbibliotheek University of Amsterdam

Section 1: Rome, de keizer en de goden / Rome, the Emperor and the Gods

1. Arch of Constantine (entrance of the exhibition, with features of the Arch in Rome)
2. Head of Colossus of Constantine, copy (original: MC, copy: RLT, inv. 1.8.10)
3. Isis lactans relief (APM, inv. 7766)
4. Front of a sarcophagus with Orpheus (MVAC, inv. 31501)
5. Mosaics with the story of Jonah (MVAC, inv. 31598)
6. Sculpture of Mithras killing the bull (MVMGP, inv. Sala V 343)
7. Mosaic with Dionysos (MNR-PM, inv. 115116)
8. Front of sarcophagus lid of Faustina (MNR-TD, inv. 67613)
9. Funerary stele of Licinia Amias (MNR-TD, inv. 67646)
10. Funerary inscription of Pomponius (MNR-TD, inv. 77643)
11. Relief of Jupiter Dolichenus and Sol (MNR-TD, inv. 78197)
12. Sarcophagus with Dionysian rites (MNR-TD, inv. 128577)
13. Sarcophagus with Dionysos and the Four Seasons (MNR-TD, inv. 407)
14. Altar of the Great Mother and Attis (MVMGP, inv. 9937)
15. Relief with fighting wild animals, venator and bestiarius (MNR-TD, inv. 62660)
16. Opus sectile with man in two-horse chariot, from the Basilica of Junius Bassus (MNR-PM, inv. 375831)
17. Portrait bust of unknown woman (MC, inv. 404)
18. Statuette of the Good Shepherd (MVAC, inv. 28590)
19. Statuette of Christ teaching (MNR-PM, inv. 61565)

Section 2: Het christendom onder de loep / Scrutinizing Christianity

20. Gold glass with Torah ark and Menorah (MVAD, inv. 60733)
21. Gold glass with the binding of Isaac (MVAD, inv. 60755)
22. Gold glass with married couple and Christ (MVAD, inv. 60708)
23. Gold glass with St. Agnes (MVAD, inv. 60757)
24. Fragment of sarcophagus lid with the story of Jonah (MVAC, inv. 31451)
25. Fragment of sarcophagus lid with the Adoration of the Magi (MVAC, inv. 31443)
26. Sarcophagus of Sabinus (MVAC, inv. 31509)
27. Front of Passion sarcophagus (MVAC, inv. 31429)
28. *Roma sotterranea* by Antonio Bosio, book 1632 (UB UvA, inv. OTM :OL63-497)
29. Fragment of sarcophagus with Anastasis (MVAC, inv. 31523)
30. Inscribed funerary slab of Prectectus (MVAC, inv. 32138)
31. Inscribed funerary slab of Gentianus (MVAC, inv. 32139)
32. Fresco from catacomb with the Good Shepherd (MVAD, inv. 61939)
33. Fresco from catacomb with orans (MVAC, inv. 58965)
34. Copy of a fresco in the catacombs of Calixtus with shepherds and orantes, by Carlo Ruspi (MVAC, inv. 52738)
35. Copy of a fresco in the catacombs of Calixtus with five orantes, by Carlo Ruspi (MVAC, inv. 57232)
36. Copy of a fresco in the catacomb of Ss. Marcellino e Pietro with Christ, Peter and Paul, by Carlo Ruspi (MVAC, inv. 57239)
37. Oil lamp with Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace (MVAD, inv. 61304)
38. Oil lamp with Christogram (MVAD, inv. 60918)
39. Front of sarcophagus with Christus and the Apostles (MVAC, inv. 31534)

Section 3: Constantijn en zijn droom / Constantine and his Dream

40. Portrait head of Licinius (RMO, inv. I 1961/3.1)
41. Two lance tips from Maxentius' regalia (MNR-PM, inv. 520267; MNR-PM, inv. 520262)
42. Portrait head of one of Constantine's sons (MC, inv. 843)
43. Medal of Constantine and sons (DNB, inv. RO-11094)
44. Two medals of Constantine with trophies (DNB, inv. RO-10937; DNB, inv. RO-10938)
45 Three engravings of Constantine's victory by Henri Tardieu (TM, inv. KG 18409; TM, inv. KG 18412; TM, inv. KG 18413)
46. Nummus of Helena (DNB, inv. RO-10385)
47. Medal of Constantine II and laurel wreath (DNB, inv. 1972-0709)
48. Nummus of Constantinus 'divine' (DNB, inv. RO-11286)
49. Nummus of Constantine and Sol (DNB, inv. 1951-0234)
50. Manuscript of Eusebius' Church History in the translation by Rufinus (UB UvA, hs. VI E 11)
51. Multiple nummus of Magnentius (DNB, inv. 1950-0215)
52. Coins with cross and Chi-Rho-symbol (DNB, inv. RO-11653; DNB, inv. RO-11553)
53. 'Gemma Constantiniana' from Rubens' collection (RMO, inv. GS-11096)
54. Two coins of Julian II (DNB, inv. 1975-1069; DNB, RO-12272)

Section 4: De keizer, de kerk, de stad en de wereld / The Emperor, the Church, the City and the World

55. Map of Rome with the Seven Churches, engraving by Lafréry and Du Pérac (KB, inv. 582 B 20)
56. Manuscript of the *Liber Pontificalis* (UBL, hs. VLQ 41)
57. Fragments of architrave with inscription referring to church atrium from Portus (MVAC, inv. 20962.3-1/2/3)
58. Fragments of inscription of pope Siricius from S. Pudenziana (MVAC, inv. 32177; MVAC, inv. 32178)
59. Fragments of Damasian inscription by Philocalus (MVAC, inv. 32199.2.1-2)
60. Gold glass with Damasus, Pastor, Peter and Paul (MVAD, inv. 60780)

61. Statuettes of Peter and Paul with Christogram (MVAD, inv. 60809)
62. Gold glass with Peter and Paul (MVAD, inv. 60768)
63. Gold *ex voto* with eyes and the cross (FSP; inv. 2)
64. Gold glass with Timotheus and Sixtus (MVAD, inv. 60772)
65. Mosaic panels of Simplicia and Flavius (MVAC, inv. 31584-31585)
66. Front of a child sarcophagus (MVAC, inv. 31569)
67. Manuscript of the Vulgata, Genesis – Numeri (UB UvA, hs. I A 1)
68. Manuscript of *The City of God* by Augustine (UBL, hs. BPL 12)

Section 5: De echo van vroegchristelijk Rome / The Echo of Early Christian Rome

69. Icon of Constantine and Helena presentating the True Cross (MVP, inv. 43649)
70. Veronese, The Vision of Helena (MVP, inv. 40352)
71. Jacopo di Cione, The Crucifixion of Peter (MVP, inv. 42104)
72. Frans Floris De Vriendt, Fight with Beast in the Colosseum (MVP, inv. 43606)
73. Valentin De Boulogne, Martyrdom of Processus and Martinianus (MVP, inv. 40381)
74. Trophime Bigot, Saint Sebastian and Saint Irene (MVP, inv. 42307)
75. Girolamo Muziano, Saint Jerome (MVP, inv. 40369)
76. Statue of Saint Catherine of Alexandria by the Master of Leende (CC, inv. ABM bh00274)
77. Catherine of Alexandria by unknown painter (CC, inv. ABM s00133)
78. Right hand from Colossus of Constantine (MC, inv. 789/S)

List of illustrations

Further information regarding objects marked cat. DNK is to be found in the Appendix List of exhibited objects. Unless otherwise stated, the credits for these illustrations go to the respective lenders mentioned in the Appendix List of exhibited objects, courtesy Stichting De Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam.