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FIG. 5. Christ as Orpheus. Fresco, 3rd century, Domitilla catacombs, Rome. Photo: *akg-images / André Held*

The introduction into iconography of details from apocryphal sources seems not to have begun until the late fourth century, and to have first developed in the East, in Palestine and Egypt in particular.

The Church's approach to visual arts in the third and fourth centuries paralleled its approach to written theology. Learned authors such as Justin Martyr (c. 100–65) and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215) put selected philosophies and myths to Christian use. These Apologists, who defended the Christian faith against pagan accusations, had an ambiguous relationship with Graeco-Roman mythology and philosophy. They both used these to explain the Christian faith and at the same time explained how the faith was superior to them. Clement of Alexandria, for example, wrote in his *Exhortation to the Heathen* (1.4.1) that whereas the song of Orpheus could charm only wild animals, Christ the Word could calm the unruly desires of human beings. Other writers who interpreted Orpheus's power of music in this way are Pseudo-Justin in his *Address to the Greeks*, Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromateis*, and Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444) in his *Against Julian*.

After the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity a greater distance was gained from its pagan past, and this emboldened Christian

authors to draw even closer parallels between pagan myth and Christ. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–339) was among the earliest to take this approach, in his *Preparation to the Gospel*.

At around the same time as these Apologists there emerge depictions of Christ as Orpheus calming the wildness of human sin, symbolised by the now tame animals gathered around the singer. Orpheus is usually shown seated, like a classical musician, and holding a plectrum. Six such frescoes exist in the Roman catacombs and four carved onto sarcophagi. One of the oldest is a fresco from the third century in St Callixtus cemetery.¹ Another is in the Domitilla catacombs, also from the third century (fig. 5).

A second example of pagan mythology put to Christian use is found on a sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome (fig. 6). This



FIG. 6. Jonah under the vine. Marble sarcophagus (detail), c. 275, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome. Photo: *Steven Zucker, Ph.D.*



FIG. 7. Pagan sarcophagus showing the myth of Endymion. Marble, mid-2nd century, Via Ardeatina, outskirts of Rome. Metropolitan Museum, New York. Photo: *Metropolitan Museum, New York*



FIG. 139. Different shapes within the aureole: *a.* 'Arrowhead'. Tempera, c. 1500, Byzantine. *b.* Concave square over diamond. Icon by author. *c.* Star over diamond. Mosaic, c. 1312, church of the Holy Apostles, Thessaloniki. Photos: *a.* and *c.* Temple Gallery, London, *b.* Aidan Hart.

judgment, but not His very essence [*ousia*]
 . . . His energies come down to us, but His
 essence remains beyond our reach.

Theological terminology can also suffer from loss in translation; we may suffer a poverty of associations with the original Greek terms. The term *energeia* is a case in point. It has a rich philosophical pedigree before its patristic use, primarily with Aristotle and then Plotinus. Its common English translation as 'energies' fails to catch its nuances, sounding so impersonal to modern minds. For this reason some translators prefer the terms 'operations' or 'activities', which better suggest the acts of a personal God. But these words too have their deficiencies.⁷

Some icons have many more than five rays. The illustrated fresco from Ubisi monastery in Georgia has nine major rays and a multitude of smaller rays emerging from each of the three inner circles (fig. 138). This reflects God's generosity and abundance towards all His creation, without discrimination. He is the sower casting His seed liberally, the sun pouring forth its rays upon all because such is its nature.

Each ray is often made of three distinct rays. These represent the Holy Trinity, for although one Person of the Trinity is the most evident

actor in a given sacred event, all three Persons act in concord. As one hymn puts it: 'Let us gaze with our minds at the spiritual Godhead of the Father and the Spirit, shining forth in the Only-Begotten Son' (Canticle Nine, Matins).

The trinitarian character of the Lord's transfiguration becomes clearer when related to His baptism. In both instances the Father's voice is heard; in both the Spirit is manifest in a visible form—the first time as a dove, the second as cloud and light. And finally, in both events the Son is the subject of the Father's voice and of the Spirit's descent. Through Him are the Father and Spirit manifest.

The shapes within the aureole

Many, though not all, Transfiguration images have angular shapes within the aureole. Each shape indicates a particular reality. See fig. 139 for examples of three variations.

One possible meaning of the square-like rhomboid superimposed on a diamond (shown in fig. 139b) has already been discussed—namely the union of the human and divine natures in Christ (the square within the circle), and the opening of created time into the eighth day that symbolises eternity (the eight-pointed star created by the square and diamond combined).

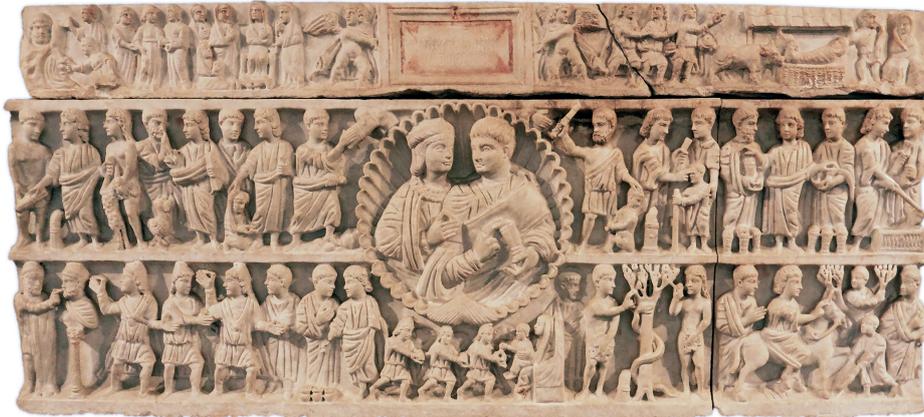


FIG. 145. 'Adelphia sarcophagus', including Palm Sunday (bottom right). Marble, 340–5. Museo Archeologico, Syracuse, Sicily. Photo: Michael Kogan



FIG. 146. Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. Marble, 359. Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome. Photo: Steven Zucker, Ph.D.

Examples of Roman victory and *adventus* carvings can be found in the Marcus Aurelius group (175–96) incorporated in the fourth century into the Arch of Constantine, Rome (fig. 148).

The Palm Sunday carvings both follow and depart from the Aurelius victory carving. Christ enters the city riding, but on a donkey rather

than on a horse (though admittedly the donkeys on these early Palm Sunday carvings look like miniature stallions). In contrast to the emperor, Christ is vulnerable, dressed in ordinary garb rather than in armour. A peaceful disciple rather than a warrior general stands behind Him. Children willingly pay homage to Christ out of love for Him by laying a rug before him, while

THE ICON

COMPOSITION

As seen in the history section above, the contents of the first Anastasis icons were: Christ, sometimes with a mandorla, often holding a scroll; Adam, his wrist grasped by Christ as he is raised up; Eve, with her covered hands raised in supplication to Christ; Adam's and Eve's tombs; Hades or Satan trampled underfoot by Christ; the broken gates of Hades; and David and Solomon looking on and awaiting resurrection along with Adam and Eve (fig. 211).

These elements remain more or less the minimum for subsequent Anastasis icons,



FIG. 212. The Anastasis. Tempera, 14th century(?), St Catherine's, Sinai. Photo by permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt, and courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai

though Satan is sometimes omitted. Elements soon added include rocky mountains in the background. Christ usually has either a cross or scroll in His left hand. The most noticeable additions, however, are extra figures, most commonly St John the Forerunner, then Abel (son of Adam) and Isaiah. As the centuries progress, the trend is to add further figures still. Though usually without inscriptions, these can often be identified from hymnology and patristic references as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Joseph or Jonah. Although quite rare, some icons add non-biblical people, such as the illustrated fourteenth-century icon from St Catherine's, Sinai (fig. 212), which includes a monk awaiting resurrection. The mosaic in Torcello adds a number of monks. Then there are unidentified people, often only the tops of



FIG. 213. The dominant movements of the typical Anastasis icon: Christ's descent; people's ascent; the opening of Hades' jaws.