THE ICONOLOGY OF THE CAPPELLA GRECA
IN THE CEMETERY OF PRISCILLA

by
Mary Stuart Quinby Hunt

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Mary Stuart Quinn-Jennett

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

DARRELL D. DAVISSON
Assistant Professor of Art

Date
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ABSTRACT

The iconography of the Cappella Greca, a Paleo-Christian chamber in the Cemetery of Priscilla (Rome), is examined. First, the physical appearance, dating, possible function and non-figurative decoration of the chapel are discussed. The figurative frescoes, representing stories from the Old and New Testaments (Noah in the Ark, Daniel in the Lions' Den, and The Adoration of the Magi, for example) and several, originally pagan, but adopted into the Christian repertoire (The Phoenix in Flames and The Seasons), are then analyzed, stylistically and iconographically.

The second part of the thesis discusses the interrelationships among the frescoes and the meaning of these juxtapositions. An eschatological symbolism is seen in the arrangement of the frescoes. The symbols in the first room, the naos, describe the earthly preparation for death and immortality. Those in the second room, the sanctuary, emphasize the importance and unique nature of Christian salvation, assuring the believer of eternal life.
INTRODUCTION

The Cappella Greca is a small chamber in the cemetery of Priscilla in Rome, which is elaborately decorated with frescoes representing scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The organization and iconography of the chapel have long been a matter of dispute and have not been satisfactorily explained. Wilpert first postulated an iconographical scheme based on that in the Chapel of the Sacraments in the Cemetery of Callisto (Rome) which shows the series of sacraments a Christian must pass through to achieve salvation. This theory has been dismissed by most authorities in respect to the Cappella Greca as forced and does not adequately explain the scenes represented in the chapel (see below p. 81). Other descriptions of the chapel iconography make no attempt to explain the location of the scenes on the walls.


The purpose of this thesis is to explain the iconographical scheme of the Cappella Greca. In order to achieve this, it is necessary first to describe the chapel fully. The section on the pre-iconographic description and iconography of the frescoes discusses the chapel's architecture dating, possible function, and decoration, non figurative (dado, stucco, inscriptions) and figurative (the appearance of the frescoes and their iconography based on literature of the period, visual prototypes and subtypes). The section on the interrelationships among the frescoes first analyzes early explanations, their strengths and weaknesses, and then proposed an iconographical scheme for the chapel.

The chapel is divided iconographically into two parts: the nave, which represents the earthly life and preparation of the Christian, and the sanctuary, which is a visual sermon on Christian sacrifice and salvation, the way to eternal life. The two rooms are linked by the juxtaposition of the frescoes over the archways. To the viewer moving into the chapel, the two arch frescoes represent the Incarnation-Redemption cycle. As he leaves the chapel the viewer is confronted by frescoes which allude to Resurrection and life eternal. The cycle of frescoes would thus provide a spiritual guide to those entering the chapel.
PRE-ICONOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE CAPPella GRECA AND ICONOGRAPHY OF THE SEPARATE FIGURATIVE FRESCOES

The Cappella Greca in the cemetery of Priscilla is unique in its plan, decoration, and most importantly, its iconography. Located on the Via Salaria in Rome, the cemetery lies north of the city far from the large catacombs on the Via Appia. The cemetery of Priscilla is not technically a catacomb. The word "catacomb" derives from "kata kombas" meaning "by the hollows" and refers to those cemeteries on the Via Appia near San Sebastiano. The chapel's location within the cemetery is shown in Fig. 1. Figure 2 shows the "area of the Cappella Greca."

After walking through seemingly endless and disorganized passageways, one enters a large rectangular area forming the chapel atrium (Fig. 2). Off this atrium branch several burial chambers, the Cappella Greca, and a well (piscine in Fig. 2). From the size of the complex, it is no wonder that Wilpert thought he was describing a Christian meeting place. Wilpert headed the excavations of the upper sanctuary in 1893 (p. 2) and described his discoveries in Fractio Panis. De Rossi excavated the chamber in 1885. It has long been known and frequented as is seen by the graffiti (C. Aponi - 1777, d'Agincourt - 1783, 1786, and De Rossi - 1851).

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5 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 31. Wilpert headed the excavations of the upper sanctuary in 1893 (p. 2) and described his discoveries in Fractio Panis. De Rossi excavated the chamber in 1885. It has long been known and frequented as is seen by the graffiti (C. Aponi - 1777, d'Agincourt - 1783, 1786, and De Rossi - 1851).
Fig. 1. Plan of the Cemetery of Priscilla, Rome.

From Cabrol-LeClerq, 14, Fig. 10533.
Fig. 2. Plan of the Area of the Capella Greca.

From Cabrol-LeClerq, 2, Fig. 2060.
"area of the Cappella Greca." It should be noted that even the passage-ways of this area of the cemetery of Priscilla are considerably wider than those of Callisto and Domitilla. Only the fourth century catacomb on the Via Latina has an equally orderly and spacious arrangement of chambers. There is some question that the atrium was built after the Peace of the Church, but Wilpert maintains that the entire complex dates from the same time.6

The Cappella Greca is of roughly cruciform plan (Fig. 2). The main area is 6.98m long and 2.24m wide and is divided into two sections by an arch (Fig. 3): the first section entered is referred to as the naos, the second as the sanctuary.7 Distinctions between the two rooms are also made by the vaulting. The naos is barrel vaulted; the sanctuary is groined. Three niches extend off the sanctuary: one (I in Fig. 2) is barrel vaulted; the other two are absidioles (semidomed-II and III in Fig 2). A bench along the left side,8 0.68m high,9 extends the length of the chapel and has a leg extending across the base of the chapel at an oblique angle (Fig. 3). There are eleven graves in the

6 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 31.

7 No functional importance should be attached to these names. For simplicity they are used to describe the equivalent area in standard church architecture. There is no evidence to show that any such nomenclature was intended here. The chapel is, however, distinctly divided by its architecture and its decoration.

8 Directions in the chapel will always refer to the direction when the viewer is facing the altar area. When discussing the frescoes, left will always mean viewer's left, unless otherwise specified.

9 All measurements are from Cabrol-LeClerq, 2, 2059.
Fig. 3. View into the Cappella Greca.

From G. P. Kirsch, The Cemetery of Priscilla, Rome, 1966, Fig. 8.
chapel: one in niche I, two in each of the other niches, two along the right wall (2 and 3a in Fig. 2) and four in the bench (γ). Wilpert associates the grave in niche II with a martyr. The grave was small, only large enough for a child or a cremation. Because the grave was empty, and in the position of an altar, he prefers the idea that the grave was one of a martyr. There is also a reference to the martyrs in an inscription (see p. 17) "Cun Martyribus."

The Cappella Greca is a Christian chamber. It was located near (and today is connected with) the burial area of the Aciliii Glabriones, an old patrician family who are recorded as Christian martyrs as early as the first century A.D., and whose hypogeum was near their country house. The chapel was extensively decorated with figurative frescoes whose subject matter represents well-known Judeo-Christian stories. Only three have even rough counterparts in Egyptian, Roman or Greek iconography (the Adoration of the Magi, the Flood, and the Fractio Panis).

10 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 17.
11 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 17.
12 Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 477.
13 Kirsch, 7.
14 Kirsch, 7.
Dating

The most commonly accepted date for this chapel is not later than ca. 220 A.D.,\textsuperscript{15} although Wirth has suggested the fourth century.\textsuperscript{16} While it is not the purpose of this paper to argue the date, several of the determining factors may be mentioned. An inscription referring to the consuls from the year 269\textsuperscript{17} is a date \textit{ante quem}, that is before which, the chapel was constructed. Stylistically, the chapel must be placed as early as the first-half of the third century since its style is impressionistic and painterly the figures show modeling, without the outling and isocephaly of the later third and early fourth centuries. However, the figures are more squat than those in paintings of the late first century. L'Orange has identified such a trend to the Late Antique in Roman imperial busts, the change in style beginning with Commodus.\textsuperscript{18} The third century is a period of transition, since the \textit{Cappella Greca} frescoes retain many Classical characteristics even though the trend to the Late Antique is apparent, and therefore is dated at the beginning of the third century.

\textsuperscript{15}Du Bourguet, \textit{Art}, 51 (First half of the third century).
\textsuperscript{17}Fritz Wirth, \textit{Romische Wandermalerei; von untergang Pompejis bis zum ende des dritten Jahrhunderts}, Darmstadt, 1968, 214.
\textsuperscript{18}Marucchi, \textit{Le Catacombe}, 474.
While the architectural design of the Cappella Greca is extremely rare for Christian cemeteries (no similar chapel has been found in pre-Constantinian times), it is not without prototypes. Etruscan tombs at Cerveteri show similar architectural plans, consisting of a large chamber with benches in it for sarcophagi, and often with burial niches off the main chamber. Although the benches in the Etruscan tomb were not actually used for banquets, the sarcophagi often show the deceased as if at a banquet. There is no evidence that the bench in the Cappella Greca was used for sarcophagi. This bench is lower and narrower than those in Etruscan tombs and contains graves itself.

There is some evidence to indicate that the Cappella Greca was used as a meeting place, perhaps as a funerary chapel.

A third century bishop is recorded as having led processions to the catacombs to honor the martyrs. The earliest recorded celebration in the cemetery is in the Acts of St. Polycarp (ca. 155). Underground sanctuaries were well-known to the Roman non-Christian. "Pagan" underground sanctuaries were common: both the Mithreaum of S. Clemente and the Aventine are underground (Fig. 4). They consist of a large rectangular chamber with benches down either side and an altar at the far

19 Andre Grabar, Beginnings, 81.


22 Wilpert, Fructio Panis, 41.
Fig. 4. The Mithraeum of S. Prisca sull'Aventino, Rome.
end. An extensively decorated pagan basilica was found near the Porta Maggiore, which is on a much grander scale than the Cappella Greca. The existence, therefore, of subterranean chapels in the catacombs is not precluded either by known Christian practice or by Roman tradition.

The chapel may have been used to hold refrigeria for the dead. The Christians often celebrated meals in memory of the dead (see below under Fractio Panis). Roman "pagan" funeral rites also included a silicernium in honor of the dead, often held in rooms attached to the tomb. Besides containing graves itself, the Cappella Greca is also located near burial chambers. It has a bench suitable for sitting and is close to a well. The fresco over the main arch portrays the Eucharistic celebration (see below under Fractio Panis). While many of the burial chambers in the "area of the Cappella Greca" were extensively decorated, none of them contemporary with it used a cruciform plan or had a bench, so the chamber is unique in form. Graffiti from the catacombs proclaim that refrigeria were celebrated there; therefore it is reasonable to postulate that the chapel was used for the refrigerium.

Since martyrs are mentioned in connection with the Cappella Greca and

\[23\] There is some question as to traditional meeting places for Mithraic rites. Vezin (Gilberte Vezin, L'Adoration et Le Cycle des Mages dans L'Art Chrétiennne Primitif, Paris, 1950, 8) claims meetings were on top of mountains. Cumont (Franz Cumont, Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism, New York, 1956, 151) maintains that they were in caves. In either case, in Rome meetings were underground.


\[25\] Toynbee, 240.
commemorative services were held in honor of the martyrs, the Cappella Greca may have been used as a martyrrium as well as a funerary chapel.

Other interpretations have been offered. Marucchi suggests that it was a chapel for gravediggers. Most early Christian daily or weekly meetings took place in the home, as is seen in Acts 2:46. Styger suggests that the chapel was simply a burial chamber and most authors neglect the question of its function.

The Cappella Greca is the only known chapel before the Peace of the Church to use a cruciform plan, either by design or by accident. This ground plan was not used until much later, although the bema received emphases in the basilican plan. Dix maintains that it was the relationship of the atrium to the alae in a Roman house, which results in a form of cross which was the prototype for the cruciform plan. Perhaps without realizing the implications of his plan, the original architect created one of the earliest prototypes for the monumental basilican church.

---


28 Acts 2:46. "With one mind they kept up their daily meetings at the temple, and breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy, as they praised God . . . ."

29 Styger, 139.

30 Dix, 26.
Non-Figurative Decoration

If the chapel's architecture is rare, its decorations are all the more so not only for their extent, but for their aesthetic quality. In the nave there is a frescoed dado of imitation marble up to shoulder height; on the right wall above the dado is a cornice (Fig. 3). The soffits of the entry arch, main arch, and arch of niche I have a fine stucco rinceau (Fig. 5) similar to that found in many pagan buildings in Rome from the Classical age, for example, the Ara Pacis (Fig. 6).

Inscriptions

There are at least six inscriptions recorded. The two Greek inscriptions which give the chapel its name, found in niche III, are:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{OBPIμOC πΑΛΔΔΑΔΙω} \\
\text{ΓΛΥΚΥΤΑΤω ΑΝΕΨΙω} \\
\text{CYΝΧΟΛΑΣΤΗ μΗΨμΗC} \\
\text{ΧΑΡΙΝ}
\end{align*}
\]

and

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{OBPIμOC ΝεΣΤΟΠΙΑΝH} \\
\text{μΑΚΑΡΙΑ ΓΛΥΚΥΤΑΤΗ} \\
\text{CYΨΒΙω μΗΨμΗC ΚΑΡΙΝ}\end{align*}
\]

\[31\] There is no evidence given on the technique used in the dado. Since it is quite well preserved, it may have been made by ironing hot wax over the wet plaster (Leonetto Tintori and Millard M. Meiss, "Additional Observations on Italian Mural Technique," ΑΒ, 46, 377, 1964).

\[32\] Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474.
Fig. 5. Stucco Rinceau from the Cappella Greca.


Fig. 6. Stucco Rinceau from the Ara Pacis Augustae.

They read:

From Obrimus, in memory of
Nestoriane, most beloved and sweet wife.

and

From Obrimus, in memory of
Palladio, fellow disciple and nephew.

They were found under a layer of whitewash, crudely painted on dry plaster. Cabrol-LeClerq and Wilpert believe that they were covered up when carved marble plaques were put in (since lost) or that they were a mistake in the first place.

There are also two consular inscriptions. The first reads:

. . . MER . . .
. . . ATVS. I . . .
APRILES . . .

MAMERTino et Nevitta conss.

Gratiano aug. N eT. PROBO conss

RIS DEPOSTUS

---

This translation is the author's from the text (Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474). The translation into French read:
1) Obrimus à la mémoire de sa bienheureuse et très tendre épouse Nestoriane.
2) Obrimus à la mémoire de très tendre cousin et condisciple Palladios.

(Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 18).

Cabrol-LeClerq, 14, 1819.

Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474. For both consular inscriptions.
It was found under and to the right of Susanna A (see below p. 18). The consuls mentioned were elected for the years 362 and 371. The second inscription, found in the same location reads:

\[ \text{I...} \]
\[ \text{//ET DEpositu} \]
\[ \text{//S•EST•PRIDIE•Nonas} \]
\[ \text{//MQ•FILIAE•ET///} \]

Claudio et PatERNO•Conss

These consuls were elected from the year 269. The inscription gives a date ante quem for the chapel. The last two inscriptions are graffiti:

\[ \text{Navigi vivas in } \]  
\[ \text{// vixit ANNIS•XVIII} \]
\[ \text{//NOTARIO} \]
\[ \text{//cuN MAPTYVRI} \]

This last inscription refers to the desire of the dead to be buried near the martyrs.

---

38 Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474.

39 Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474.

40 Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474.

41 This inscription is probably post-Constantinian, since the labarum did not become popular as a Christian symbol until then. (George Pitt-Rivers, The Riddle of the Labarum and the Origin of Christian Symbols, London, 1966, 30.)

42 Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474.
Figurative Decoration

Twelve episodes representing biblical stories, two ornamental motifs, and the original ceiling frescoes are still extant in the chapel (see Fig. 7 for the location of each). Large areas of the ceilings were destroyed so the motifs from the central tondos are unknown (lost). All the other wall frescoes in the chapel are in fair to good condition. The episodes have been identified as Moses at the Rock of Horeb (or Moses; Fig. 8), the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace with Nebuchadnezzar (the Three Hebrews; Fig. 9), the Story of Susanna in three episodes: the Confrontation in the Garden (the Garden Scene or scene A, Susanna A; Fig. 10), the Accusation of the Elders, (the Accusation, scene B or Susanna B; Fig. 11), and a man and a woman orant (Daniel and Susanna orant or scene C or Susanna C; Fig. 11), and the Healing of the Paralytic (Paralytic; Fig. 10). Over the main arches are the Adoration of the Magi (the Adoration or Epiphany; Fig. 12) and the Fractio Panis (Fig. 13). In the sanctuary are the Sacrifice of Abraham (Abraham; Fig. 14), Daniel in the Lions' Den (Daniel; Fig. 15), Noah in the Ark with a dove (Noah; Fig. 16), and the Raising of Lazarus (Lazarus; Fig. 17).

Over the entry door, on the face of the arch is the representation of Moses; beneath him directly over the door is a decorative head (Fig. 5). To the left of the door is Nebuchadnezzar pointing to the

43The phrase in parentheses following the title is a shortened form of the title and will be used in references to the motif involved.
Fig. 7. Schematic Diagram of the Cappella Greca.

This figure shows the location of the frescoes.
Fig. 8. Moses at the Rock of Horeb, Cappella Greca.
Fig. 9. View of the Entrance Wall of the Cappella Greca.

Fig. 10. The Garden Scene and the Paralytic, Cappella Greca.
Fig. 11. View of the Left Wall of the Cappella Greca.

This figure shows the Three Hebrews, Daniel and Susanna Orant, and the Accusation.
Fig. 12. The Adoration of the Magi, Cappella Greca.

Fig. 13. The Fractio Panis, Cappella Greca.

From Kirsch, pl. 10.
Fig. 14. Abraham, Cappella Greca.
From Wilpert, Fractio Panis, pl. X.

Fig. 15. Daniel in the Lions' Den, Cappella Greca.
From Wilpert, Fractio Panis, pl. IX.
Fig. 16. Noah in the Ark with the Dove, Cappella Greca.
From Marucchi, Le Catacombe, Fig. 162.

Fig. 17. The Raising of Lazarus, Cappella Greca.
From Wilpert, Fractio Panis, pl. XI.
Three Hebrews. To the right of the door, on the right wall is a figure identified as a Phoenix in Flames⁴⁴ (Phoenix, Fig. 9). To the left of the Phoenix, toward the sanctuary is the Garden scene of Susanna; above the Garden scene, directly above the Susanna figure is the Paralytic (Fig. 15). On the central arch, which bisects the chapel is the Epiphany. On the left wall of the naos, closest to the door is the Daniel and Susanna orant and next to this scene, toward the sanctuary is the Accusation (Fig. 10).

The ceiling in the naos is divided into eight sections (Fig. 18); in one, above Susanna A, is the Paralytic, and in the corner nearest the entry on the right side is a head wearing a wreath of bluetts and corn (Fig. 9), identified as Summer.⁴⁵ The other seasons would have appeared in the other corners (all destroyed). The seasons commonly represented the Cyclical nature of time and life. Not only do they represent the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, but also the course of a man's life.

⁴⁴Pasquale Testini, Le Catacombe egli Antichi Cimiteri Cristiani in Roma, Bologna, 1966, 115. This is the only reference which mentions or identifies this motif. It does, however, exist and appears to be a large lighted torch with a bird in the flames. Kirschbaum mentions a frescoed phoenix in the cemetery of Priscilla, but does not locate it further, (Engelbert Kirschbaum, Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie, 3 vols., Rome, 1968, 3, 430.

⁴⁵Cabrol-Leclercq, 15, 576. The heads used to identify the seasons were usually shown with the flora symbolic of that season as wreaths (Cabrol-Leclercq, 15, 574) or as persons performing acts symbolic of the season. For instance, Summer was often shown dancing with a garland of flowers (Cabrol-Leclercq, 15, 574). While the identification in the Cappella Greca is not universally accepted, no other interpretations have been offered. Grabar labels the head "Head in a Medallion." (Grabar, Beginnings, 86, Fig. 79.)
Fig. 18. The Ceiling of the Naos, Cappella Greca, Reconstruction.

From Cabrol-Leclercq, 2, Fig. 2063.
from youth to old age, a theme often presented in tomb decoration (Villa Albani Sarcophagus, IIInd C., and Barberini Sarcophagus), and not unexpected in the Cappella Greca.

A possible central rondel has been destroyed, but Wilpert suggests that it would have held a Baptism, whereas Testini suggests a Good Shepherd. Wilpert's justification for the existence of the Baptism is based on the assumption that both the Paralytic and Moses are baptismal motifs and that the naos is dedicated to the sacrament of baptism. This explanation of the naos leaves the Story of Susanna totally unexplained, even though it occupies the major portion of the naos walls. Secondly, an obvious baptismal motif, Noah, is found in the sanctuary. Thus it would be unwarranted to assign the central rondel to a Baptism without further evidence. Testini's suggestion of the Good Shepherd is more reasonable since the assignment was made because of the number of times that this motif appears in a central rondel, most notably in the cemetery of Priscilla, in the Camera della Velata, and in the

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46 Roger Hinks, Myth and Allegory in Ancient Art, London, 1939, 52. This course is described in Ovid's Metamorphoses as the theory of Pythagorus, "or again, don't you see the year passing through a succession of four seasons, thus imitating our own life? . . ." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, xv, trans. Mary M. Innes, Baltimore, 1955, 340).

47 Cabrol-LeClerq, 15, 574.

48 Hinks, 48, pl. 6.

49 Du Bourguet, Art, 58.

50 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 60.

51 Testini, 289.
Crypt of Lucina (Callisto) and the Hypogeum of the Aurelii (Domitilla); these last two are close contemporaries of the Cappella Greca.

In the sanctuary, above the main arch is the Fractio Panis. On the wall to the left on the face of the arch is Abraham. The Daniel is painted above the central arch in the sanctuary (viewer facing door) with Noah lower and to the left.

A water seepage has destroyed the vault of the sanctuary, the central portion of which is entirely missing (Fig. 19). In each of the corners, figures rest on a pedestal (only two remain) linked by a delicate rinceau. From the position of the drape of the figure, Wilpert has deduced that two figures, in alternating corners, are orants. Orants on pedestals are common motifs in both pagan and Christian decoration as seen in the orant on a pedestal found in the subterranean basilica at the Porta Maggiore in Rome (Fig. 20). Similar ceiling decorations appear in the Crypt of Lucina, which is roughly contemporaneous with the Cappella Greca.

The decoration in the Cappella Greca is extensive. Of the ten stories represented only three, Noah, Daniel, and Abraham, are known to have appeared contemporaneously or earlier in Christian art.

Each representation is significant stylistically and iconographically; many of these images possibly are prototypes for later representation. Others are unique and indicative of experimentation in advance of the adoption of any single motif.

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52 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 5.
Fig. 19. The Ceiling of the Sanctuary, Cappella Greca.

From Wilpert, Fractio Panis, pl. VII.
Fig. 20. Orant on a Pedestal, Subterranean Basilica near the Porta Maggiore, Rome.
Generally, the chapel is painted in a free, impressionistic, painterly technique, more closely akin to the Classical style of Pompeii (Fig. 21) than to the Late Antique or Early Christian styles found in most other catacombs. All of the scenes in the Cappella Greca use eloquent descriptive gesture, rather than the hard outlining and stocky figures of later styles. The figures are also highly animated. For example, in the Fractio Panis, the gesture of breaking of bread is explicit (Fig. 22). The use of such descriptive gesture is often used as an indication of the change from Classical to Late Antique or Early Christian style. However, a brief review of Roman painting shows equally descriptive gesture in Pompeii and earlier. Since in the Late Antique, the drawing became more sketchy, and the landscapes are omitted, the gesture, which was always there, becomes isolated. If, for instance, one looks at one of the Odyssey landscapes, the Laestrygonians' Attack, the gestures are highly animated, suggestive of an attack, but in the scene of Abraham in the Cappella Greca (Fig. 14) the hand holding the knife, which involves the same gesture, is more isolated and thus is more emphasized. Later in the Adelphia Sarcophagus (Fig. 23) the scene is described with no landscape and little modeling so consequently further emphasized. The gesture is not new, however, only its nakedness.

The images in the sanctuary are painted on a cinnabar\textsuperscript{53} or Pompeian red\textsuperscript{54} base (extremely rare in the catacombs) and those in the

\textsuperscript{53}Cabrol-LeClerq, 2, 2095.

\textsuperscript{54}Grabar, \textit{Beginning}, 113.
Fig. 21. Villa, House of Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii.


Fig. 22. Fractio Panis, Cappella Greca, Detail.

From Wilpert, *Fractio Panis*, pl. XIII.
Fig. 23. The Adelphia Sarcophagus.

nave are on white. The style of the representations is not consistent throughout the chapel, which may imply the work of more than one painter. The variations in style point to two or more artists working concurrently, rather than in two separate periods. All the figures appear to belong to the beginning of the trend to the Late Antique. Most authorities agree that there were at least two painters, one for the red base and one for the white. However, there are stylistic changes within each room - in proportions of the figures and use of background. The Story of Susanna and the Daniel use long thin graceful figures, whereas all the others are somewhat stockier and more energetic. Daniel, Moses, and Abraham use elaborate landscaping, whereas in Susanna, scene A, Noah, and Lazarus the landscape is only sketchy, and much smaller than the figures. The Fractio Panis, Paralytic, Epiphany, and Susanna, scenes B and C use no landscape at all. (Landscape disappears very early from most catacomb painting, as does the impressionistic technique.) Because of the poor preservation of the frescoes, it is impossible to compare the various modeling techniques. In the Epiphany (Fig. 12), the third magus appears strongly modeled, whereas the other two and the mother and child are more flat. So one must assume that much detail and modeling has been lost through deterioration of the wall surface.

Pictorial representations in the catacombs were used as images, pictures used to represent an ideological meaning. Pure narrative, that is representation of only historical interest, often

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55 Grabar, Beginning, 113; Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 28.
56 André Grabar, Christian Iconography, 8.
break down a story to tell it more completely, and leave no ambiguities to confuse the viewer. A narrative may also be symbolic. For instance, one often sees a series of pictures depicting the American Revolution. Granted these instruct the viewer the intricacies of winning independence, but in their portrayal of the "tyrannies" of George the III and the virtues of the simple upright Frontiersman, the theme of the "triumph of good over evil," "right over might," or "freedom over tyranny" becomes clearer and clearer. In the catacombs this same combination of narrative and image-sign appears. The narrative may have a meaning as a whole, and each separate episode may have a unique meaning. The story of Jonah and the Whale is often broken into three scenes: Jonah Swallowed, Jonah Expulsed, and Jonah in the Arbor. The Swallowing implies the need for salvation, even among the most holy; the Expulsion implies divine salvation, and Jonah under the Arbor symbolizes the result of salvation or paradise gained. As a unit, Jonah becomes a Baptismal motif, since it involves purging and salvation through water. Jonah remained in the whale three days, emphasized in the narrative by the presence of both the Swallowing and the Expulsion, which prefigures Christ's death and resurrection as well as the Descent into Hell. Jonah appears in all three parts in the early IIIrd century Sarcophagus with Biblical scenes (Fig. 24). In the Cappella Greca, Susanna appears in three parts. The pictures are, in fact, visual parables, which lie at the core of Christian thought:
Fig. 24. The Sarcophagus with Biblical Scenes, Lateran Museum.
From Volbach-Hirmer, pl. 40.
Matthew 13:10. Then the disciples came and said to him, why do you speak in parables? and he answered them, "to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."

and

Matthew 13:34. All this Jesus said to the crowd in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.

The parables shown in the frescoes represent ideas which would be understood by believers. Often the parables had more than one meaning. The story of the baptism of the centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10:1-37), is a good example of the use of multiple meanings (the meanings are revealed to the viewer successively through the story). In the beginning Peter has a vision:

Acts 10:10. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet let down by four corners on the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." But Peter said, "No, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common."

57 All quotations from the Bible will be from the New English Bible, Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1970. The translation is idiomatic and tries to be close in meaning to the original. Since it is most important that the meaning is as close as possible to that of the second and third centuries, it seemed best to use this edition. The author regrets that she is unable to read second century Greek which would have been more ideal.
Most obviously, or superficially, this is a reference to Jewish dietary law. Later, Peter eats with gentiles sent to him by Cornelius, showing a second level of meaning to the story. Finally, following God's will, he accepts Cornelius, an uncircumcized gentile, into the church, which reveals still a third level of meaning to the vision. In the same sense, the image-signs may be understood to have several meanings. It is essential to understand the meanings of the representations singly, before trying to assign meanings to their juxtapositions.

Moses at the Rock of Horeb (Fig. 8)

Like other frescoes in the chapel, that over the entrance is impressionistic and painterly. A young man in a short tunic is seen striking a conical rock at his left. No other figures are present, but to the right is a landscape form resembling a plateau. Such a scene is described in Exodus 17:5.

Exodus 17:5

Go forward ahead of the people, take with you some of the elders of Israel and the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. You will find me waiting there, by a rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, water will come out of it and the people shall drink. Moses did this . . .

This is the earliest known representation of Moses. In the numerous later sculptural representations, one or two figures are shown drinking from more flowing landscape. No landscape other than the rock itself is shown (Fig. 8). The motif as it is defined here is repeated in many catacomb paintings, sometimes with the witnesses (Fig. 25).

58 Cabrol-LeClerq, 11, 1662.
Fig. 25. Moses, Cemetery of Callisto, Chamber of the Pecorelle.

From Du Bourguet, Painting, pl. 8.
Primarily Moses symbolizes divine salvation. Since the rock gives forth pure water which saved the Israelites, it provides the prototype for the baptismal waters of salvation:

I Cor. 10:1-5.
You should understand, my brothers, that our ancestors were all under the pillar of cloud, and all of them passed through the Red Sea; and so they all received baptism into the fellowship of Moses in cloud and sea. They all ate the same supernatural food, and all drank the same supernatural drink; I mean, they all drank from the supernatural rock that accompanied their travels - and that rock was Christ.

So from the time of Tertullian (160? - ?230), Moses has been considered a symbol of baptism." In this connection, "the desert rock is the antetype for Christ from whose side, blood will flow." Because the early Christians believed that baptism was the antetype for the entry into Paradise, the water of baptism was also associated with the rivers of Paradise, the water of eternal life, which were supposed to flow from a desert rock.

The story has also been identified with Peter, whom Moses is said to prefigure; Moses disbelieved in the miracle of the Lord, Peter in the coming Passion of Christ (Moses/Peter). Moses was handed the Ten Commandments, Peter the foundation of the church. A glass disc has

59 Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1, (text, 108).
60 Grabar, Christian Iconography, 143.
61 I Cor. 10:1-5.
63 Cabrol-LeClercq 14, 941.
been found on which Moses is seen striking a rock from which water is flowing; next to this motif is the word "PETRUS" (Fig. 26). "PETRUS" may be associated with either Moses or the rock. If "PETRUS" refers to the rock, Moses may be the antetype for Christ striking the rock, Peter, upon whom he founded his church (Christ/Peter). It was from the church that the water of baptism and baptism would flow. The Christ/Peter interpretation is further supported by the common juxtaposition of Moses with the Handing of the Ten Commandments which may be seen as two acts of Moses, but more likely as the Giving of the Law and the Founding of the Church.

If "PETRUS" refers to the man (Moses was often identified with Peter) then Wilpert infers (as he does for many of the sarcophagi), that the motif represents the Baptism of Cornelius, since that is the only baptism mentioned in connection with Peter, and Tertullian states, "Ipse denique (Petrus) primus in Cornelii baptismo." There are two arguments against this interpretation. First, the scene is in no way that described by the narrative in Acts. Peter does not perform the baptism and water is never mentioned. Secondly, the motif quite accurately portrays the action described in Exodus 17 (see above p. 39). Wilpert actually only associated the motif with Peter if the man was

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64 Marucchi, Manual, 343.
65 Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1, 108.
66 Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1, 109.
67 Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1, 108.
68 Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1, 109.
Fig. 26. Glass Disc with the Word "PETRUS."

From Marucchi, Manual, 343.
bearded, and thus identifies the motif as it appears in the Cappella Greca with Moses, but the two motifs are so intimately related that the meaning of both is important. Cabrol-LeClerq actually refer to the motif in the Cappella Greca as a Peter-Moses symbol. They, however, interpret the motif differently: Peter is seen to cause the rock, which is Jesus Christ (the source of Grace through the intermediary of the sacraments), to gush forth. This interpretation is actually close in meaning to that which identified Peter as the rock. In both interpretations, the water which gushes forth is the water of baptism which is the typos for the water of salvation, and both intrinsically refer to Peter and the Sacraments as intermediaries to salvation and eternal life with Jesus as primary source: the first (Peter as the Rock) implies the founding of the church with Peter, the second that the church already exists as Peter. Either of these interpretations seems more reasonable than Wilpert's.

Moses (Moses/Peter or Christ/Peter) thus symbolizes divine intervention, baptism, and eternal life and probably refers in some way to the founding of the Church with Peter.

The Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace (Fig. 9)

The Three Hebrews appears divided between both sides of the entry door. Facing the door, on the right, three men in Phrygian caps

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69 Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1, 108.
70 Cabrol-LeClerq, 14, 941.
and short tunics are standing in orant position on top of a box-like furnace, which has flames shooting out of its sides. To the left of the door is a man in a tunic and cloak pointing to the scene opposite. The motif has been identified as Nebuchadnezzar or Daniel pointing to the three Hebrews which Nebuchadnezzar had thrown into the furnace:

Daniel 3:19.
Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage with Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego, and his face distorted with anger. He gave orders that the furnace should be heated up to seven times its usual heat and commanded some of the strongest men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego, and throw them into the blazing furnace. Then those men in their trowsers, their shirts, and their hats and all their other clothes were bound and thrown into the fiery furnace.

The identification of the left-hand figure may be postulated by comparison with early Christian Sarcophagi (albeit later) which also show the scene of the three Hebrews refusing to worship the idol, and then later thrown into the furnace. The king appears in both scenes (Fig. 27).

The stoker may also appear on the sarcophagi (Fig. 28). The left-hand figure may be alternatively identified with Daniel who narrates the scene. He is shown as a young man and has no particular attributes to identify him. Since the Hebrews are shown alone,

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71 Cabrol-Le Clerq, 2, 2095.
72 Cabrol-Le Clerq, 6, 2110.
73 The angel sent to save them is not found until the fourth century (Wilpert, Le Pittura, 1, 40).
Fig. 27. Sarcophagus Cover from the Cemetery of Domitilla.

This figure shows the three Hebrews refusing to worship the idol, then in the furnace, and finally, The Adoration of the Magi. (From Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 2 (plates) pl. 202 [1]).

Fig. 28. Sarcophagus from Cherchel, Louvre.

This figure shows the three Hebrews in the furnace with a stoker next to the furnace. (From Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 2 (plates), pl. 202 [4]).
praying, the moment portrayed is possibly that of the "Prayer of the Three Hebrews," which was in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament.

This version of the Three Hebrews is the earliest known. The right-hand part (Fig. 29) may be the prototype for many other representations of the Three Hebrews, since the format is very similar to others, including that in the Camera della Velata (Fig. 30) as well as those on numerous sarcophagi. The motif represented symbolizes salvation, faith, and divine intervention.

The Story of Susanna (Figs. 10 and 11)

The three episodes of the story of Susanna: the Garden scene, the Accusation, and the Daniel and Susanna Orant, appear on the walls of the nave. Scene A appears on the right-hand wall (Fig. 10), scene B on

The position of prayer for the Hebrews is described in Kings 8:22, "Then Solomon, standing in front of the altar of the Lord and in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel spread out his hands toward heaven and said . . . ."

It would have been known by the builder's of the Cappella Greca, who by their inscriptions can be shown to have read Greek.

Cabrol-LeClerq, 6, 2108.

Schiller, 152.

Grabar, Christian Iconography, 10. Marucchi suggests that the Three Hebrews refers to the prayer for the repose of the soul (Marucchi, Manual, 302). This prayer asks for salvation, "as the Lord saved . . . ." and therefore mentions stories of divine intervention.
Fig. 29. Three Hebrews, Cappella Greca, Detail.

Fig. 30. Three Hebrews, Camera della Velata, Cemetery of Priscilla.

From Du Bourguet, Painting, pl. 79.
the right half of the left wall and scene C on the left hand of the left wall (Fig. 11). They read cyclically from right to left:

Scene A: A draped female orant stands in the center of the composition. To the right are two men, one in front of the other, gesturing toward the female with their right hands. On the left is a young man standing in front of a small building watching the three others.

In scene B, the Accusation, the draped female stands with hands lowered between two men, who face her placing one hand each (the near one) on her head. In scene C, a male and female are standing in orant position against plain background (the female is on the right). All the figures are graceful and slightly elongated. The Susanna recalls the style and position of the Andromeda\(^79\) (Fig. 31) in the House of the Priest Amandus.

The story of Susanna is told in the Book of Susanna, included in the Septuagint and in use in the second and third centuries.\(^80\)

Scene A shows the elders approaching Susanna. She cries out. The male figure to the left balances the composition, visually, but is

\(^79\)Gilbert Picard, Roman Painting, Greenwich, Conn., 1968, 65. (For illustration only.)

Fig. 31. Andromeda, House of the Priest Amandus.

From Picard, pl. 61.
not described in the scripture. The figure has been identified as Daniel who was not physically present, but was able to discern the truth. 81

The second scene is explicitly described in the narrative, lines 33-5, "And the two elders stood up in the midst of the people and laid their hands on her head and she wept and looked up to heaven."

The third scene, showing a man and woman in orant position has a more ambiguous reference. In lines 42-3 and 46, Susanna cries out to God; and Daniel, being stirred by God exclaims, "I am free of the blood of this woman." In lines 63, "Hilkiah and his wife praised God for their daughter, Susanna." Another explanation, while not described in the Scripture is implicit in the situation, is that the two figures represented are Daniel and Susanna, thanking God. All three explanations are possible, but the third is most generally accepted.

This is the first known representation of the Story of Susanna and is one of the earliest examples of narrative found in the catacombs. (Except for a few examples of Jonah and the Whale, narrative is extremely rare in the catacombs in the third century.) But as has been mentioned above (p. 36), a narrative sequence can be also symbolic. The only other third century example of the Story of Susanna in the catacombs is in the Catacomb of Callisto (Fig. 32). A female orant standing between two men is frequently identified with Susanna; however, the

81 Cabrol-LeClerq, 15, 1745; Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 75.
82 Cabrol-LeClerq, 15, 1745.
Fig. 32. Daniel Accusing the Elders, Cemetery of Callisto.

From Du Bourguet, Painting, pl. 5.
identification is not positive. The identification is based on a lamb standing between two wolves in which the sheep is labelled Susanna (Fig. 33). None of the representations are as elaborate as in the cycle in the Cappella Greca.

The orant position, in scenes A and C, is common in the pagan and Christian repertoire, occurring hundreds of times in the catacombs and pagan basilicae. According to Grabar the orant was the pagan symbol of piety, and may be found in the subterranean basilica near the Porta Maggiore. Livia is also portrayed in this position (Pio Clementino Museum, Milan). The same position was used by the Hebrews for prayer:

Kings 8:22.
Then Solomon, standing in front of the altar of the Lord and in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel spread out his hands toward heaven and said ...

Thus to a Roman, the orant position would symbolize both piety and prayer.

The Story of Susanna symbolizes divine salvation and represents virtuous life. Marucchi suggests that it represents a prayer for the repose of the foul and faith in God. Referring to the Accusation, Hippolytus says that Susanna represents the church between the pagans and the Jews.

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83 Grabar, Christian Iconography, 59.
84 Du Bourguet, Art, 56, citing LeClerq, Manuel d'Archeologie Chrétienne, 1, 154.
85 Marucchi, Manual, 302.
86 Cabrol-LeClerq, 15, 1745, citing In Daniel, 1, 5-6 (ed. M. Lefevre, Coll. Sources Chrétienne, 96).
Fig. 33. Susanna and the Two Elders as a Lamb between Two Wolves.

This is a rare example from the Cemetery of Praetextus, Arcosolium of Celerina. From Du Bourguet, Painting, pl. 55.
The question remains of why Susanna, an infrequent subject in the catacombs, is displayed so prominently in the Cappella Greca. Since the story dominates the chapel, it has more than a trivial significance. It is portrayed only rarely in the third and fourth centuries and never (as far as is known) in such great detail.

In Roman burials an imago clipeata or a portrait of the dead was usually found on the sarcophagus. An inscription or further decoration on the sarcophagus or in the tomb itself indicated the attributes, merits, or profession of the deceased. In the tomb of the Valerii (Vatican), there are painted descriptions of the occupations of the dead. 87 The use of imagi clipeatae was commonly carried over into Christian practice (Fig. 25) and it is not unusual to find a portrait of the deceased as orant or led into paradise (Fig. 34), corresponding to pagan tomb decorations. In the Cappella Greca no such image has been identified. One must recall, that the two Greek inscriptions refer to a faithful wife and to a fellow disciple. Since the Story of Susanna involves a faithful, virtuous and beloved young wife and a religious young man, Daniel, it is not unreasonable to postulate that the Story of Susanna was used to describe the merits of Nestoriane and Palladio, or perhaps those of two other occupants of the tomb.

The Story of Susanna thus symbolizes divine salvation, the virtuous life, and perhaps serves as a reference to the initial, or at least early, occupants of the tombs in the chapel.

87 Toynbee, 142.
Fig. 34. Veneranda Led into Paradise by S. Petronilla, Cemetery of Domitilla.

The Healing of the Paralytic (Fig. 10)

On the right wall above the Garden Scene of Susanna, is the fresco identified as the Healing of the Paralytic. The legs and lower torso of a person in a short tunic is seen holding a bed. The upper half of the fresco has been destroyed and only the silhouette remains in the lower half, all plastic values having worn off. Although this is the earliest known appearance of the Paralytic, the same image appears hundreds of times in the catacombs and on early Christian sarcophagi. Clearly, the man presented is the Paralytic to whom Jesus said, "Go, take up thy bed and walk" (John 5:6; Luke 2:9). It is not clear, however, if this is the Paralytic, mentioned in John, by the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9) or the one at Capernaum mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels. The specific scene is described in John 5:6:

John 5:6.
When Jesus saw him lying there and was aware that he had been ill a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to recover?" "Sir," he replied, "I have no-one to put me in the pool when the water is disturbed, but while I am moving, someone else is in the pool before me." Jesus answered, "Rise to your feet, take up your bed and walk."

and in Luke 2:9:

"Is it easier to say to this Paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven: or to say, Stand up, take up your bed and walk?" But to convince you that the Son of Man has the right on earth to forgive sins - he turned to the paralyzed man, "I say to you, stand up, take your bed and go home."

88 Cabrol-Leclercq, 13, 1618.
Primarily, the Paralytic is a theme of divine salvation. The artist has made no attempt to differentiate between the Paralytic of Bethesda or Capernaum. Inclusion of a pool or roof architecture would have made the identification certain, so probably, the artist did not mean to refer to a specific historical scene, but to the moral implied by the Paralytic. Common to both the Paralytic of Bethesda and Capernaum is the idea of salvation by divine intervention. The pool of Bethesda has, since the time of Tertullian (160? - 230?) in De Baptismo, been considered a symbol of Baptism since he is waiting to be saved by immersion in water. The Paralytic of Capernaum refers directly to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus used physical healing to symbolize spiritual healing. Marucchi suggests that the theme symbolizes penitence, since the paralytic has to wait to be saved.

The symbolism of the man holding his bed surely partakes of all of these: divine salvation, forgiveness of sin, baptism, and penitence.

The Adoration of the Magi (Fig. 12)

The fresco identified as the Adoration of the Magi is located on the central arch facing the entry door. Three men approach from the left wearing yellow, red, and green, short tunics and trousers and each carrying an object. Facing them, on the right is a woman holding a

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89 Cabrol-Leclercq, 13, 1618.

90 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 60.

91 Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 474.
child on her lap. The men are shown in almost full profile while the woman is in a three-quarter view. Most detail has worn off. There is some evidence of modeling on the third magus (yellow) and he seems to be carrying a jar. The other figures are quite flat and their gifts obscured. The objects being carried have been identified by Wilpert and Schiller as the gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The scripture being presented is in Matthew 2:

Matthew 2:11.
And when they were come into the house they saw the young child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshipped him. And when they had opened their treasure they presented unto him gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh.

This fresco is the earliest known representation of the Adoration of the Magi. The representation of a mother and child is common to most ancient cultures [Hera Kourotropos, Isis suckling Horus (Fig. 35), and particularly pertinent to the early Roman-Christian artist, Tellus Suckling, on the Ara Pacis Augustae (Fig. 36)]. Equally important to these and other societies (Egyptian, Mesopotamia) is the idea of the god

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92 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 63.
93 Schiller, 96.
94 DuBourguet, Art, 72.
95 DuBourguet, Art, 54. The original story is in Diodorus Siculus (Edmund Tripp, Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology, New York, 1970, 276).
Fig. 35. *Isis Suckling Horus.*


Fig. 36. The *Tellus Relief, Ara Pacis Augustae.*

From Moretti, 32.
who dies and is reborn. 97 The early Christian writers Tertullian and Justin Martyr saw these similarities and thought them the work of the devil. Tertullian in the *Prescription against the Heretics* 98 states, "Who interprets the meaning of those passages which make for heresy? The devil of course whose business it is to pervert truth, who apes even the divine sacraments in the idol mysteries." The mother figures provided a commonplace model for the portrayal of Mary with Jesus. The magi have a visual prototype in the portrayal of conquered barbarians bringing their crowns to the emperor. In some sarcophagi, the magi are even shown carrying crowns 99 (Fig. 23). Grabar points out that the early Christian often adopted common types from the Roman repertoire. 100 While entire scenes were rarely copied, single positions often were. One wonders whether the artists were actually relying on stock types or if they were trained to present the human body in various positions.

St. Ireneus, Bishop of Lyons, circa 170, identified the gifts of the magi as gold, a symbol of royalty; incense, a sign of divinity; and myrrh, a symbol of humanity; "gold, for his kingship, frankincense, as for the God, and myrrh, for the sorrows and his Death for our


100 Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 37.
salvation. The Magi refer, therefore, to the three natures of Christ.

The three Magi have been associated from earliest times with priests and kings. A Magus was a priest of Ahura Mazda, hence the Phrygian dress. Clement of Alexandria (152-212) wrote the "Magi brought gifts to Christ as priests and physicians." Later, in the fourth century, they were thought to be Priests beginning the Eucharistic celebration, thereby assuming a liturgical role. The comment from Clement may refer to this function. However, Priests of Mazda actually functioned as physicians, so his statement may have been merely factual. Since there is no evidence to substantiate the Eucharistic function of the Magi in the Cappella Greca, their liturgical role as Priests must be discounted.

The identification of the Magi with kingship is associated with passages from Isaiah (49:8ff and 60:1-6) and Psalms (68:32 and 72:9-11). Psalms 72:9 reads


102Grabar, Christian Iconography, 113.

103Cumont, Oriental Religions, 144.

104Davisson, 106.

105Cumont, Oriental Religions, 139.
Psalms 72:9.
The kings of Tarhish and the islands shall bring gifts
the kings of Sheba and Seba shall present their tribute
and all kings shall pay him homage
all nations shall serve him.

Schiller\textsuperscript{106} maintains that as early as the third century this association was made, but states that the names, Balthazar, Melchior, and Caspar, were not associated with them until the sixth century. The earliest known literary source of the names of the Magi is an inscription known as "Excerpta Latina Barbari," BN Lat. 4884, from the seventh century which states that the "Magi were called Bithisarea, Melichior, and Gathaspa.\textsuperscript{107} Inscriptions above the Magi in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (ca. 568) name them Balthassar, Gaspar, and Melchior.

The Epiphany is an Incarnation symbol. Grabar reasons that because the Epiphany recognizes the incarnation of God as man, and therefore refers to Christ's work on earth, the symbol refers to the entire Christological cycle and this is an Incarnation-Redemption symbol.\textsuperscript{108} The emphasis in the Epiphany is therefore on Christ's human nature.

The Mother and child image refers to the cyclical nature of life. This idea is intimately related to the image of the dying god who is reborn, found in many oriental religions, for instance: the cults of Isis,

\textsuperscript{106}Schiller, 96.


Cybele, Dionysus, and Mithra, to which Christianity is so closely connected. In most early forms of these oriental cults, the god who dies is some form of the god of vegetation, which like the god, dies and is reborn each year. These gods are therefore symbols of immortality. The bearer or wife of these gods usually was the Earth goddess. Many Romans believed that in death their union with the earth insured their immortality, as is seen in the funerary inscription:

\[ \text{cinis sum, cinis terra est, terra dea est, ergo ego mortua non sum.} \]

A mother and child, symbols of the god who dies and is reborn, and the symbol of the great mother were both symbols of immortality and thus were easily accepted into the Roman-Christian iconography. Syncretism was common already in Roman religion, so although the church fathers may have disapproved of the similarity of Christianity to pagan religions, many of the motifs and festivals were adopted into the church. As a matter of pure practicality, comprehension of iconographical symbols whose meanings had changed only little, was far more probable than if a totally new vocabulary had been developed.

The Epiphany was also accepted as the symbol of the revelation to and acceptance by the Gentiles. Justin Martyr mentions the Magi

\[ \text{Cumont, Oriental Religions. The discussion of Attis is on p. 52, of Osiris on p. 62, and of Dionysus on p. 48.} \]

\[ \text{I am ashes, ashes are earth, earth is a goddess, therefore I am not dead,} \] Toynbee, 37, citing, Corpus Inscriptionem Latinarum, (CIL), 6, 29609.

\[ \text{I am ashes, ashes are earth, earth is a goddess, therefore I am not dead,} \]

\[ \text{Cumont, Oriental Religions, 88.} \]

\[ \text{Marucchi, Manual, 302. Du Bourguet, Art, 64.} \]
as the first pagans to worship Him. Later, Augustine refers to them as the first Gentiles to be converted (primitiae gentium). This idea would be especially important to ex-Pagan-Christians in Rome.

The Raising of Lazarus (Fig. 17)

The Raising of Lazarus is found on the reverse side of the central arch, that is, behind the Epiphany. A man and a woman stand on the left; on the right is a sepulchre with a mummy standing in the door. Because the fresco is in poor condition, there is disagreement as to the identification of all the figures. Wilpert identifies the woman as Mary, the sister of Lazarus and identifies the mummy and the young man as Lazarus, dead and then alive. Styger, on the other hand, identifies the central young man as Jesus. This is certainly the earliest known representation of Lazarus and if Styger is correct the earliest representation of Christ, in an historical sense.

The scripture is John 11:23-44. This particular scene is described in John 11:43-44:

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113 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 63, citing Dialog cum Trypho, cvi, 212.
114 Davisson, 91.
115 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 4.
117 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 4.
118 Finegan, 467.
John 11:43-44.
When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages and his face wrapped with cloth.

If Wilpert's identification is correct, then the representation of the second Lazarus was to make the idea that he had risen from the dead more explicit.

Lazarus symbolizes Resurrection. The scripture itself makes this clear. In John 11:25-26, Jesus says to Martha:

I am resurrection and I am life.
If a man has faith in me even though he dies, he shall come to life . . .

Further, Lazarus is actually brought to life, and therefore prefigures the resurrection of Christ and also of the dead at the Last Judgment. 119

The symbol of the mummy refers to resurrection even in Egyptian representation. 120 Mummies are displayed in front of a tomb in the New Kingdom tomb of Ipuki and Nebmun (1580-1314 B.C.) and in illustrations to the Book of the Dead. There is no apparent relationship in the iconography or story in this tomb and that in the Cappella Greca. Further, there is no evidence that the artist of the Cappella Greca had been to Egypt, but since mummies have been found in Italy 121 and there were Isis sanctuaries in Rome from the first century A.D., 122 it is

119 Schiller, 181.
120 Schiller, 182, n. 31.
121 Toynbee, 41.
122 Emerson H. Swift, Roman Sources of Christian Art, New York, 1951, 51.
possible that the artist had seen such a painting and knew of its symbolism. Or more simply, he may have thought that this was the condition of the body as described in the text.

Daniel in the Lions' Den (Fig. 15)

The Daniel is located in the vault of the sanctuary closest to absidiole III, that is to the right of the Fractio Panis. A slender man in a tunic, in orant position, stands next to one lion in front of fantastic architectural setting. This is the only known example of such elaborate architecture in the Christian catacombs, closely resembling Pompeian decorative architecture. The fresco is in extremely poor condition: one lion has completely disappeared. Its presence in the original may be assumed from the standard heraldic form this motif usually takes. Secondly, the area where the lion would stand has been obliterated, but the artist in this catacomb usually constructed a balanced composition (note the Susanna Garden Scene, where an extra figure has been added, although it is not mentioned in the text). The rest of the fresco is very faint.

This is the second known representation of Daniel in the catacombs. The earliest known is in the cemetery of Domitilla in the

\[123\] Cabrol-LeClerq, 2, 2088.
\[124\] Cabrol-LeClerq, 2, 2088.
\[125\] Wilpert, Le Pittura, 1, 39.
gallery of the Flavians. It shows an orant on a pedestal between two lions. It may be, therefore, a possible prototype for the Daniel in the Cappella Greca, but not necessarily. Certainly the use of the architectural backdrop was unique. Only the first few representations of Daniel show him clothed; after these the motif shows Daniel nude. The motif of a man (clothed or nude) between beasts, however, is a common one, found throughout the Near East in the form of a nude hero or bull-man standing between two rampant animals. The meaning of the ancient pagan motif, a reference to the struggle of man against nature, of course, has changed.

The scripture represented is Daniel 6:1-28. The specific scene is described:

Daniel 6:16.
Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, "May your God deliver you."

Clearly the story is symbolic of divine salvation. Secondly, Daniel

126 Borda has dated this hypogeum slightly later than the Cappella Greca (230 vs. 220), therefore the Daniel and Noah may be without earlier Christian models (Borda, 123).

127 Cabrol-LeClerq, 4, 224.

128 Henri Frankfort, The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient, Baltimore, 1954, 12. The Lion is seen as the "destructive element of the Great Mother, . . . an aspect which was held in check as a rule." There is no mythological reference to this scene (H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort and Bernard Ashmole, Art of the Ancient World, Englewood Cliffs, 1971, 103), however, in Gudea Cylinder A, Gudea describes a dream in which he saw "a gigantic man with a divine crown, with wings like a great bird; . . . to the right and left of this man lions were lying . . . " (Thorkild Jacobson, "The Function of the State," The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, H. Frankfort, ed., Chicago, 1946, 189).
symbolizes refusal to falsely worship (willingness to risk death to avoid false worship). Thirdly, it is a symbol of faith. Wilpert also associates the scene with the Eucharist. He reasons that Habakkuk bringing Daniel the miraculous repast which saves Daniel physically refers to the Eucharist which saves man spiritually. However, since Habakkuk is not shown and Daniel is portrayed standing triumphant between two sitting lions, the scene refers more specifically to the power of his faith, his successful offering, and his thanking God for his salvation.

The Sacrifice of Abraham (Fig. 14)

The Sacrifice of Abraham is on the arch over the left niche (I) in the sanctuary, opposite Daniel. A bearded man stands with his raised right hand holding a knife. There is a ram standing to the left and a boy to his right. Further to the right is a flaming altar. On either side is a landscape.

The scripture represented is from Genesis 22:1-12.

Then he stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son; but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham." He answered, "Here I am." The angel of the Lord said, "Do not raise your hand against the boy; do not touch him.

129 Schiller, 152.
130 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 66.
131 Wilpert's hypothesis is based on an Apocryphal story from the book Daniel, Bel and the Snake which was in the Book of Daniel in the Septuagint.
Now I know you are a God-fearing man. You have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up, and there he saw a ram caught by the horns in the thicket.

This is one of the earliest known representations of the Sacrifice of Abraham. While the motif on the figures was repeated after the time of the Cappella Greca, the landscape is (as far as is known) unique.

Abraham has several obvious meanings: salvation by divine intervention, the denial of human sacrifice (but the need for sacrifice). As Daniel, Abraham was willing to sacrifice the thing most dear to him, his son and therefore he was saved. Many early Christian writers see in Isaac a prefiguration of Christ. The motif, therefore, refers to the Passion of Christ and His subsequent sacrifice. Therefore the story of Abraham like Daniel is a Salvation-Sacrifice theme.

Noah in the Ark (Fig. 16)

Noah is located a little to the left and below Lazarus on the same wall. It is under the skylight in a protected position: a man in a short tunic is standing in orant position in a box. A dove holding a branch descends from the right. This is the second known presentation

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132 Cabrol-LeClerq, 1, 112. "The Abraham in the Chapels of the Sacraments in the cemetery of Callisto may be the earliests." Since the Cappella Greca must be considered at least contemporary with the Chapels of the Sacraments, the Abraham is undoubtedly as early, probably earlier.

133 Wilpert, I Sarcofagi and Le Pittura, general.

134 Cabrol-LeClerq, 1, 2712.
of Noah, the first being in the cemetery of Domitilla. The scripture being presented is Genesis 8:11:

Genesis 8:11.
And the dove came to him in the evening; and lo in her mouth was an olive branch, plucked so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the face of the earth.

Noah is portrayed floating in a box. In the original Hebrew a tebah, or in the Aramaic tebah, is a floating boat not to be sailed or navigated. The Ark of the Covenant, a box, was tebah or aron in Aramaic. In Greek and Latin the differentiation is not made; in Greek both are κόλπος and in Latin they are arcae. Classical prototypes exist for this scene in the presentations of Danae and Perseus and Deucalion and Pyrrha, both of which show the boat as a box.

Noah symbolizes divine salvation. In Peter 3:30, the story is also associated with baptism:

Peter 3:30.
They had refused obedience long ago, while God waited patiently in the days of Noah and the building of the Ark, and in the Ark, eight persons in all were brought to safety through the water. This water prefigured the water of baptism through which you are now brought to safety.

Justin Martyr sees Noah as the prefiguration of Resurrection:
Just as the first resurrection of the race after the deluge took place by means of eight persons, so the Lord has also inaugurated the resurrection of the dead on the eighth day, when, having dwelt in His sepulchre, as Noe in the Ark, he put an end to the deluge of impurity and instituted Baptism of Resurrection.

and, "By the deluge was accomplished the mystery of the salvation of men." 139

Marucchi associates the symbol with peace bestowed after the turmoils of earthly life. 140 Pagan Romans often expressed this desire on their sarcophagi: "Toil was my lot from childhood and now it is laid down for ever;' 141 "I have fled the miseries of sickness and troubles of life so great. Here I am free of my pains, I enjoy a peaceful calm;" 142 "After a heavy burden and incessant labor, he is silent now and satisfied with his silent abode, he rests." 143 The dove was associated with peace and Noah with rebirth. 144

139 Daniélou, 85.
140 Marucchi, Manual, 302.
143 "Qui post tantum onus, multos crebrosque labores/ nunc sile et facito contentus sede quiesit," Cumont, Recherches, 358, n. 4, from CIL, 8, 5278. The author's translation is from Cumont's French into English.
144 Wilpert, Fratag Panis, 68.
Clearly, Noah is a symbol of faith as are Daniel and Abraham. The motif then speaks of Resurrection through baptism, salvation, divine salvation, and possibly peace after the trials of life.

The Fractio Panis (Fig. 13)

The Fractio Panis is located on the final arch over absidiole II (Fig. 13). Seven people sit in a semicircle on a couch. The bearded man at the left has his arms extended and one knee flexed; he appears to be breaking bread. The second man from the left faces the first. The third looks to the other end of the table and is passing a bowl to the fourth person who is leaning forward toward a plate with two fish on it. In front of the third person is a double handled chalice. The fifth is a veiled lady; the sixth sits quietly and the seventh has a arm stretched inward over a platter with five loaves of bread.

This is the first known representation of the Fractio Panis. It is in excellent condition; its colors remain bright. The brushwork is painterly, the figures animated, details are carefully defined with quick brushstrokes. One only need look at the diaphonous veil of the woman to respect the proficiency of the artist. Looking at this fresco, one can only wish to have seen the entire chapel in good preservation.

Many banquets are described in the Christological cycle: the Last Supper, the Meeting at the Sea of Tiberias, the Marriage at Cana, and the Multiplication of Loaves (Feeding the 4,000). All of these must be excluded as the exact moment portrayed in this fresco. The Last

\[145\] Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 5.
Supper included thirteen people, and no woman was present; the Pentecost, although it included a woman, also refers to thirteen people but there are no flames appearing above the heads of the participants in the Cappella Greca fresco. The Meeting at the Sea of Tiberias included seven disciples (but also the risen Christ as an eighth) and does not mention a woman. The Marriage at Cana involved an unspecified number of people, and women would have been present but the multiplication was of jars of wine not baskets and the representation is different (Fig. 37). The Multiplication of Loaves mentions a great crowd, though these need not be shown, and five loaves of bread and two fishes (in the version in John), but refers to twelve loaves of bread remaining. The specific reference can not be explained by a single text in the Bible.

Wilpert suggested when he first discovered the fresco that it was an historical representation, that of the Fractio Panis, the breaking of bread, literally, which was part of the second half of the

\[146\] Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 5.
Fig. 37. Sarcophagus of Gerona, Church of S. Felice.

This figure shows The Multiplication of Jars, and Moses and Lazarus at either end. (From Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1 (plates), pl. 111. [1]).
Certainly it is this rite which is portrayed: the elder leans back his head, holds the bread in his outstretched hands and flexes one knee; he breaks the bread. To Wilpert the symbols of bread, fish, and wine, identify the meal as a special one, the Eucharist. The fish and bread remind one of the Multiplication of the Loaves:

Simon Peter said to him, "There is a boy here with five loaves and two fishes . . ." Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them among the people. He did the same with the fishes . . . "Collect the pieces that are left over, so that nothing be left." This they did and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left uneaten of the five barley loaves.

This was seen as a prefiguration of the Last Supper. The chalice symbolizes the Marriage at Cana, which according the Liberias and Cyrille

147 Dix, 36. The service was made up of two parts, the synaxis or meeting, which derived from Jewish ritual, and the Eucharist. In the pre-Nicene church, the service followed the same outline in all places and was possibly of Apostolic origin (Dix, 5). Originally they were separable. The breaking of bread clearly identifies the Eucharist as Christian. It is commonly mentioned in the Scriptures; the reason for its performance is usually repeated (I Cor. 10:1-3, I Cor. 10:16, Acts 11:42-46, and Acts 20:7). Tertullian and Justin Martyr also refer to the ceremony (Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 14) and Theodore of Mopsuestia states, "Now that the liturgy is complete, the pontiff breaks the bread, as our Lord first showed himself in his manifestations, appearing now to this man and now to that." (Daniélov, 138.) Clearly the breaking of bread was an important symbol. Although it was a ritual performed at a Jewish meal, the words of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of me," made the action important to the Christian. As Jews, they would have automatically performed the rite, but since Christ mentioned the action, he placed emphasis on the second half of the command, "in remembrance of me." (Dix, 56.)

148 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 8.
of Jerusalem prefigures the Last Supper. The Eucharist itself is a commemoration of that meal. In this way the fresco instructs the viewer of the types for the Eucharist during the life of Christ.

The location of the Fractio Panis is in burial chamber, and its funerary significance is clear. The Last Supper celebrates the sacrificial nature of Christ. The disciples eat his body and blood allegorically, but soon he will give them, actually, as a sacrifice for all mankind. Through this sacrifice, men may achieve eternal life; they are forgiven. It was this promise which was seen by the believer in the Fractio Panis.

Even the baskets of bread on either side of the table echo this theme. There are seven, divided four and three. "Four" symbolized the earth to the ancients: the four seasons, four corners of the earth, four winds, four elements, and so on. "Three" symbolized the holy: the three natures of Christ and the trinity. "Seven" therefore was the perfect number, symbolizing the union of heaven and earth. It is the sacrifice of Christ which allowed man to achieve union with God.

"Seven" was the number which represented the epochs of man, the days of the week, the eighth day was the day of eternity, but all through Revelations, which describes the day of Judgment, the number

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149 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 10.


151 Daniélou, The Bible, 262.
"seven" echoes

Revelations 5:4.
Then I saw in the right hand of the One who sat on the throne a scroll, with writing inside and out, and it was sealed up with seven seals.

and

Revelations 5:6.
Then I saw standing in the very middle of the throne, inside the circle of living creatures and the circle of elders, a Lamb with the marks of the slaughter upon him. He had seven horns and seven eyes, the eyes are the seven spirits of God sent out all over the world.

In fact in this book even the numbers "four" and "three" recur: four living creatures, four horsemen, three phases for the burning of earth. Even the color that the fresco is painted on reminds the viewer of the coming sacrifice (or that which has already occurred). The base is Pompeian red, red symbolizes wine and blood. A passage from Isaiah clearly shows this association:

Isaiah 63:1-3.
"Who is this coming from Edom, coming from Bozrah, his garments stained red? . . . Why is your clothing all red, like the garments of one who treads the grapes in the vat? I have trodden the winepress alone; no man, no nation was with me. I trod them down in my rage, I trampled them in my fury; and their life-blood spurted over my garments . . .

Red was also associated with the passion.

The Eucharist, from the first, symbolized the repast beyond the tomb; Jesus, himself establishes this precedence in Luke 22:30.
You are the men who have stood by me in times of trial; and now I vest in you the kingship which my father has vested in me; you shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom . . .

In the Cappella Greca, the Fractio Panis may also represent actual Eucharistic celebrations held there in honor of the dead. By the third century, services were held in honor of the dead in or above the catacombs.152 Graffiti from the catacomb of S. Sebastiano recall this function:

DALMATIUS
BOTUM IS PROMISIT
REFRIGERIUM

and

AT PAULO
ET PETRO
REFRI(geravi)153

Pagan Roman funerals often included a banquet in honor of the dead. Descriptions of Roman tombs often mention areas in which this banquet was held: cenaculae and tabernae and also sources of water: piscinae and putei.154 In one room of the tomb of Titus Terentius Felix, shells were found indicating meals were eaten there.155 In the Isola Sacra a

153 Marucchi, Le Catacombe, 262.
154 Toynbee, 97.
155 Toynbee, 115.
kitchen was found in Tomb number 11 and water supply in numbers 16, 34, 47, and 75.\textsuperscript{156} It has been postulated (p. 12) that the Cappella Greca served as a funerary chapel, where the refrigerium was held. Not the raucous banquet of the pagan funeral\textsuperscript{157} but the joyful celebration of the death of a believer, who has been born to new life.\textsuperscript{158} The chapel was large enough, it has a bench for sitting, there was a water supply nearby, and there was pagan precedence particularly among the upper class, and some middle class, for the presence of this sort of a chapel or room within the burial area.

The symbol of the Fractio Panis is a complex one, representing all the complex symbolism of the Eucharist: sacrifice, salvation, redemption, the miraculous repast, the end of Jesus' mission on earth. It, like the Epiphany, embodies the entire Christological cycle. Perhaps the Fractio Panis in the Cappella Greca also represents that celebration which was held in the chapel, the refrigerium for the dead.

\textsuperscript{156}Toynbee, 135.

\textsuperscript{157}Richardson, "Foundations," 18.

\textsuperscript{158}Both Richardson ("Foundations," 18) and Toynbee (240) agree that this is a possibility.
THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE CAPPELLA GRECA: THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE FRESCOES

The walls and ceiling of the Cappella Greca are elaborately decorated. The scheme behind this decoration has long been a matter of dispute. Initially, in *Fractio Panis*, Wilpert outlined an elaborate iconographical scheme of location based on that postulated for the Chapels of the Sacraments in the Cemetery of Callisto. In the main room, the naos, were the Baptismal themes of the Paralytic and Moses, and a postulated Baptism, in the central rondel of the ceiling. The Epiphany represents a transitional element expressing faith in the Incarnation. In the sanctuary are the representations of the Eucharist: the Fractio Panis, Daniel (a reference to the miraculous repast brought by Habbakuk), Abraham (a reference to the suffering Christ) and Lazarus, (since according to John 6:55, life eternal and the Eucharist are inseparable). Wilpert does not explain the location of the other stories. Noah and the Four Seasons, referring to the resurrection, appear on a wall in the sanctuary and on the naos ceiling, respectively. The Three Hebrews and Susanna representing the prayer for those persecuted in the name of the Church are in the naos with the baptism themes. The orants on the sanctuary ceiling are the souls of the dead reunited with the Saints, not a Eucharistic theme.

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159 Wilpert, *Fractio Panis*, 62.
It is unreasonable to assume that part of the chapel was carefully planned and the rest, including the dominant motif of Susanna, were randomly placed. There is no explanation for the importance of Susanna, a motif occurring rarely in the catacombs. There is only one other definite occurrence before the Peace of Constantine in the cemetery of Callisto. Nor does it explain why there are two symbols of resurrection in the sanctuary, Lazarus and Noah, and two in the nave, the Four Seasons and the Phoenix. In order to explain the sanctuary frescoes as Eucharistic motifs, Wilpert must make numerous assumptions. First, that the Daniel necessarily is associated with the miraculous repast; second, that the suffering Christ seen in Isaac is a reference to the Eucharist and that the Lazarus refers more directly to the Eucharist than to the Resurrection. Not all these assumptions are necessarily unwarranted, but that the viewer was expected to make all of them, seems unlikely. Wilpert's error was methodological. He tried to make the data fit a preconceived theory. He assumed that the underlying themes and plans for any cemeterial chapels had to be the same, i.e., that the iconography of the Cappella Greca was the same as that for the Chapels of the Sacraments, an idea which is completely unsupported. The styles are dissimilar, the architecture is dissimilar, and the motifs are dissimilar. While there are some motifs which overlap, Jonah appears prominently in the Chapel of the Sacraments, while there is no evidence of a Jonah occurring in the Cappella Greca.  

160 Wilpert, Le Pittura, 1, 504-5.
gravediggers (Chapel A4) or a baptism scene (Chapel A2), whereas
Susanna, the Three Hebrews, and the Phoenix do not appear in the Chapels
of the Sacraments.

Le Blant and Cabrol-LeClerq suggest that the themes represented were parts of the Commendatio Animae. Although the earliest
written Commendatio is from the Sacramentary of Reichenau (eighth -
ninth century), similar prayers were found as early as the fourth cen-
tury in the Apostolic Constitutions (v,7). Earlier still are the
prayers for the Jewish fast days which begin, "Save me as you saved . . ." This theory is possible. However, it does not explain
the location of the paintings on the walls, forcing one to believe that
the frescoes were randomly distributed.

Another objection to LeBlant's theory is the presence of the
Fractio Panis and Epiphany which perhaps refer to means of achieving
Christian salvation but are not mentioned in the Commendatio. He may
dismiss the ceilings and the decorative head over the door as pure
decoration, but the Phoenix, a well-known pagan symbol, requires

_163_ Cabrol-LeClerq, 4, 435.

_164_ Du Bourguet, _Art_, 56, citing Goujoud, "Etude sur les Ordine

_165_ "He who raised Lazarus on the Fourth day, who raised
the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow, and rose also Himself;
who after three days brought forth Jonah living and unharmed from the
belly of the whale, and the Three Children from the furnace of Babylon,
and Daniel from the mouths of lions shall not lack power to raise us
also . . .", Lowrie, 42.

_166_ Du Bourguet, _Art_, 56.
explanation. LeBlant's theory is at best deficient. Many of the motifs clearly refer to divine salvation which, certainly, is a theme of the chapel, but there must be further explanation for the rest of the motifs, for their locations, and to their symbolic relationships.

Styger suggests an historical basis for the frescoes, reasoning that since the same motifs appear both in funerary and non-funerary monuments then they do not have necessarily a funerary significance even in a funerary monument that their meaning is purely narrational. To ignore the double meaning of the parable, however, is to deny the basis for Christian thought. The Gospels and Acts all refer to Christ and his disciples speaking in parables (see above under Moses). Furthermore, in the Cappella Greca the precise reference of the frescoes is ambiguous (Fractio Panis, Paralytic, Susanna C) further implying that historical significance was not of prime importance. The Fractio Panis is inexplicable in biblical terms, although it could represent an actual historical meal. The double representation seen in the Paralytic can not be explained nor can Susanna C. Styger does not discuss the ceilings, Phoenix, or locations.

Du Bourguet and Martimort suggest that catacomb paintings show the stories learned in the Christian catechism. However, of the stories mentioned in Tertullian's De Baptismo, David and Goliath, Adam and Eve, and the Woman of Samaria are not found in the Cappella Greca.

167 Styger, 135.

168 Du Bourguet, Art, 56.
And many of the stories from the Cappella Greca are not mentioned in De Baptismo: Susanna, Noah, Abraham, Daniel, the Epiphany, and the Fractio Panis. Further, this explanation makes no mention of the location of the frescoes or their relationships to each other.

All the above theories assume that all decorated catacomb chambers represent the same thought, a catechism, a rite for the dead, etc. There is no reason to make this assumption. Christian sermons in antiquity as today were not on the same topic, not in the Gospels, in the Acts, in the Pauline letters, nor in the writings of the early Christian fathers. Nor is any Christian burial the same. They man follow a set pattern, but there is some variation, usually in the use of quotations which have particular applicability to the deceased. In the third century dogma and ritual had not even been standardized. Constantinian basilicas were not the same in plan, decoration, or dedication. There is thus no literary or visual evidence that chambers were dedicated or decorated following the same scheme. Looking at the catacombs roughly contemporaneous with the Cappella Greca, few of the motifs are duplicated. Later, some of the motifs are used, some are even repeated in the same relationships, but the set found in the Cappella Greca are never repeated in toto.

Secondly, with the exception of Wilpert's interpretation, all the above theories assume that the motifs were placed on the wall randomly, or if there was a scheme it is impossible to decipher it without

169 Du Bourguet, Art, 56.
written assistance. Christian burial chambers were entirely too important to be randomly constructed. The Cappella Greca itself gives the appearance of being carefully planned: in its cruciform plan, with stucco under all the arches, in the false marble dado. Cabrol-LeClerq suggest that Wilpert's theory is a little contrived and that while the individual motifs may have a particular meaning to presuppose a careful layout without written proof is perhaps expecting too much from the primitive church. The problem with this mode of thinking is that the primitive church was anything but primitive. A further study of the writings of early Christian fathers and the Pauline letters should be enough to convince anyone that the theology being discussed at the time of the Cappella Greca was anything but simplistic. The construction of these early writings is not random and there is no reason to assume that early Christians could construct a complex sermon, but not a chapel. If the owners of this chapel were originally pagan, and probably educated to the point of reading some Greek, and wealthy, then they cannot be classed with the poor and naive believer. The Roman of the third century can be classed as anything but naive. If there was a design to the arrangement, it would have been decipherable to the worshipper, therefore it should be at least partially understandable to the twentieth century observer, although he would be somewhat handicapped by the lapse of time.

As Wilpert recognized, most of the themes represented involve salvation themes. In Moses, the Three Hebrews, Susanna, Lazarus, Daniel, Cabrol-LeClerq, 2, 2100.
Abraham, and Noah, a life or lives are saved by the hand of God. However, the main arch representations, the Fractio Panis and the Epiphany, as well as the Paralytic and the Phoenix and presumably the ceiling representation, are not life-salvation themes. The Paralytic involves a form of salvation (the forgiveness of sin), the Fractio Panis involves the route to salvation, the Epiphany shows the birth of He who was to save mankind, but all involve a different perspective on the subject of salvation than does Susanna. Certainly the Fractio Panis and the Epiphany do not fit into the Commendatio Animae scheme of "Save me as you saved . . ." The Phoenix does not fit into the cycle of the Commendatio Animae at all. Although in some Christian art it was used to represent the Christ, this motif is never in the form of a Phoenix in flames but is a triumphant Phoenix already risen, symbolizing resurrection. Testini considers the Phoenix in the Cappella Greca a comment on the transitory nature of life. This point of view is not a common interpretation of the symbol, but then this representation is not the common symbol either. Hagel sees the Phoenix as "eternally preparing itself for the funeral pile."

Thus the unifying scheme of the chapel has not yet been satisfactorily explained. The scheme was at one time understood by the viewer without a written explanation, therefore, it should be possible to determine that scheme by studying the motifs themselves and

171 Testini, Le Catacombe, 115.
postulating the meaning and their interrelationships. The meanings derived would need to be compatible with Christian thought of the second and third century as written in the New Testament, the Apocrypha known at that time, and the writings of the early Christian fathers, particularly those who were known to have worked in Rome.

The Cappella Greca itself suggests to the viewer that the position of the paintings was meaningful. The initial view of the chapel from the entry door is of the two major arches, displaying the Epiphany and the Fractio Panis (Fig. 3). These are visual references to the beginning and the end of Jesus' life on earth. The Epiphany represents the Incarnation, the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah. The Fractio Panis takes place in commemoration of the Last Supper, and symbolizes the Passion of Christ and the subsequent promise of salvation of mankind and of resurrection. While the Epiphany and Fractio Panis are both incarnation-redemption images (incarnation because they both require the manhood of God), the former represents the culmination of the Jewish prophecies, the latter refers to the part of Christianity which so distinguishes it from Judaism. This is not an unexpected thought coming from (a) Christians who felt that they must defend themselves from the Jews as well as the pagans and (b) Pagan-Christians who undoubtedly were made to feel their non-Jewishness. The differentiation of the Christian from the Jew is emphasized later in the chapel.

The two symbols together, the Epiphany and the Fractio Panis, have even greater meaning for the Christian. After the fourth century the Epiphany was often associated with the Eucharist. In fresco and mosaic, the Magi are shown carrying food, as priests, initiating the Eucharist (Fig. 38). The Christ child is often shown lying on an altar (Fig. 39) identifying Him with the bread and wine. Similarly, Eucharistic scenes often include references to the Magi. In San Vitale in Ravenna, Theodora is shown with the Adoration on the border of her dress.

But the Magi in the Cappella Greca do not carry food. The Christ child sits on his mother's lap, not on an altar. In short, the Epiphany in the Cappella Greca has no Eucharistic significance alone. But from the entrance door (Fig. 3) the two scenes appear juxtaposed, a juxtaposition which rarely occurs later, not because it was not accepted, but because it was so important and so intimate that the two scenes were integrated. As early as Anathasius, the Child was associated with the bread of life; the Magi are the prototypes for the congregation which receives that bread. In the Eastern liturgy, during the Transubstantiation, a "star of Bethlehem" is held over the bread. The juxtaposition of the Epiphany over the Fractio Panis in the Cappella Greca


175 Nilgen, 311.

176 Nilgen, 312.
Fig. 38. The Adoration of the Magi, S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna.

From Volbach-Hirmer, pl. 153.

Fig. 39. Sarcophagus in the Crypt of S. Massimo.

This figure shows Christ on an Altar-manger. (From Wilpert, I Sarcofagi, 1 (plates), pl. 39 [2]).
may then be a prototype of, or transition to, the symbolism where the
two are united.

The juxtaposed Fractio Panis and Epiphany may also be seen as
the beginning and end of Jesus' life on earth. They recall Revelations
21:6:

I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end, to the
thirsty I will give from the fountain
of the water of life without payment.

Even the colors on which the scenes are painted serve to unite the two.
The Epiphany, which celebrates the Incarnation of God as man, or His
Incorporation, represents the body and thus the bread, which was white,
is on a white base. The Fractio Panis, on red base, represents the
Passion and the wine, traditionally red, of the Eucharist. Together
they symbolize the Eucharistic elements and the sacrifice.

The juxtaposition of the Epiphany with the Fractio Panis
presents a statement of Christian dogma of Jesus as the Alpha and Omega,
a representation of the Christological cycle and Jesus as the Eucharis-
tic "Bread of Life."177 This juxtaposition serves to unite the two sec-
tions of the chapel. The bench along the left wall, where celebrants
would have been seated if the ceremony were actually performed here,
also unites the two rooms. Even the colors of the bases refer to the
Eucharistic bread and wine.

177 Davisson, 92.
Standing in the sanctuary, facing the entry, Lazarus and Moses are visible on the main arches. Although their relationship is not so obvious, these two stories are often juxtaposed in catacomb paintings and in early sarcophagi. For instance, they often appear at the ends of a sarcophagus panel (Fig. 37) on two facing walls or in parallel positions on a wall (Fig. 40). The two, in their most common representations, are easily used compositionally as ends, since they involve a solid mass at one side which serves as a stable end element. If these masses are placed back to back, a stable pyramidal composition is formed. In the Cappella Greca, Moses and Lazarus are not in these special positions but over two successive archways, so they were not juxtaposed merely as a compositional device.

Early Christians seemed to have seen, therefore, some special meaning in the arrangement. Schiller claims they are linked by the baptismal function leading to resurrection, but does not reference the origin of this type of thinking. Lazarus most commonly was associated with the resurrection; Moses in its baptismal function represents the entry of the soul into paradise and, therefore, the prospect of eternal life. The rock has even been identified with the source of the rivers of paradise. This recalls another of the linking statements from the writer John:

I am the resurrection and the life,
he who believes in me, though he die,
yet shall he live.

178 Schiller, 181.
179 Schiller, 131.
Fig. 40. Cubiculum in the Cemetery of Peter and Marcellinus showing Moses and Lazarus in parallel positions.

From Wilpert, Le Pittura, pl. 108.
This explanation involves only a slight change in emphasis and provides an iconography more compatible with a funerary chapel, and also with the direction in which the viewer would be moving and with his natural tendency to read downward.

In the New Testament, typi from the Old Testament were frequently used for illustrative purposes. For example, in Peter 3:30 (see above p. 71), Peter describes Noah in the Ark as the typos for baptism. Justin Martyr (see above p. 72) describes Noah as the prefiguration for the Resurrection. The use of juxtaposed images was also common. On ancient coins obverse and reverse were often related; a cup by the Brygos painter shows revelry on the exterior and the aftermath on the interior.

Since the Cappella Greca falls within the antique tradition stylistically, it is not unreasonable to assume that the thought behind it also falls within this tradition. Some of the juxtapositions postulated for the chapel were repeated, even into the period after the fall of the empire (Moses and Lazarus, the Three Hebrews with the Epiphany, see below). Another pair were synthesized into one image (the Fractio Panis with the Epiphany).

The archways in the Cappella Greca serve to unite the two major divisions of the chapel. They also serve as and are read as a

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directional guide. The Epiphany leads to the Fractio Panis and draws the celebrant into the sanctuary. The Lazarus (resurrection) leads to eternal life and Paradise (Moses) and thus leads the celebrant out of the sanctuary and presumably out of the chapel.

Within the rooms, the motifs interrelate to form a coherent scheme. A diagram of the nave (Fig. 7) shows that the motifs are not symmetrically arranged even though the separate motifs sometimes contained elements which seem to have been placed there for the sake of symmetry. Presumably then there was some reason for the placement of the motifs, over and above an aesthetic one.

The themes at the ends of the nave are juxtaposed theologically as well as physically. As discussed above, Moses may be seen as a prototype for Christ; the striking of the rock may be a typos for the founding of the church with Peter. This story is therefore intimately related to the Incarnation in that the former refers to the establishment of God as man, or the word as flesh, the latter as the establishment of the instrument of propagation of the word on earth. Using the reverse interpretation of the Moses-Peter symbol, that Peter is striking the rock that is Christ from whom the eternal life flows, the juxtaposition is equally striking. The Epiphany, representing the birth of Jesus to his mortal life, is juxtaposed to the Moses, representing the instrument for man's birth into eternal life.

Similarly, the Three Hebrews are often considered the typos for the three Magi and were sometimes confused with them.182 This is

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182 Lowrie, 63.
illustrated in the sarcophagi which show the Three Hebrews with Nebuchadnezzar and the idol, then in the furnace, and the worshipping of the newborn child (Fig. 27). The word "Magus" had a greater meaning to the Roman of the second century than "wise man."\(^{183}\) Although he may have been a wise man, he was also a priest of Mazda, a Persian religion which by that time had absorbed much Babylonian philosophy (including worship of an almighty god).\(^{184}\) Since Nebuchadnezzar persecuted the Three Hebrews in Babylon, the medieval mind has therefore linked the two. Thus the two scenes in the Cappella Greca were later linked into a narrative sequence.

Theologically, the Magi are seen as worshipping and recognizing the true God, though he is not of their own faith, while the Three Hebrews are seen refusing to worship false gods.

The Story of Susanna is a cyclical narrative which probably refers to the character of those buried within the chapel. The appearance of a narrative sequence, which is portrayed as a cycle, is extremely rare in the catacombs. Only the Story of Jonah is usually broken into three scenes. However, Jonah is never seen to dominate a chapel as Susanna does the Cappella Greca. The three episodes on the chapel wall

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\(^{183}\) There are many interpretations of the word "magus," (A. E. Harvey, The New English Bible: Companion to the New Testament, Oxford and Cambridge, 1970, 20). That the artist dresses his Magi in Phrygian dress, tends to substantiate the association with the Persian magus. In the second and third century, Mithraism was popular in Rome and priests of Mithra, also from Persia, may have been the source of the dress.

\(^{184}\) Cumont, Oriental Religions, 144.
are linked together, not reading left to right as in a book but cyclically, repeating the cyclical nature of life theme on the ceiling:

**Accusation** (Susanna B)  

![Diagram](image)

**Garden Scene** (Susanna A)

**Daniel and Susanna Orant** (Susanna C)

The *Story of Susanna* refers primarily to salvation, but it also refers to the virtuous life led by Susanna, and to the religious, studious Daniel, thereby emphasizing the life a virtuous person was supposed to lead.

The *Cappella Greca* has no *imago clipeata* or portrait of the deceased. Many chambers in the catacombs show the deceased as orant (Fig. 41). Sometimes, they are being led into Paradise (Veneranda, Cemetery of Domitilla, Fig. 34), so it is likely that in the *Cappella Greca*, the *Story of Susanna* represents a similar reference. The only names associated with this chapel are Palladio and Nestoriane, who could correspond to Daniel and Susanna (see p. 55). This may, of course, be a coincidence. However, it is a striking one.

The significance of the *Epiphany* over the main arch becomes clearer in respect to Nestoriane and Palladio. Nestoriane and Palladio are Gentile names; the people associated with the chapel spoke or at least wrote Greek. The *Story of Susanna* was in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible, and not in the Hebrew version.
Fig. 41. **Crypt of the Five Saints**, Cemetery of Callisto, Detail.

From Du Bourguet, *Painting*, pl. 7.
Furthermore, the Cemetery of Priscilla has largely been associated with the Glabriones (even though the two hypogea were not connected at the time, the area is one of patrician country houses), a Gentile patrician family. It seems more than reasonable that the founders of the Cappella Greca were Gentile. The Epiphany was seen as the conversion of and the acceptance by the Gentiles, and thus would have special importance to a Gentile-Christian.

The Paralytic appears above the Garden Scene in Susanna. There is room for figural decoration in other portions of the ceiling, however, no evidence of other motifs have been found, so the Paralytic must in some way relate to the Garden Scene. Susanna says that in the period under the law, punishment for sins was harsh, the Paralytic, under grace, sins were forgiven. The Paralytic above Susanna emphasizes that although one tries to lead a virtuous life, even if he fails, through Christ, the believer's sins will be forgiven.

It is possible that the Paralytic was placed in this position for a purely practical reason as well. When one stands in the naos the symbols on the end walls (Epiphany, Moses, Three Hebrews) and side walls (Susanna and the Phoenix) are easily visible. But to see the ceiling one must consciously look up to the side. However, sitting on the bench, the Paralytic is directly in front of the viewer if he raises his eyes at all. This is not true of the other axial divisions of the ceiling, and they show no sign of figural decoration. This postulate must not be carried too far as the ceiling is decorated and had a central rondel which probably would have been figured. The sanctuary
decorations are all above eye level. However, placement of the Paralytic over Susanna in a place where it could be contemplated by a seated viewer explains at least the apparent asymmetry in the chapel.

Thus all the major motifs in the nave are linked iconographically: Moses and the Three Hebrews with the Epiphany, the Susanna Cycle and the Susanna A with the Paralytic and with the Epiphany. Many of the others may be associated through their references to the physical aspects of the world and of death. On the entry wall, Moses and the Three Hebrews involve the elements water and fire, respectively. These elements are repeated on the right hand wall in the Phoenix and the Paralytic. The two elements are mentioned together by John the Baptist when he says:

Matthew 3:11.
I baptize you with water for repentence, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I . . . , he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and the fire.

Fire and water were also the elements used for purification after interment and before the banquet in Roman funerals. The Stoics believed that the myth of Phaeton showed the union of fire and water, which were the primal elements which dominated at the end of each cosmic period.

The physical world is suggested by the placement of the Epiphany opposite the Three Hebrews and Moses. The Epiphany represents

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185 Toynbee, 50, citing Cicero, De Legibus.
186 Cumont, Récherches, 17.
the incarnation of God as man, the incorporation, referring thus to the human nature of Christ. Man from earliest times has been considered to be dust:

Genesis 3:19.
In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Earth was the third of the four basic elements of the ancients. Air, the fourth, may be found in the *Seasons*, not only by the direct association but also by their transient nature. So vertically, the nave is united by themes of the four elements, symbolizing the world. 187

It is interesting that water and earth occur on the same level, air is above and fire is below, which is actually true of their physical existence. The ancients also believed in the air or heavens being above (the emperors when deified go to the stars). 188 The idea of fires burning in the depths of hell is as old as Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 32:22.
For fire is kindled by my anger, it burns to the depths of Sheol.

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188 [Cumont, *Recherches*, 373.](#)
In pagan Rome of the fourth century, the elements were worshipped.\(^{189}\) The importance of these elements in Roman paganism was brought about by the influx of oriental religions primarily those of Mazda, Zoroaster, and Chaldea. Both oriental and pagan religions would have had a profound influence of Christianity and early Christians, particularly pagan converts. The third century writers of both religions are similar and often seem to be reacting to each other, trying to find common ground.\(^{190}\)

The nave may be seen as the earthly existence preparation for death. The elements refer to the known world; fire and water to purification during the funeral rite. The Susanna cycle is a reference to the virtuous life and possibly refers to the lives of those buried within the chapel. The Paralytic refers to physical and spiritual healing and possibly baptism. The Phoenix in Flames and the Seasons refer to the transitory and cyclical nature of life and also the only promise of resurrection known by most pagans. Most important, the Epiphany proclaims the Incarnation of God as man.

The juxtaposed images further elaborate on these themes. The Three Hebrews and Moses serve as typi for the Epiphany. The Paralytic above Susanna A exphasizes that, under grace, the believer's sins are forgiven. Thus the nave is tied together.

As discussed above, the juxtaposed images of the Epiphany and the Fractio Panis link the naos to the sanctuary. It is fitting that

\(^{189}\) Cumont, Oriental Religions, 206.

\(^{190}\) Richmond, 48.
the Epiphany is over the entrance to the sanctuary since it is with the Incarnation that the cycle of Christian salvation begins and the sanctuary is a sermon on Christian salvation.

The entire sanctuary is painted on base red, which was a popular base with the Romans, but in the dark catacombs, it was rarely feasible to use it. However, as Wilpert points out, there was a light shaft which opened into the chapel's sanctuary which allowed enough light for the use of Pompeian red. Iconographically, the color is suitable as it symbolizes the sacrifice which would have taken place in the sanctuary if, as many experts assume and is postulated here, the Fractio Panis were celebrated here. Or if Niche II holds the grave of a martyr, as Wilpert suggests, then the color of the room may signify the sacrifice which the martyr has offered.

The arrangement of the nave is:

Fractio Panis
Abraham Daniel
Noah
Lazarus

On the minor axis are Daniel and Abraham. These represent salvation before and after the law but before grace. Daniel was willing to sacrifice his own life rather than worship false gods. Abraham was willing

191 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 20.
192 Wilpert, Fractio Panis, 17.
to sacrifice his son in order to worship the true God. And because they were willing to risk death, they were saved.

On the major axis is a statement of Christian salvation. The Fractio Panis clearly refers to the Eucharist, the sacrament through which the believer might achieve salvation and resurrection, seen in Lazarus, opposite. The Fractio Panis also refers to Christ's passion and sacrifice. Lazarus is the typos for Christ's resurrection and is also proof of Christ's ability to conquer death and a reference to John 11:25:

John 11:25.
If a man have faith in me, even though he die, he shall come to life; and no one who has faith shall ever die.

Therefore, the believer no longer has to make the sacrifice offered by Abraham and Daniel, for through his belief and the sacrifice of Jesus, commemorated by the Fractio Panis, he is saved.

The Noah occurs on the wall with Lazarus and a little below it. This is usually a reference to baptism, and possibly refers to the necessity of being baptised, as well as the celebration of the Eucharist for salvation. 193

The iconography of the Cappella Greca is a statement of Christian belief. In the nave, the frescoes reflect on Christian life and death and promises of resurrection and salvation. The juxtaposition of Fractio Panis and Epiphany refers to the life of Christ, the Alpha and Omega and to the whole Incarnation-Salvation cycle, to the

It also serves as a subtle reminder of the fate of the wicked, unrepentent, and unbaptised.
Incarnation and the passion, the whole basis for Christian belief. The sanctuary elaborates further on salvation through sacrifice, contrasting the periods before and after grace.

As the believer leaves the chapel he sees first Lazarus then Moses, a final juxtaposition of resurrection and paradise, and a reference to John 10:25:

John 10:25.
I am the Resurrection and I am life,
if a man have faith in me even though he die,
he shall come to life . . .
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