

# Dancing Muses?

*Elisabet Frieslander*

*Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University*

Several relief sculptures and fragments of statues of the Hellenistic and Roman period have traditionally been identified as “Dancing Muses”, mainly on the basis of their movement motif and the composition of their mantle folds. However, I would like to contend that this interpretation does not always fit the iconographic content of some of these works of art, and would like to suggest different interpretative possibilities. Moreover, since examination of the Dancing Muse figures discloses significant dissimilarities between the various depictions, I believe that different archetypes were used to create these figures, rather than a specific and well-defined type.

The dancing aspect of the Muses is explicitly stated by Hesiod, in a celebrated hymn to the Muses, which prefaces the *Theogony*:

From the Heliconian Muses let us begin to sing  
who hold the great and holy mount of Helicon, and  
dance on soft feet about the deep-blue spring and  
the altar of the almighty son of Cronos, and, when  
they have washed their tender bodies in Permessus,  
or in the Horse’s Spring of Olmeius, make their fair,  
lovely dances upon highest Helicon and move with  
vigorous feet.<sup>1</sup>

This hymn is remarkable for several reasons: it introduces a new concept, the “Heliconian Muses”, unheard of before Hesiod; and it describes their character, the place and the preparations (the bathing) performed for their activities.<sup>2</sup> Although the denomination “Heliconian Muses” refers to the main

reverence site of the Muses at Helicon in Boiotia, these are actually the same Homeric Muses who inhabit Olympus.<sup>3</sup>

The cult activity seems to have been of a simple, rustic nature until the beginning of the fourth century BCE.<sup>4</sup> In the Hellenistic period, the cult of the Muses expanded and they were allotted new functions and attributes. Thus, it is not surprising that Ptolemy I founded the famous Alexandrian library in their honor, and also established poetic competitions dedicated to Apollo and the Muses.<sup>5</sup> Due to their close association with Nature, especially with mountains and water sources, the meaning and characteristics of the Muses are very similar to those of the Nymphs and *Charites*, to the extent that in several instances it is difficult to distinguish amongst them. In early visual portrayals, the Muses are depicted as a varying number of feminine figures of similar appearance who follow Dionysos, Apollo or Athena, and lack any characteristic traits or attributes. This "negative type" makes their identification in early works of art uncertain, and based mainly on the inscriptions which accompany the figures.<sup>6</sup> Discrepancies also appear in the number of Muses, which is certainly related to the lack of consistency in ancient literary sources. While Homer addresses only one Muse in the famous lines which open his *Epics*, later on he invokes the Muses as a collective *chorus*, and even mentions their number as nine.<sup>7</sup> Hesiod's description is more precise and details the genealogy, number and names of the Muses: 'nine daughters begotten by great Zeus, *Cleio* and *Euterpe*, *Thaleia*, *Melponene* and *Terpsichore*, and *Erato* and *Polhymnia* and *Urania*; also *Calliope*'.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to their nature and functions, both sources refer to the Muses in an abstract, philosophical manner: they embody a wide scope of cultural and intellectual abilities, such as singing and dancing, memory and prophetic inspiration, eloquence and persuasion. Though their personal names suggest an idiosyncratic, individual approach, they in fact formed an impersonal *chorus* and were not assigned specific roles or attributes. This fact undoubtedly influenced their representation in the visual arts. Only after a long and slow development, did different artistic types and corresponding attributes gradually emerge.<sup>9</sup>

Hesiod's fifth Muse is called *Terpsichore*, i.e. 'she that delights in the dance'.<sup>10</sup> Pindar also mentions her, with emphasis on her attractive, sweet singing.<sup>11</sup> One century later, she is noted by Plato as connected to the dancing *chorus*<sup>12</sup> as well as by a series of ancient authors who mainly refer to her genealogy.<sup>13</sup> Her functions and attributes - as is the case regarding all Muses in the early period - are generic, undefined and circumstantial, and thus differ from one example to another. Though the depiction of *Terpsichore* on painted vases is most popular,

her iconography does not specifically reflect her dancing any more than her musical occupation or her association with Apollo or Dionysos.

Accordingly, *Terpsichore* is often depicted playing different musical instruments - such as the *auloi*, *trigonon*, harp or lyre, or standing without any attributes - or even holding a *thyrsos*. This last attribute may be understood in the light of the legendary association of the Muses with Dionysos, who (according to Plutarch) is also the god of 'moist nature'.<sup>14</sup>

A black-figured *lekythos* in the Louvre Museum<sup>15</sup> illustrates both the lack of differentiation amongst the Muses themselves, and the difficulty involved in creating specific types and scenes of Muses. We see Apollo, dressed in a *chiton* and a mantle, holding in his hands a *kithara* and *plektron*. Four Dancing Muses advance towards him, three of them holding *krotala* in their raised hands, and one of them a lyre. In addition to the identifying inscriptions, there are minor differences in each figure, whose clear purpose is to diversify the motif of the Dancing Muse rather than to create individuality. If we compare the Dancing Muses of the above mentioned *lekythos* with a black-figured *hydria* at Hamburg that depicts a Dionysiac scene,<sup>16</sup> we see that the main difference lies in the context. The scene of the Muses is defined by their dancing for Apollo, whereas the scene of the *Maenads* is built around Dionysos. Nevertheless, the *Maenads* can be easily identified by their ivy-crowned heads and typical gestures, while the Dancing Muses perform occasional movements which are not peculiar only to them.

This lack of a clear iconographic formula in the depiction of a Dancing Muse can also be observed in the sculptural media, as far as I can conclude from the few extant and partly damaged sculptured cycles of Muses, and some fragmented *torsoi*. What are the reasons for this phenomenon? As mentioned above, the written tradition, as embodied mainly by Hesiod, stresses already in the first lines of the *Theogony* the dancing aspect of the Muses, and describes very vividly its different steps and character. At first the Muses dance around the spring and altar, and then on the mountain, seemingly in a choral, circular dance of the type well known from many descriptions.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, however, I know of only one example in Hellenistic sculpture (to be discussed in detail below) which reflects very closely Hesiod's description. Even if we take into account the probability that similar works of art were made but did not survive, it is clear from the later iconographic tradition (as depicted on many Roman sarcophagi) that Muses were only occasionally represented performing dancing movements.

On the other hand, we see that from early on it was the musical and poetical aspects of the Muses which were the more emphasized. This fact can be

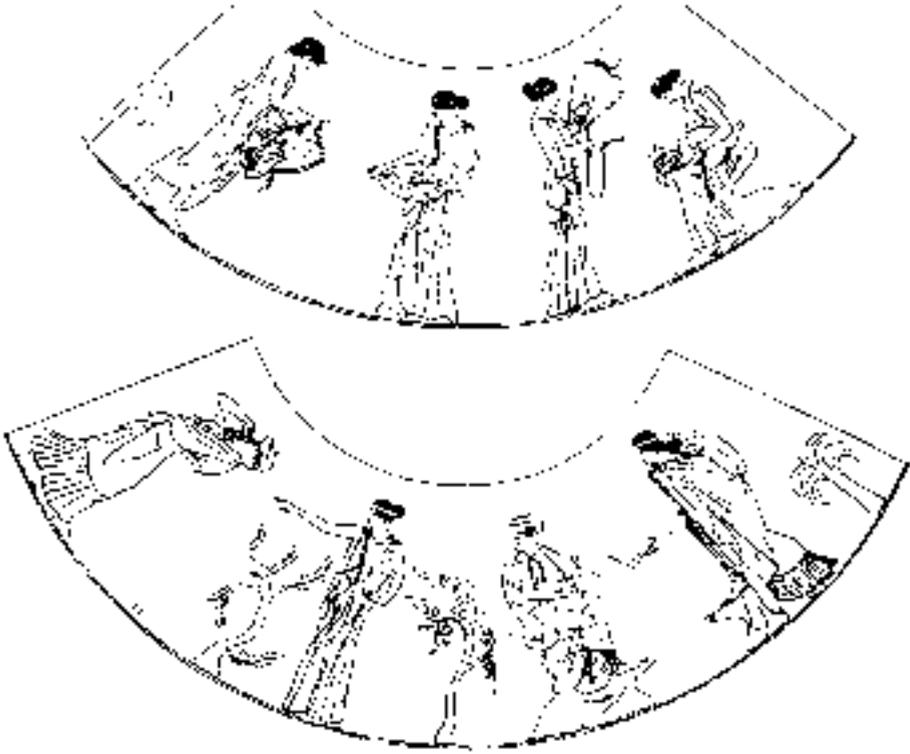


Fig. 1: *Apollo and the Muses*, Red-figured *hydria*, Berlin (after Daremberg-Saglio, III, Fig. 5207).

explained both by the complexity of the meaning of the concept “Muse”<sup>18</sup> and by the Greek choral tradition which stressed the close link among recitation, music and dancing.

An illustration to this line of thought can be found on a red-figured *hydria* from Vulci, which depicts Apollo *Kitharoedos* in the company of seven Muses (Fig.1).<sup>19</sup> The figures are paired in four groups: on the left side Apollo, wearing a laurel crown, is holding his *kithara* and facing a standing Muse who is reading an open papyrus. Facing him on the opposite side, another Muse is holding a *barbiton*, with yet another Muse playing the *kithara* whilst sitting on a rock. The other side of the painted frieze depicts on the left side a Dancing Muse, and in front of her a standing girl stretching out her right arm as if reciting. The pair of Muses on the right side comprise another girl sitting on a rock and playing the *auloi*, and a standing Muse who is holding an open writing tablet. The intervals between the figures are decorated with stylized trees that suggest - together with the rocks - the natural environment in which the Muses dwell.

The Dancing Muse does not differ from her companions. She too wears a long *peplos*, which falls in regular, serene folds, and an *himation*, which is pulled across her left shoulder, similar to the other pair of Muses. Her hair is bound up and covered by a *saccos*. She is stepping forwards, her upper body bent down, and her right arm flexed up towards her neck. The feet are naked, and her step is short and performed on the flat sole. Her movement is minimal, closed and very restrained.

This example illustrates the development that took place in depicting the Muses in the fifth century BCE. Each of the figures shown on this vase displays a different posture (mainly standing and sitting) and different attributes, which refer to the sphere of recitation, dancing and music. The pairing of the figures does not reflect any active interaction between them, but merely serves the aesthetic purpose of creating harmony and variation.

Thus, we may conclude that after a long period of gestation, the general type of the Muse emerged, represented as a standing, sitting or reclining draped, female figure, who occasionally is portrayed holding different and varying attributes pertaining to the poetic and musical arts. Whether the Dancing Muse is to be considered as a specific, defined type within this rather loose and collective scheme, is a question I shall attempt to answer below.

### **Reliefs and Statuettes**

Three exceptional marble sculptured plates, discovered at Mantinea and dated to the end of the fourth century BCE,<sup>20</sup> depict the cycle of Apollo in company of the Muses. Though the extant slabs do not include the figure of a Dancing Muse, scholars believe that a fourth relief originally existed, which depicted three additional types of Muses.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the existing figures still provide a great deal of information concerning the development of the different figurations of Muses. The style of the Mantinea Muses, their attitudes and gestures, as well as the treatment of their shapes and drapery, reveal resemblance to well-known Classical works. Since no prototypes of sculptured Muses are known, scholarly opinion is that the Mantinea Muses represent adaptations of a workshop repertoire, which included figures of different kinds. On the basis of these reliefs we may conclude that the difficulty of translating the characteristics of the Muses into visual terms found, at this point in time, a partial solution: their modeling adopted and reflected existing draped statues.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the stances and attributes of the Mantinea Muses reveal that they are mainly depicted as poetical and musical divinities. The relation of one Muse to another, as well as the distribution of the musical and poetical instruments, remains random and non-specific, dictated to a great extent by values related

to composition and aesthetics.

This vagueness and want of clarity of the typology of the Muses would change to some extent in the Hellenistic period as a result of the scholarly attitude to art. The emphasis on erudition and scientific knowledge - characteristic to this age - strove to create a methodic classification of the nine Muses as patrons of a specific *genre*.

This tendency is brilliantly illustrated in my next example: its subject can be easily comprehended on an immediate apparent level<sup>23</sup> but at the same time the work is also to be understood on a learned level, which is far less simple, and in fact remains to be satisfactorily solved. The importance of the relief in question, which is known as "The Apotheosis of Homer" or "The Relief of Archelaos" cannot be sufficiently emphasized, not so much because of its artistic quality but for its uniqueness. In the meager *corpus* of sculptured cycles of Muses of the Hellenistic period, this relief, signed by the sculptor Archelaos, son of Apollonios of Priene, is undoubtedly of great value.<sup>24</sup>

The relief was found in the first half of the 17th century in Italy, and since then has been the subject of much scholarly debate with regard to the iconographic identification of some of the figures, and its origin. Thus, on the one hand a possible connection with Alexandria has been rejected by Fraser,<sup>25</sup> while on the other hand it has been maintained that 'its subject matter is indisputably Alexandrian and suggests that it was made for a poet who had been victorious in some sort of poetic competition at Alexandria'.<sup>26</sup>

The sculpture has also been connected to Rhodes, on the basis of the assumed similarity to the renowned cycle of Apollo and the nine Muses by Philiskos of Rhodes, which is described by Pliny<sup>27</sup> as standing in Rome near the *Porticus Octaviae*. Nevertheless, though a sculptor named Philiskos of Rhodos is known to have worked in about 150 BCE, a painter and a late 2nd century architect also bear the same name. In fact, we have no clear evidence that Pliny's description refers specifically to the famous master of the cycle of the Muses.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the identity of the sculptor of the "Relief of Archelaos", we know only his name: Archelaos, son of Apollonius of Priene, which is inscribed on a tablet in the upper part of the relief. Nothing is known about his activity, and therefore the date of the relief is open to debate. On epigraphic grounds, a dating of about 130-120 BCE is generally accepted, but other scholars maintain that the style of the drapery and the composition of some figures reflect tendencies which had already appeared in the years 225-200 BCE.<sup>29</sup>

The work, which is displayed in the British Museum, depicts different scenes related to the Apotheosis of Homer, taking place against a mountainous background. The depiction of the ceremony is divided into four different,

parallel registers, which are formed by the “natural” elevations and depressions of the rocky surface.

The lower scene presents no problems of identification, since the names of all the participating person (fifteen figures) are inscribed immediately after them. It takes place in a sanctuary, which is suggested by a row of eight high Doric columns concealed by a long, wide curtain, which covers the background. The participants in the ceremony are divided into three groups: on the left side Homer is depicted enthroned - a bearded and venerable old man - holding a scroll in his right hand and a scepter in his left. Behind him two tall figures are crowning him with a wreath. The inscription identifies them as *Chronos* and *Oikumene* but some scholars believe that they portray Ptolemy IV Philopator and his sister-wife Arsinoe III.<sup>30</sup>

Homer's throne is supported by two female kneeling figures, which personify his main creations: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. An allusion to a further poem, the *Batcho-myo-machia* (Battle of Frogs and Mice) can be found in the mouse depicted on the footstool under the throne.

In the center of the scene is a kindled round altar, around which the sacred rites are being performed, and the right side features a crowded group of participants in the procession, who appear as personifications of History, Poetry, Tragedy and Comedy, *Physis*, *Arete*, *Mneme*, *Pistis* and *Sophia*.<sup>31</sup> Due to the significant differences that can be seen with regard to contents and composition between the sacrificial scene and the upper registers,<sup>32</sup> the opinion has been voiced that the scene of the Apotheosis is a copy of a former work.<sup>33</sup> Whereas the lower part of the relief is built up as a narrative with a clear action, and a centered - rather crowded - composition, the three upper registers depict figures who have an abstract, timeless character<sup>34</sup> and whose relation to one another is thematic rather than factual.

The upper part of the relief depicts the top and slopes of a mountain with two rows of figures, which represent the nine Muses together with Apollo *Kitharoedos*, and a statue of a poet.<sup>35</sup> At the peak of a mountain we see Zeus, reclining in a relaxed position, with scepter and eagle. To his right stands *Mnemosyne*, the Mother of the Muses, personified by a tall middle-aged woman, who stands in a dignified position with her right hand on her hip. She wears a *peplos* and a mantle folded over her right shoulder, and her head is veiled. Due to the fact that both Zeus and *Mnemosyne* are depicted on a larger scale than the other figures, the Muse that is seen on the right, descending the rocky staircase, seems small (Fig.2). With regard to the significance and identity of this latter figure, some scholars describe her movement as ‘running quickly down’ and identify her as *Thalia*, Muse of Comedy, or *Calliope*.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 2: *The Dancing Muse*, detail of the Relief of Archelaos, London, British Museum (after Pinkwart 1965: Pl. 33).

A different interpretation is given by other researchers, who describe her as a Dancing Muse.<sup>37</sup> She is in fact the only figure in the upper registers to be depicted in *active motion* rather than a static position as is the case with regard to the other eight Muses and Apollo. She is descending the mountain with a graceful and harmonic movement, her head inclined forwards as if watching her step, holding and lifting the end of her *himation* with her right hand. As a result of this gesture, her well-formed naked foot is disclosed and becomes the central focus of the whole composition. The Muse is represented in a rather complex motion, which relates to the continuance of her descent from the mountain, and to the very moment when she is about to set down her right foot on the rocky surface. Her step is wide with regard to its distance from the left foot, which is partly seen under the folds of the long *chiton*, a particularity which emphasizes the dynamics of the movement since she is depicted off-balance, with the weight of the body being transferred forward and downward. Her drapery, which falls in soft folds behind her, emphasizes both the active movement and the charm and lightness of her figure. The association with



Fig. 3: The Halicarnassus Base, rolled-out drawing, London, British Museum (after Daremberg-Saglio, III, Fig. 5210).

Hesiod's "Heliconian Muses" is inevitable, the more so since the whole depiction of the mountain with Zeus and *Mnemosyne* follows the *Theogony* very closely, and thus I consider the assumption that the Muse in question is indeed performing a dancing movement to be very convincing. This conclusion is further based on the dynamic and extremely graceful quality of the movement, which differs considerably from the rather stiff and frozen postures and gestures of the remaining figures on the relief. From a stylistic point of view, both the Dancing Muse and the other Muses depicted on the relief of *Archelaos* are considered to be variants of earlier works of art that have not been preserved, and may be reflected in later replicas.<sup>38</sup>

The second Hellenistic cycle of Muses, which unfortunately has reached us in a very damaged condition, is the "Halicarnassus Base" in the British Museum, dated about 120 BCE.<sup>39</sup> Its importance lies mainly in its uniqueness. Together with the "Relief of Archelaos" and a series of Roman denarii issued by Pomponius Musa (which are believed to reflect a cycle known as the "Muses of Ambrakia"),<sup>40</sup> the Halikarnassus Base is one of the rare artistic monuments of the Hellenistic age that depict a full cycle of Muses.

This round pedestal, found in a Roman villa west of the Mausoleion, depicts a group of nine Muses, six standing and three sitting. All the heads are missing and the remaining parts of the figures are badly damaged. Nonetheless, the outline of the remaining relief is clear enough to allow the identification of the figures as Muses, which resemble in their attitudes and attributes the Muses of the Archelaos Relief and also include the figure of a Dancing Muse (Fig.3). This and other figures of the Halicarnassus Base have also been connected to the cycle of the Muses by Philiskos.<sup>41</sup> The Dancing Muse is depicted in a frontal position, her raised left arm leaning in a relaxed motion on the tree beside her. She is lifting her *himation* with her left arm, revealing part of the leg and the bare foot, a gesture that accounts for her identification. The tree has been interpreted as a necessary device, required by the Dancing Muse in order to



Fig. 4: *Torso Milet*, Istanbul, Archaeological Museum (photograph by the author).

balance herself,<sup>42</sup> though obviously this assumption contradicts the very essence of the concept of a Dancing Muse! The tree has also been explained in terms of the composition of the discussed relief, as not belonging to the original figure.<sup>43</sup> I believe that the strict frontal position, the static posture and the mere suggestion of a dancing motif, belong to a different artistic tradition than that of the Dancing Muse of the Archelaos Relief.<sup>44</sup>

Though the head is severely damaged, the outlines enable one to estimate the proportions of the figure, which differ considerably from the dancing figure on the Apotheosis of Homer. Whereas this latter figure displays a tiny head and very elongated proportions, which create a feeling of elegance and grace, the Halikarnassus Muse has a large head and short proportions, reflecting a plump, heavy and static figure. The fact that she is depicted standing still and leaning against a tree emphasizes the basic difference between these two Muses. In the Halicarnassus relief the dancing motif is used as an attribute connected solely to her function (dancing) and described as an isolated element; on the

Archelaos Relief, the entire figure is actually dancing, i.e. her function is an integral part of her artistic and cultic personality.

The motif of the bust inclined towards the right leg, and the gathering and lifting of the end of the mantle, thereby disclosing the naked right foot, can be found in a relatively large number of sculptured replicas and variations (more than twenty are known). On these grounds scholarly opinion is that the original work of art contained these elements and that the original type of the dancing Muse can be reconstructed by means of these replicas.<sup>45</sup>

One of the best preserved items - considered to represent a Dancing Muse - is the *Torso Milet*, a Roman marble statue displayed in the Archeological Museum of Istanbul (Fig.4). This torso depicts a female draped figure in a frontal position, in the act of advancing her right bare foot and leaning the weight of her body forwards. Both arms and the head are missing, but the gathering of the hem of the *himation* over the right hip is clearly shown. The mantle is

rendered as light and transparent, and displays a stylized scheme of linear, diagonal and tubular folds, which can also be found in other works from Miletus.<sup>46</sup>

When comparing the Torso Milet with the Dancing Muse on the Archelaos Relief, striking differences can be seen: although the Torso Milet displays clear, well-organized shapes and proportions, the movement of the figure lacks unity. The inclination of the bust is successfully rendered, but the legs appear to be turned inward<sup>47</sup> with no suggestion of any dancing movement. Thus, the clutching of the mantle and the inclination of the torso, which suggest a forward movement, appear as disconnected from the lower part of the body, which is depicted in a stationary position. Moreover, the Torso Milet is clearly intended to be observed from a frontal point of view, whereas the Dancing Muse in the Relief of Archelaos is depicted in profile. On the other hand, some of the characteristics of the Torso Milet, such as the rendering of the drapery around the upper body and the lifting of the mantle above the right leg, relate to the dancing Muse on the Halikarnassos Base. For all that, if the original prototype consisted of a sculptured work, it had to be flattened down in order to adapt it to relief shape, and consequently stylistic analysis is problematic.<sup>48</sup>

According to the detailed study by Pinkwart, several additional sculptured *torsoi*, which display a similar composition, stem from one original prototype that portrayed a Dancing Muse.<sup>49</sup> I cannot agree with this conclusion, however, since all the replicas mentioned in her list consist of fragmentary sculptures, which lack essential parts (all the heads are missing) and many of them have been reconstructed in different ways, which make the original intention of the artist rather obscure. Moreover, the replicas differ to a great extent one from another as far as composition, style and character are concerned. Consequently, it seems necessary to attempt a reinterpretation of some of these figures.

The so-called Torso Ince-Hall<sup>50</sup> was found at Hadrian's villa, where it decorated a fountain. It bears the inscription *Anchyrroe*, a water nymph, on its base. This inscription is believed to be late Roman,<sup>51</sup> suggesting the possibility that the sculpture was originally created to depict a Nymph, or that the types were so similar that they could serve as either Nymph or Muse.<sup>52</sup> As a result of reconstruction, the following parts have been added: the neck, head, right shoulder and part of the right breast, the right arm with part of the drapery held in this hand, the left arm with the jug, the right leg with part of the calf. The Torso Florence<sup>53</sup> also depicts a figure known under the name *Anchirrhoe*. It has undergone reconstruction of the left arm with the drapery joined on the shoulder, the upper part of the right arm and part of the *himation* held in the right hand, the neck and the head (which is antique but probably not pertaining).<sup>54</sup>



Fig. 5: *Torso Florence*, drawing, Paris, Bibliothèque National (after Brendel 1955: Fig. 32).

A drawing made by Pierre Jacques between 1572 and 1577 and kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Fig.5), preserves two versions of the sculpture: one of them without arms, and the second one with the reconstruction of the right arm, depicted as grasping the end of the *himation*.<sup>55</sup> If we compare the Torso Florence with the Torso Milet, we can observe significant stylistic differences, especially in the treatment of the drapery. The *himation* of the Torso Florence lacks the transparency and lightness that characterize the Torso Milet, but there is great similarity in the movement motif, and in the pattern of the folds. Evidently, a typical scheme, which included the motif of the inclined bust and the clutching of the *himation*, was repeatedly used. The question remains whether these and other depictions of the motif originally referred to a Dancing Muse or a Nymph.

The Torso Louvre,<sup>56</sup> has been described as 'Nympe drapée, le pied posé sur une sphère, portant une amphore sur l'épaule gauche, dite *Nausicaa* or



Fig.6: *Torso Tegel*, Berlin, Palace Tegel (after Reinach 1908-1924: VI, Fig. 93,6).

*Anchyrrhoe*'.<sup>57</sup> And indeed, the torso - which has been reconstructed mainly in the neck and head, right and left arms and point of the right leg - shows a frontal, draped figure, whose right foot rests on a sphere. Since this attribute is considered to be antique, it excludes - to the best of my understanding - the possibility that the figure was originally intended to describe a Dancing Muse.

This recurring lack of differentiation between Nymphs and Muses can be explained by their common origin. As stated above, before they became inspiring divinities the Muses too were considered to be closely related to Nature, especially to mountains and water sources, to the point that scholars believe that they were originally simple water genii.<sup>58</sup>

With regard to the Fragment Giustiniani,<sup>59</sup> the only original and relevant segment of this sculpture relates to the folded hem of the *chiton* and the bare right foot. The other components of the figure, which comprise the upper part of the torso up to the breast, both arms and the grasping

of the *himation* with the left hand, are reconstructed. It is not clear whether the sandal that is depicted on the left foot belongs to the original figure.

The style of the *Torso Tegel* (Fig.6)<sup>60</sup> is considered to be closest to the original work, together with the *Torso Milet*, especially with regard to the treatment of the drapery, the proportions of the figure and the movement motif.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the heavy reconstruction of the figure as a Nymph (neck and head have been added, as well as both arms with part of the grasped mantle and the jug, the right leg as from the calf, part of the drapery and the rock) impedes a conclusive interpretation.

An explicit dancing movement can be seen on the *Torso Delos*, (Fig.7)<sup>62</sup> a unfinished statue, which fortunately has not been reconstructed. In this case, the position of the whole body and the fluent, harmonic lines of the drapery clearly suggest a rhythmic dancing motion. The bust and upper part of the



Fig. 7: *Torso Delos*, Delos (after Mayence/Leroux 1907: Fig. 3).

torso are depicted as performing a sharp forward and downward movement, similar to that of the Dancing Muse on the Relief of Archelaos. As to the movement motif of the lower body of this statue, it continues the dancing motion in a consistent manner: the right leg is depicted stepping forwards (foot is missing) whilst the left leg is still carrying part of the weight of the body. Thus, the motion is organic, distinctively active and comprises the entire figure without incongruity. The composition of the drapery contributes to the rhythmical character of the figure, by means of a pattern of curved, parallel and deep folds, which follow the movement of the body.

The *Torso Delos* was found at Delos in the so-called “Kerdon” house, believed to be an atelier of sculpture. Several other statues of Muses were found at the site, and scholars believe that they formed part of the same cycle.<sup>63</sup> Thus, we have clear evidence

that the sculpture was originally created to depict a Muse, and that her character suits that of a Dancing Muse.

Fragment *Kunsthandel 1923*<sup>64</sup> too seems to display a dancing rhythm, though the torso is badly damaged (it lacks head, both arms and the lower part of the body and legs) and therefore its discussion is quite limited. With regard to fragment *Palestrina*,<sup>65</sup> we meet again a similar array of the drapery, but the character of this fragmented sculpture is frontal, static and inactive.

The difficulty of understanding the original composition of the sculptured torsoi that may depict a Dancing Muse is reflected in the variety of reconstructions. *Torso Dresden*<sup>66</sup> was formerly considered to represent “a daughter of Niobide” and consequently, was reconstructed as such,<sup>67</sup> with her left arm lifted before her in a protective gesture. The head too is turned in the same direction, with the gaze fixed upwards, and the right arm with part of



Fig. 8: *Apollo and a Dancing Muse, pyxis, Athens, National Museum (after LIMC: II(2) s.v. "Apollo", Fig. 704).*

the *himation* has been reconstructed. In another example, the Torso Stockholm,<sup>68</sup> the reconstruction applies to the left hand with the bunch of the drapery lifted above the left shoulder, the right arm with part of the clutched drapery, the right naked foot, and the head.

If I attempt to summarize the above mentioned material, I believe that we cannot be sure that all these fragments were originally meant to depict a Dancing Muse. The meaning of these and similar figures is far from clear, and we have insufficient evidence to conclude that in each case a Dancing Muse was represented, and not a Nymph or another Muse. Though it is evident that a recurrent movement motif became attached to the depiction of a Dancing Muse, as is the case with the figure on the Halicarnassus Base, and some of the discussed *torsoi*, I am not convinced that this scheme reflected a unique dancing type.

The question remains as to why most of the replicas which display the so-called "dancing motif" are depicted in a frontal, partly static position, while on the Relief of Archelaos the Dancing Muse presents the function of dancing not as a symbolic motif, but as an organic movement which applies to the whole figure, clearly related to the conceptual background of the relief.

Moreover, the fact that the only Dancing Muse to have survived in a good state of preservation (she is the only sculptured figure to have kept her head) is depicted in profile, can be interpreted as an indication that this type evolved

from vase painting. Evidence in this direction can be found in the scene, that appears on a red-figured Attic *krater*:<sup>69</sup> a sitting Muse is playing the *barbiton*, while a Dancing Muse is performing in front of her. This latter figure is seen in profile, dressed in a light, sleeved *chiton*, ornamented with black embroidery, which she graciously lifts with both hands while stepping forward on naked feet.

An additional and interesting example appears on a *pyxis* at Athens (Fig.8).<sup>70</sup> A young, long-haired Apollo *Kitharoidos* is sitting on a chair, surrounded by eight Muses. One of them, a Dancing Muse, is standing behind him, holding up her *chiton* with her right hand. Her stance is quite complex: the position of the naked feet clearly indicate that she is stepping to the right, but her head and bust are turned to the left, thus creating a twisted motion. Since this *pyxis* is dated to about 430-420 BCE, it would seem that the so-called dancing motif, which refers to the grasping of the drapery with the right hand, already existed on vase painting in the second part of the fifth century BCE.

A different illustration of the Dancing Muse can be seen on an intagliated cameo at Vienna, dated to the first century BCE,<sup>71</sup> which depicts a draped figure in profile playing the lyre, whilst performing a dancing movement that is reflected in the agitated undulation of the drapery.

## Conclusions

The numerous variations and significant differences found in the depictions of a Dancing Muse in the Hellenistic period, suggest the existence and continuity of a repertoire of different models and types.

As explained at the beginning of this article, the formative process involved in the creation of individual Muses was extremely slow and complex. On the one hand, whereas an inclination to utilize the existing stock of female draped statues can be observed, on the other hand, we also witness a tendency towards individuation and the creation of specific types of Muses.

The use of a recurrent motif in connection with the depiction of a Dancing Muse reflects both trends: the borrowing of a scheme which may have existed earlier in relation to the depiction of Nymphs or Muses, and the need to typify the function of dancing. Nevertheless, the fact that this popular motif appears in a considerable range of variations, both stylistic and thematic, suggests the lack of a clear, well-defined type of a Dancing Muse.

Consequently, I am of the opinion that in the Hellenistic period, the different elements that composed the personality of each Muse<sup>72</sup> had not yet become integrated, and thus enabled the co-existence of diverging types and motifs in works of art chronologically close one to another, such as the Relief of Archelaos and the Halicarnassus Base.

## Notes

- \* This paper is based on my PhD thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Asher Ovadiah, submitted to Tel-Aviv University, 1997.
- 1 Hesiod *Theo.* I. 1-8.
  - 2 Schachter 1986: 154.
  - 3 West 1966: 152.
  - 4 Schachter 1986: 156 ff.
  - 5 Vitruvius 7 *Prae.Fal.* 4; cf. Otto 1955:37.
  - 6 Navarre 1904: 2063.
  - 7 Homer *Od.* I, 1-2; *Il.* II, 484; *Od.*, XXIV, 60.
  - 8 Hesiod *Theo.*, 76-79.
  - 9 The oldest attempt at individuation of the Muses appears on the Francois Krater in Florence (Archaeological Museum; *Beazley ABV*: 76,1). Kalliope is depicted in a full frontal view, and holds a syrinx, the first attribute linked to the Muses on works of art.
  - 10 Hesiod *Theo.*, 78.
  - 11 Pindar *Isthmian Odes*, II,7.
  - 12 *Phae.*: 259c.
  - 13 Bie 1965: 389.
  - 14 *De Iside et Osiride*, 34, 364D.
  - 15 Sappho painter, early 5th century BCE; cf. *LIMC* II (1) s.v. "Apollon":270, Fig.701a; II(2):241 No.701a.
  - 16 Museum fuer Kunst und Gewerbe, end of the 6th century BCE; cf. *LIMC* II (1)s.v. "Apollon": 278 no. 266a; II(2):249, Fig. 766a.
  - 17 Oesterley 1923; 97 ff.
  - 18 The word "Muse" has been explained as having several meanings, which refer to abstract, personified and concrete contents.
  - 19 Gerhard: *Trinkschalen und Gefaesse* II, figs. 17,18; cf. Daremberg-Sahlio s.v. "Musae": 2063-4, Fig. 5207.
  - 20 Horn 1931: 16; Bieber 1961: 22, 130; Ridgway 1990: 253.
  - 21 Fougeres 1888: 125; Linfert-Reich 1971: 35; Ridgway 1990: 253.
  - 22 Horn (1931: 16, Fig.4.1) finds an analogy between the simplicity and the conciseness of the description of the Muses on the Mantinea Relief and the Atarbos base in the Acropolis Museum.
  - 23 Pollitt 1986:14.
  - 24 Pinkwart 1965: 55-64, Pls. 28-35; Pinkwart 1965a; Smith 1904: no. 2191, Fig.30; Pollitt 1986: 15ff., Fig.4; Otto 1955: 23ff.: Bieber 1961: 127ff.
  - 25 Frazer 1972: II, 862.
  - 26 Pollitt 1986:16.
  - 27 *N.H.*: XXXVI, 34, 35.
  - 28 Ridgway 1990: 259.
  - 29 Smith 1904: 250 ff.; Ridgway 1990: 257; Pollitt 1986: 16.
  - 30 Ovadiah and Guretzki 1994: 120, 123; Watzinger 1903: 13; Pollitt 1986: 16; Bieber 1961: 127.
  - 31 Ovadiah and Guretzki 1994: 124.
  - 32 Pinkwart 1965: 63.
  - 33 Kees 1933: 743.
  - 34 Pinkwart 1965: 63.
  - 35 This figure has not been clearly identified. The suggestions proposed are Homer,

- Hesiod and Orpheus or a poet who won a poetical competition and offered the votive relief to Homer and the Muses; cf. Smith: 1904: 250.
- 36 Smith 1904: 249; Pinkwart 1965: 60 quotes Reinach who suggests that the figure is *Calliope*.
- 37 Bieber 1961a: 128; Pinkwart 1965a: 128; Bie 1887: 68; Otto 1955: 24; Ridgway 1990: 258.
- 38 Pollitt 1986: 16; Bieber 1961: 128.
- 39 Pinkwart 1967: Ill. 53-56; Ridgway 1990: 258 Ill. 32; *LIMC* VII(1) s.v. "*Musai*": 1000 no. 250-254e; VII(2): 721 fig. 250-251.
- 40 Bieber 1961: 246 ff. This cycle does not include a Dancing Muse.
- 41 Pinkwart 1967: 92.
- 42 Trendelenburg 1876: 7; Pinkwart 1967: 90.
- 43 Pinkwart 1965: 129.
- 44 The recurring scheme of the lifting of the skirt and the inclined upper part of the body, may have been originally connected to the depiction of a Nymph carefully drawing water. Consequently, the tree can be interpreted as belonging to the habitat of a Nymph.
- 45 Pinkwart 1965a: 130.
- 46 Linfert 1976: Figs. 112-114.
- 47 Pinkwart (1965a: 131) has accurately described how the thighs of this sculpture are turned inwards, whilst the calves are turned outwards.
- 48 Ridgway 1990: 259.
- 49 Pinkwart 1965a: 128, 199 ff.
- 50 Ashmole 1929: 21, no. 37, Pl. 23; Pinkwart 1965a: 200, no. 7; Reinach 1908-1924: I, 436, no. 8. The names of the replicas follow the denominations used by Pinkwart (1965a).
- 51 Stark 1863: 288.
- 52 Pinkwart (1965a: 130) states that although common characteristics apply to the figures of Nymphs and Muses, the original type was created to represent a Dancing Muse.
- 53 Mansuelli 1958: 103, 131, Fig. 95; Pinkwart 1965a: 199, no. 4; Reinach 1908-1924: I, 314, no. 3; III, 190 no. 8.
- 54 Mansuelli 1958: 131.
- 55 Brendel 1955: 113-125 Fig.32.
- 56 Pinkwart 1965a: 199, no. 3; Reinach 1908-1924: I, 164, nos. 4 ,6.
- 57 Michon 1922: 50, Fig. 868.
- 58 Navarre 1904: 2060.
- 59 Clarac 1841-1853: 419, Fig. 735; Pinkwart 1965a: 201, no. 16; Reinach 1908-1924: I, 201, no. 3.
- 60 Pinkwart 1965a: 200, no. 9; Reinach 1908-1924: VI, 93, no. 6.
- 61 Pinkwart 1965a: 130.
- 62 Jarde 1905: 48, no. 5; Mayence/Leroux 1907: 392, Fig. 3; Pinkwart 1965a: 201, no. 14; Reinach 1908-1924: IV, 179, no. 7.
- 63 Mayence/Leroux 1907: 391 ff.
- 64 Pinkwart 1965a: 202, no. 24; Reinach 1908-1924: V, 503, no. 4.
- 65 Pinkwart 1965a: 202, no. 18; Reinach 1908-1924: IV, 425, no. 2.
- 66 Herrmann 1925: 76, no. 319; Pinkwart 1965a: 200, no. 10; Bieber 1961: 128.
- 67 Stark 1863: 285, Pl. XI.
- 68 Heydemann 1865: 150 ff. ; Pinkwart 1965a: 200, no. 6; Reinach 1908-1924: I, 273, no. 4.
- 69 Ferrari 1988: Pl.XLIII RC 992, Cat. No. 25.
- 70 National Museum; *LIMC*: II(2) s.v. "*Apollo*" 242 no. 704; Roberts 1978: 1251 fig. 75,5;

- CVA Athens 21, Pl. 18 (76) I.5-6, 19 (77) 2,4.  
 71 Kunsthistorisches Museum IX B 534; cf. LIMC VII (1) s.v. "Musai": 1019 no. 63; VII (2): 733 Fig. 63.  
 72 Navarre 1904: 2068.

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# *A New Look at the Geometric Mosaic in the Promontory Palace at Caesarea Maritima*

*Yehudit Turnheim and Asher Ovadiah*

*Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University*

**H**erod began construction of the new town of Caesarea Maritima in 22 BCE and inaugurated it in 10-9 BCE. Josephus describes at length the magnificence of the town and its large harbour.<sup>1</sup> During the reign of Tiberius, Caesarea became the residence of the Roman procurators, including Pontius Pilate (27-37 CE). With the end of the first procuratorial period in Judea and the return of the Herodian dynasty to the throne in the reign of Agrippa I, Caesarea's status was reinforced. Agrippa was the last Jewish king to rule the city and he died there, while watching a performance in the hippodrome. A Latin inscription on an altar discovered in Caesarea Maritima mentions Pontius Pilate and the *Tiberieum*, indicating that this Judean procurator would appear to have erected a temple or a sacred place there in honour of the Emperor.<sup>2</sup>

The mosaic floor that is the subject of this article comprises a geometric carpet and was unearthed by an archaeological expedition on behalf of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in 1975,<sup>3</sup> within an extensive and magnificent architectural complex situated west of the Roman theatre, the so-called 'Promontory Palace'.<sup>4</sup> The complex may well be Herod's palace itself, mentioned by Josephus:<sup>5</sup>

His notice was attracted by a town on the coast, called Straton's Tower, which, though then dilapidated, was, from its advantageous situation, suited for the exercise of his liberality. This he entirely rebuilt with white stone, and adorned with the most magnificent palaces, displaying here, as nowhere else, the innate grandeur of his character. (*Jos. War* I. xxi. 5 [408]). He set about making a magnificent plan and put up buildings all over the city, not of ordinary material but of white stone. He also adorned it with a very costly palace, with civic halls ... (*Jos. Ant.* XV. ix. 6 [331]).



Fig. 1: The promontory at the end of the excavation, facing west (Netzer and Bar-Nathan 1986: ill. 130)

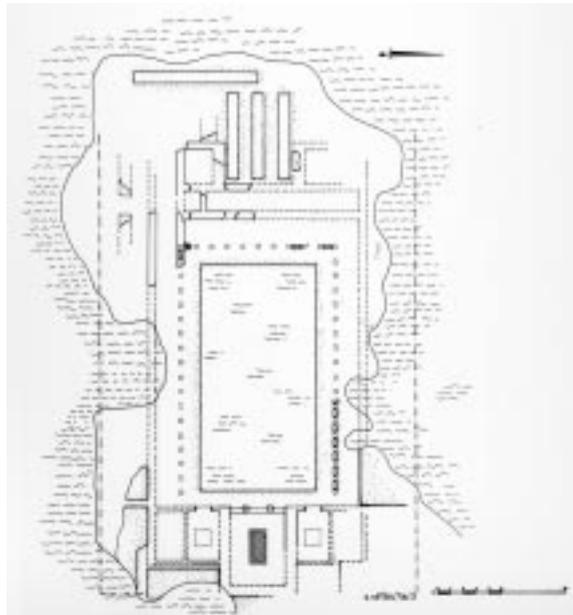
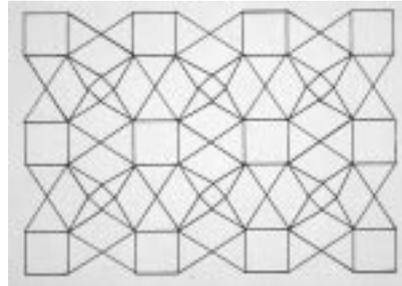


Fig. 2: A reconstructed plan of the promontory palace (Netzer and Bar-Nathan 1986: plan 17 on 177)



Fig. 3: The central mosaic carpet  
(Netzer and Bar-Nathan  
1986: ill. 135)

Fig. 4: The geometric pattern of the  
central carpet (Ovadia  
1987: 249 [H16])



The location of this complex on a promontory (Fig. 1) is typical of Herod's aspirations and hubris. It reflects his ambition and personal taste, familiar now from other construction projects that he conceived and carried out at Masada, Herodion, Jericho, Cyprus, Samaria-Sebaste and Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

The complex is built around a rock-hewn bathing pool. Four rooms were discovered in its eastern wing, three of which were paved in mosaics (Fig. 2). The mosaics in two of the rooms are badly damaged, but in the third and largest (12 m x 8.5 m) a 5.2 m x 2.6 m mosaic floor composed of complex geometric patterns has survived (Figs. 3, 5). The colours of the patterns of the central carpet of the mosaic are black, white, pink (yellow?) and red. The central carpet has a simple red type A1 frame<sup>7</sup> and within it a more complex frame: a broken double meander alternating with squares<sup>8</sup> filled with a chessboard pattern (G1).<sup>9</sup> The frame is outlined in black on a white background. A white field scattered with diamond shaped motifs (type D)<sup>10</sup> surrounds the central mosaic.

The geometric pattern of the central carpet is composed of squares, lozenges and triangles (H 16; Fig. 4);<sup>11</sup> the basic motif is a square with an equilateral triangle extending from each of its four sides forming a sort of four-pointed star. The point of each of the four triangles touches the point of another triangle whose base rests in turn on another square, thus forming a mirror-image of the first four-pointed star motif. Sharing the outer side of each pair of equilateral



Fig. 5: The central mosaic carpet, detail (Photo : Carla Gomez de Silva)

triangles is a large lozenge. When the mosaic is viewed as a whole, these three basic shapes – squares, triangles and lozenges – strongly outlined in black, combine to form a sort of network. The sophisticated, varied placement and the red, pink and black filler colours add to the overall effect. The squares contain a smaller square in black, which in turn contains a white lozenge (K2),<sup>12</sup> with a diamond-shape in its centre (D). The filler of the lozenges is a simple diamond shape (D) and of the triangles a smaller black triangle (Fig. 5).

Analysis of the overall pattern shows a complex composition formed by two large parallel twelve-sided polygons with sides of unequal length. These are organized around a square filled with a K2 type pattern. This basic polygonal pattern is repeated over the whole area of the mosaic, with the centralised polygons intersecting each other. Thus the square at the centre of one forms part of the perimeter of another. This overlapping creates in turn various common geometric shapes. These patterns within patterns and shapes within shapes endow the Caesarea mosaic with complexity, sophistication and richness of form. The play of filling motifs, alternating dark and light colours, enhances the polychromic effect of the whole composition, while the coloured fillers contrast sharply with the black outlines of the basic network of the mosaic.<sup>13</sup> The white background is unobtrusive and serves only to unite and balance the various sections.

Among the twenty-two mosaic pavements known from the Herodian period in the Land of Israel, and which have been divided into five typological groups,<sup>14</sup> not one is similar to that of the pavement at Caesarea, nor is any precedent

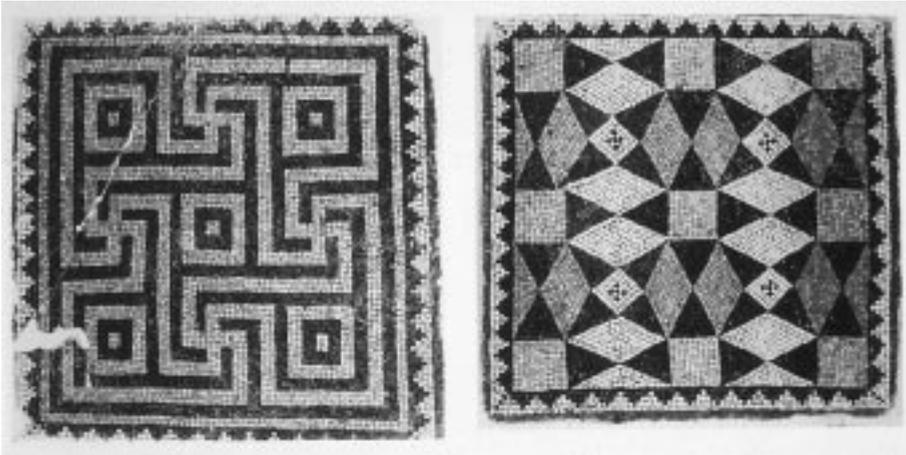


Fig. 6: Geometric mosaic carpet from the House of the Evil Eye in Antioch (Kondoleon 1995: fig. 33 [left on 66])

known in the region. Although some of the geometric units and the coloration it incorporates were in common use in the period, its overall character and decorative scheme are quite exceptional.

Even outside the Land of Israel, mosaics with this type of composition are very rare; a similar one exists in the House of the Evil Eye at Antioch (Fig. 6), dated stylistically to the early second century CE, in which a series of geometric panels decorates a colonnaded portico surrounding a central pool.<sup>15</sup> The similarity between these two mosaics – in the choice of colour (black, red, yellow and white), in form and iconography – is astonishing. Even the broken double meander of the ornamental border in Caesarea turns up in Antioch as a field pattern alongside the polygonal one mentioned above.<sup>16</sup> A similar composition from the period of Caracalla was found in the Roman baths at Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria).<sup>17</sup> The same composition framed by a double-meander border and using filling motifs similar to those in Caesarea occurs in a second mosaic at Philippopolis (Fig. 7) dated to the early fifth century CE.<sup>18</sup> But in this case, it should be pointed out, the proportions of the geometric forms used are different to those in Caesarea.

Unique and rare in its complexity and sophistication as the field design in the Caesarea mosaic may be, some Roman-period variants have been found: e.g. at Pompeii (second half of the first century CE);<sup>19</sup> in an early Roman temple (end of first century CE) in the Demeter and Kore temenos at Corinth;<sup>20</sup> in the House of Dionysus at Paphos (Fig.8),<sup>21</sup> Cyprus and elsewhere. The four-pointed star motif, composed of four equilateral triangles extending from the four sides



Fig. 7: Geometric mosaic carpet from Philippopolis with marine scene, early fifth century (Valeva 1995: fig.15)

of a square, which forms the nucleus of the Caesarea, Antioch and Philippopolis mosaics mentioned, is also found in variant forms: in the reception hall of Herod's Palace in Jericho;<sup>22</sup> and in second and third century CE Roman pavements in, for example, Volubilis, Morocco (Fig. 9),<sup>23</sup> and the House of Dionysus at Paphos.<sup>24</sup> Mosaic pavements featuring compositions similar in scheme to the Caesarea pavement, but divergent in proportions and filler colours, have been found in Florence,<sup>25</sup> Ephesus,<sup>26</sup> Aphrodisias<sup>27</sup> and Antioch.<sup>28</sup> For all the similarities of the compositional scheme in these mosaic pavements, the play between the filling colours and the black network in the above mentioned mosaics creates an entirely different impression.<sup>29</sup>

The variants at Pompeii mentioned above for comparison with the Caesarea pavement employ the same basic device of intersecting irregular dodecagons, but at Pompeii they centre on a hexagon instead of a square. Another house at Pompeii features a single octagon in a decorative frame, a lozenge at its centre, and on each of its sides an equilateral triangle; additional lozenges placed between the triangles form the sides of the octagon. Another variant occurs in the coloured mosaic at Volubilis<sup>30</sup> and at Paphos, Cyprus.<sup>31</sup> In these two instances, a square filled with a diamond (D) at its centre, and equilateral triangles extending from its four sides, forms the main motif as in Caesarea. In



Fig. 8: Geometric mosaic carpet from the House of Dionysus in Paphos (Kondoleon 1995: fig. 31 [ square 10], Pl. 1)

other words, the mosaic features a similar four-pointed star to that of the central motif in Caesarea, despite the different proportions. Four of these units centre on one point to form an irregular dodecagon, just as in Caesarea.

The Pella,<sup>32</sup> Ostia<sup>33</sup> and Aquileia<sup>34</sup> mosaics also feature one of the geometric components of the Caesarea pavement, namely the alternation of a lozenge enclosed in a square and a square enclosed in a lozenge (K 2).

The broken double meander appears in a somewhat modified version in the border of an emblematic mosaic in the House of Narcissus (Fig.10) at Antioch from the second quarter of the second century CE.<sup>35</sup> This element from Caesarea, the broken double meander as decorative border but without chessboard-filled squares, also appears in a mosaic pavement at Byblos, dated to the third century CE<sup>36</sup> and in the border of the mosaic of the beribboned lion, also at Antioch, dated to the fifth century CE.<sup>37</sup> Another example of this same border motif appears in an early Byzantine mosaic in the ancient synagogue of Gaza Maioumas (508-509 CE),<sup>38</sup> where it frames the central scene, in which King David depicted as Orpheus is playing his harp to a group of attentive animals (Fig. 11). An earlier specimen can be found in the House of the Trident in the theatre residential area at Delos from the mid-second century BCE.<sup>39</sup> Other variants of the broken double meander motif appear in the *pronaos* of the Temple



Fig. 9: Geometric mosaic carpet from Volubilis (Photo: A. Ovadiah)

of Zeus at Olympia from the fourth or third century BCE,<sup>40</sup> in a pebble mosaic of the *andron* in House A VI 13 in Olynthos, from the fourth century BCE,<sup>41</sup> in the pebble mosaic showing Theseus abducting Helen at Pella dated 300-285 BCE,<sup>42</sup> and in a *tesserae* mosaic in Milan from the first century CE.<sup>43</sup>

Judging from the examples known to us, the motif of the broken double meander and its variants remained in use in mosaic art from the Hellenistic period throughout the Roman period,<sup>44</sup> and into the early Byzantine period - a fact that supports the hypothesis that mosaicists made use of pattern-books; and perhaps the Caesarea artist did so too.

Plain fields surrounding a central mosaic carpet and scattered with diamond shapes (D) are known from the early Roman period, for instance in the *Casa del'Ephebo* at Pompeii,<sup>45</sup> in the Phaedra and Hippolytus pavement in the House of Dionysus at Paphos,<sup>46</sup> in the House of Narcissus at Antioch, and elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> A similar field dates to the Herodian period was found in the Upper City of Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup>

\* \* \*

Detailed analysis of the Caesarea floor reveals the use of basic geometric forms, colours and fillers known from other mosaics of the Herodian period (to 70 CE), such as found in Masada, in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, and



Fig. 10: Mosaic floor from the House of Narcissus in Antioch (Levi 1947: 60-66, Pl. X; Kondoleon 1995: 34-35, figs. 13 - 14)

elsewhere. But the composition created by the intersection and overlapping of these forms, as well as the use of colour and smaller shapes to fill in the larger geometric shapes and the complex border of a broken double meander - as they appear at Caesarea - have not been found in other mosaics of the Herodian period. This naturally raises questions and doubts as to whether it has in fact been correctly dated, and it appears that a reappraisal is called for.<sup>49</sup>

The basic filling motifs used at Caesarea, such as K2, D (diamond), G1 (chessboard) and the broken double meander, are known from pebble mosaics as early as the Late Classical and the Early Hellenistic periods, as well as in tesserae mosaics (*opus tessellatum*) of the Hellenistic period and onwards.

A comparison of the motifs used in Caesarea with identical or similar motifs in other pavements from the Late Classical period onwards leads to the conclusion that these motifs alone cannot be used as a chronological criterion. It is also important to note that such components are somewhat uncommon in Herodian mosaics. On the other hand, the existence of mosaics from the second and third centuries CE, which feature a combination of most of the basic components of the Caesarea pavements (the complex field pattern, the decorative border and the surrounding white carpet), increases the probability that the mosaic under discussion can be dated to within this chronological frame.



Fig. 11: Decorative border of broken double meander in the mosaic of King David as Orpheus from the ancient synagogue in Gaza Maiumas (Photo: A. Ovadiah)

Caesarea witnessed two further periods of reconstruction after the Herodian one: the first, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, who visited Palestine twice, once in 130 and again in 133-134 CE;<sup>50</sup> and the second in the time of Septimius Severus, who visited the country in 200 CE. The two emperors each contributed in his own way to the enhancement of the city, by constructing and restoring public buildings<sup>51</sup> and facilities, such as the aqueducts (to the north of the city), the theatre (in the south), the amphitheatre (in the north-east), and so on. It is quite possible that the Promontory Palace, attributed to the Herodian period<sup>52</sup> or to the period immediately following,<sup>53</sup> was later renovated, including the replacement of its mosaic pavements.<sup>54</sup>

According to the composition and the decorative border of the mosaic pavements in Antioch, Paphos, Philippopolis and Byblos, it appears that the Caesarea mosaic pavement cannot therefore be attributed to the Herodian period, but to a later one, namely the reign of Hadrian and/or of Septimius Severus, from the early second to the early third century CE. The artistic-formal data (composition and style) and the historical evidence confirm this chronological determination. Mosaic pavements employing a similar vocabulary of forms and ornamentation, such as in Antioch and Paphos, strengthen the close artistic and stylistic links, indicating that this is indeed the correct cultural milieu to which to ascribe the Caesarea mosaic.

We may assume that the pavement in question is a later replacement of the palace's original one, presumably destroyed. The pavement is quite exceptional among Roman-period mosaics in Palestine. It is of markedly greater compositional complexity and sophistication than the five typological groups reliably dated to the Herodian period,<sup>55</sup> which are generally typified by a much simpler scheme, in which each motif is placed separately.

If this new dating, namely from the early second to the early third century CE, is correct, then the Caesarea pavement adds yet another link and narrows what has been until now a marked gap in the understanding of the development of mosaic art in Eretz Israel.<sup>56</sup>

## Notes

- 1 *Jos. Ant.* XV. ix. 6 (331ff.); XVI. v. 1 (136ff.); *Jos. War* I. xxi. 5-8 (408ff.).
- 2 *NEAEHL* 4, 1992: 1372 (and photo above).
- 3 Levine and Netzer 1978: 73-75; *NEAEHL* 4, 1992: 1380-1382.
- 4 On the Promontory Palace, see Flinder 1976; Burrell 1996: 228-247; Gleason 1996: 208-227; Netzer 1976: 77-80; Netzer 1996: 193-207; Levine and Netzer 1978: 70-75; Burrell et al., 1994: 65-66. The Promontory Palace complex, according to recent excavations, consisted of an Upper and Lower Palace; see Gleason 1998: 23-52 (esp. 40).
- 5 Levine 1975: 36, n. 256.
- 6 *Cf.* Turnheim 1998: 144-147.
- 7 *Cf. Décor géométrique* 1985: Pl. 1(a, i, j); Ovadiah 1980: 21, 23 (= *AIEMA*, Nos. 137-140).
- 8 *Cf. Décor géométrique* 1985: Pl. 39(e).
- 9 *Cf. Décor géométrique* 1985: Pls. 111(a,d,e), 112(a), 114(b); Ovadiah 1980: 21, 23 (= *AIEMA*, No. 502).
- 10 *Cf. Décor géométrique* 1985: Pl. 5(c); Ovadiah 1980: 21, 23 (= *AIEMA*, Nos. 106, 106').
- 11 *Cf.* Ovadiah 1987: 249.
- 12 Ovadiah 1987: 207, 256; Ovadiah 1980: 22, 24, 160 (= *AIEMA*, No. 546). The K2 motif occurs as a field pattern as early as the pebble mosaic in Pella, 300-285 BCE (Ovadiah 1980: Pl. XXIV [fig. 58]).
- 13 Blake (1936: 192) has described this effect, whereby the spectator's gaze is distracted from the overall structure of the mosaic to the details of its component ornaments.
- 14 Ovadiah 1994: 67-76. A small geometric mosaic pavement from room P27 in Lower Palace, partially preserved, it appears to be of the Herodian period; see Gleason 1998: 39-40 (fig. 8).
- 15 Kondoleon 1995: fig. 33 (p. 66, left); *Décor géométrique* 1985: Pl. 186(c); Levi 1947: 28-29, 375, Pl. XCIII b.
- 16 Kondoleon 1995: fig. 33 (p. 66, right).
- 17 Valeva 1995: 251, n. 5, fig. 4.

- 18 In the middle of the geometric central panel is an emblem containing marine motifs and framed in a double border of meander and ivy leaves. Valeva points out that this floor is Hellenistic in type and, in her opinion, this prolonged use of the same compositions and motifs attests to the conservative tendencies in mosaic art (*ibid.*: 262, n. 53, fig. 15).
- 19 Blake 1930: Pls. 23(4), 42(4).
- 20 Bookidis and Stroud 1987: 20-22, esp. fig. 20.
- 21 Kondoleon 1995: fig. 31 (square 10), Pl. 1.
- 22 Netzer 1974: 37.
- 23 Personal impression from a visit to volubilis in summer 1995 (A.O.). There is a second mosaic, in the Labours of Hercules House (Kondoleon 1995: 125, fig. 73).
- 24 In the mosaic surrounding the peacock (room 3), Kondoleon 1995: 110-111, figs. 64-65.
- 25 *Décor géométrique* 1985: Pl. 184(b).
- 26 *Ibid.*: Pl. 186(b).
- 27 Similar compositions are found in mosaics from the second half of the fourth century, in the Bishop's Palace (room 2), Campbell 1991: 14-15, fig. 5, Pls. 49-51.
- 28 *Décor géométrique* 1985: Pl. 184(d-f); Levi 1947: Pls. IIIb, LXXXIIb, XCIVa.
- 29 Perhaps one can draw the inference from this similarity of compositional scheme and disparity of colour and filling motif that the pattern books used by the mosaicists showed pavements in outline scheme only, leaving the choice of colour and filling motif to the taste of the artist or craftsman.
- 30 See above, n. 23.
- 31 See above, n. 24.
- 32 See above, n. 12.
- 33 Blake 1936: Pl. 16(1).
- 34 Blake 1936: Pl. 16(3).
- 35 Kondoleon 1995: 34-35, figs. 13-14; Levi 1947: 60-66, fig. 23.
- 36 Kondoleon 1995: 181, fig. 115. To be exact, the Byblos border is made up of the Caesarea meander together with the one from the House of the Evil Eye at Antioch.
- 37 *Décor géométrique* 1985: Pl. 39(e); Levi 1947: Pl. CXXVIIa,c.
- 38 Ovadiah 1987: Pls. LVIII, LIX, CLXXVIII.
- 39 Ovadiah 1980: Pl. X (fig. 22). The identical motif also shows up in a second pavement at Delos from the second century BCE - but in this instance not as a border but as a component of an emblematic device (Ovadiah 1980: Pl. XIII [fig. 28]).
- 40 The meander here is a composite double meander; see Ovadiah 1980: Pl. XXI (fig. 53).
- 41 *Ibid.*: Pl. XXII (fig. 54).
- 42 *Ibid.*: Pl. XXV (fig. 59).
- 43 *Ibid.*: Pl. XX (fig. 49).
- 44 Guimier-Sorbets 1983: 208, n. 35.
- 45 Ovadiah 1980: Pl. XXXIV (fig. 92).
- 46 Kondoleon 1995: 40-42, figs. 16-17.
- 47 Levi 1947: Pls. VIIa,c, XXXa, XCIVa, c-e. See also above, n. 35.
- 48 Ovadiah 1994: figs. 14-15.

- 49 The archaeological evidence for dating the Promontory Palace complex leaves room for questions, although the excavators incline towards the Herodian period (Netzer and Bar-Nathan 1986: 176-177).
- 50 Avi-Yonah 1970: 207. According to a document from the Judean desert, the Emperor Hadrian was in Petra in the year 131 CE; cf. Yadin 1971: 249.
- 51 A sixth-century Greek inscription reveals that a temple dedicated to Hadrian (*Hadrianeum*) existed in Caesarea Maritima, built probably during one of the Emperor's visits to Palestine; see Moulton 1919-1920: 86-90.
- 52 Netzer 1994: 65.
- 53 Rabban 1981: 87.
- 54 When the pavement was first discovered, the excavators brought me (AO) a photo of it and requested my professional opinion. My opinion then was the same as that expressed in this article, namely that the pavement's artistic and stylistic qualities and its compositional complexity were so unlike those known from the period to which the excavators attributed the construction of the complex (i.e. the Herodian period, later revised to the period immediately following [Netzer 1994: 65]) that it had to belong to a considerably later period of time.
- 55 See above, n. 14.
- 56 Cf. Ovadiah 1987: 150-152.

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# *The Triumph of Dionysus in Two Mosaics in Spain*

*G. López Monteagudo*

*Department of Ancient History and Archaeology,  
Centre for Historical Studies CSIC, Madrid*

**A**mong the numerous representations of the Bacchic Triumph on Roman mosaics there is one type that stands out in its singularity: a mosaic divided into two superposed panels. This iconographic particularity, although also known in other themes, is documented only in three Roman pavements, and is related in each to scenographic representations of the myth of Dionysus, in which the house owners themselves participated as actors, while conveying at the same time an allegorical message: the triumph and virtues embodied by the gods.

\* \* \*

Two Spanish-Roman mosaics of the Bacchic Triumph combine two episodes in a single panel, depicted in two registers, placed one above the other, and separated by a dividing line. These scenes present a narrative sequence, such as those found on some mosaics with hunting themes, where successive episodes from the same hunt appear in several registers:<sup>1</sup> e.g. on the mosaic depicting agricultural tasks in Cherchel, dated to the beginning of the third century CE;<sup>2</sup> on some pavements displaying mythological themes, such as the Cherchel mosaic of the late third century CE and the Tipasa mosaic of the early fourth century CE, featuring Achilles' legend in three superposed scenes,<sup>3</sup> and the Vienne mosaic, dated 220-230 CE, in which an inebriated Hercules is represented on the lower frieze while the gods look on from the upper one.<sup>4</sup> The combination of various episodes in a continuous narrative style is also documented for Dionysiac mosaics: e.g. the recently discovered mosaic at Sepphoris, from the beginning of the third century CE;<sup>5</sup> the Dionysiac mosaic at Gerasa, of the mid-third century CE,<sup>6</sup> distributed among the Pergamon Museum, the Texas Orange University, and the Spanish Embassy in Damascus;

and finally the Cypriot pavement of the House of Aion in Nea Paphos, dated to the second quarter of the fourth century CE.<sup>7</sup> However, Bacchic Triumphs featuring bipartite schemes have been found to date only in the late Roman Spanish mosaics at Fuente Alamo (Córdoba) and Baños de Valdearados (Burgos), as well as in the mosaic at Sheikh Zouède (Northern Sinai),<sup>8</sup> with one difference between them: while the Spanish scenes are exclusively Dionysiac, and present a chronological narrative sequence, in the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, the Bacchic Triumph, while also appearing in a continuous narrative style, shares the space with the mythological episode of Phaedra and Hippolytus.

The Dionysiac mosaic from the late Roman *villa* at Fuente Alamo,<sup>9</sup> dated to the fourth century CE, according to the archaeological finds, paved the rectangular area of an apsidal room, probably the *oecus*, which was entered by five steps through an open patio paved with a figurative mosaic divided horizontally into three panels featuring Pegasus' *toilette*, the three Graces, a maenad and a satyr.<sup>10</sup> The connection between the two pavements reinforces the association of the Dionysiac themes with the three Graces, as portrayed in the patio pavement, and also documented for mosaics at Lixus and at Vinon.<sup>11</sup> The apsidal part of the front, approached by one step, is decorated by a shell with 27 radiating flutes, framed by a border of polychrome scrolls of acanthus leaves with inserted fleur-de-lis, springing from a stem in the centre of the straight area.

The polychrome Dionysiac mosaic (5.10 x 4.75 m, Fig.1), is framed by a border of spirals and a frieze of simple swastikas and inserted squares. The mosaic surface is divided into two superposed rectangular panels.<sup>12</sup> The lower panel (2.90 x 1.07 m.), vividly presents Dionysus, accompanied by maenads and satyrs, in the victorious battle over the Indians. In the central part the god and a satyr vent their merciless fury on a kneeling Indian who is defending himself with raised arms. Dionysus, of whom only the upper body is preserved, appears nude beneath a cloak on his left shoulder. In his right hand he is holding the *thyrsus*, with which he attacks the Indian. His head is adorned with tendrils and a bunch of grapes on either side of his face, as in the upper panel. The satyr is wearing a *nebris* floating over his shoulder and shaking the *pedum* in his right hand raised above his head. The group on the left is formed by three figures: a fallen Indian, his hair standing on end in fear, is supporting himself on his left arm upon the oblong shield, his short triangular sword beside him; he is being mauled and disemboweled by a lioness; behind him, another Indian, head in profile, armed with a sword and oblong shield with central umbo, is trying to defend his fellow fighter from the attack of a maenad dressed in a tunic girdled tightly around her waist, and raising a torch in her right hand.



Fig. 1: Fuente Alamo mosaic (after L.A. López Palomo)

On the right side of the panel another group features a maenad, of whom only the upper part is preserved, attired and holding a torch like the maenad on the left, and attacking another fallen Indian who is attempting to protect himself by holding his shield over his head.

Dionysus' battle against the Indians, discussed at length by Nonnos (*Dion.* 13-24; 26-40) and in an earlier summarized version by Lucian (*Bacch.* 2), is quite unusual in the scenography of Roman mosaics. Only two other representations of the battle against the Indians are known.

One, found on a mosaic at Tusculum, dated not earlier than the third century CE, features an episode similar to that on the Spanish pavements: the crucial moment of the battle, when Dionysus and a maenad vent their fury on an Indian, who tries to protect himself with his shield.<sup>13</sup> The other example, a mosaic in Amiens, dated to the end of the second century or the beginning of

the third century CE, presents the last scene of the battle, in which a maenad is leading an Indian with his hands tied behind his back.<sup>14</sup> These representations seem to derive from Hellenistic paintings, such as those decorating the temple of Dionysus in Lesbos, according to Longus' description (IV 3). The closest precedent for these mosaics can be found on Arretine pottery, as well as on second century sarcophagi. The iconography of the battle also lives on in Byzantine art in two ivory pyxides from the sixth century CE.<sup>15</sup> The triumph of Dionysus over the Indians is mentioned by Augustan and first century CE authors, such as Seneca (*Phaedra* 753 ss.): *Et tu, thyrsigera Liber ab Indis / Intonsa iuvenis perpetuus coma, / Tigres pampinea cuspede territans / Ac mitra cohibens cornigerum caput*; Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 17, 645 ss.): *Ipse astans curru atque auro decoratus et ostro / Martia praebebat spectanda Quiribus ora: / Qualis odoratis descendens Liber ab Indis / Egit pampineos frenata tigride currus*; and Martial (8, 26, 7): *Nam cum captivos ageret sub curribus Indos / Contentus gemina tigride Bacchus erat*. In contrast to the representations of the battle itself, scenes in which Indians form part of the Bacchic Triumph are frequent on Roman mosaics, representing one of the trophies won by the god along his mythical journey, as found for example, in the mosaics at Sétif, El Djem or Nea Paphos,<sup>16</sup> or on numerous sarcophagi.<sup>17</sup>

The upper panel (3.22 x 1.43 m.) at Fuente Alamo represents the Triumph of Dionysus, a theme comprehensively dealt with in literary sources (Prop. 3.17, 21-22; Virg. *Egl.* 5, 29; *Aen.* 6, 804-805; Ovid. *Ars* I, 549-550; Sil. 17, 645-648; Luc. *Bacch.* I; Nonnos *Dion.* 40 ss.). It is frequently presented in Roman art, especially on sarcophagi, as well as in the mosaics from Spain and North Africa from across a wide chronology.<sup>18</sup> The panel features the Bacchic retinue accompanying the god (Fig. 2) on a background of white *tesserae* arranged in overlapping scales. Dionysus is reclining in his chariot, turned backwards, in a pose similar to that in the fresco painting in the Vetii House in Pompeii, in the Gerasa mosaic and on numerous sarcophagi.<sup>19</sup> The vehicle, comprising a curved box and six-spoked wheels, is being pulled by two tigresses in profile advancing to the right, with lowered heads, in a similar posture as those in the mosaics of Torre de Palma, Liédena, Thysdrus, and Trèves. The god is half nude, with a cloak covering his legs; he is crowned with tendrils and a bunch of grapes on either side of his face. He is holding the cloak over his back with his right hand, and holding the reins with his left. The iconography of Dionysus alone in a chariot and usually standing, is frequently found in North African mosaics, as well as in those of Ostia, Nea Paphos, Trèves and Antioch, but is rare in Spanish examples, where it has been found only on the pavements at Alcolea, Olivar del Centeno and Tarragona.<sup>20</sup> Behind the chariot there is a feminine



Fig. 2: Detail of the upper register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, Dionysus and Ariadne (after J. Lancha).

figure in profile, possibly Ariadne. She is wearing a short tightly girdled tunic and holding a veil in her left hand; her hair is arranged in the pyramid style typical of the fourth century CE. In contrast to the representations on the mosaics of Baños de Valdearados and other pavements (see below), where Ariadne appears inside Dionysus' chariot, here she is outside it, as on the Antioch pavement (dated to the Antonine period or the mid-third century CE), perhaps with the intention of emphasizing the god's triumph.<sup>21</sup> In the center of the procession Pan, pulling the chariot, is dancing with a *pedum* in his left hand, as often depicted in other Dionysiac mosaics. A maenad, only partly preserved, is walking beside and to the left of the chariot, similar in her position in the mosaics from Caeseraugusta, Torre Albarragena and Sousse. The Bacchic procession begins with a group formed by Silenus astride a donkey, as quoted

by the sources (Ovid. *Ars* I 543-547; *Met.* IV 26-27; *Fast.* I 399; Lucian. *deor. concil.* 4; *Bacch.* 4), led by a young satyr and accompanied by a maenad, also in profile, with a long, pleated, tightly girdled tunic, an arched veil floating over her head. Silenus on a donkey is also depicted in other Spanish mosaics from Itálica, Conimbriga, Mérida, Liédena, and Baños de Valdearados.<sup>22</sup> Outside Spain this theme appears frequently on mosaics in North Africa, Gerasa, Sepphoris, and Sheikh Zouède. San Nicolás, considers it possible that the satyr and Silenus could be the portraits of the owners of the villa, in this case, father and son, as occurs in other Spanish Dionysiac mosaics (see below). He bases his supposition on various appraisals of the figures of Silenus and the satyr: the superior artistic quality of their execution compared with the rest of the mosaic, the clearly defined and individualized physiognomic features, and the fact that both figures appear in the picture as spectators of the scene.<sup>23</sup>

The two registers of this pavement follow a thematic and chronological sequence corresponding to Dionysus' history, such as the battle against the Indians and the god's victory, which allude to the civilizing and cosmocratic nature of Dionysus. According to Turcan, the Greek poets sang of Dionysus as the *Cosmokrator*, who bestows civilized life upon the *oikoumene*.<sup>24</sup> This Hellenistic figure of the colonizing hero, conqueror of the brute and disorderly forces of evil, surrounded by the aura of prestige conferred upon the civilizing hero, was very successfully resurrected in the Roman period. This same Silenus figure is therefore presented as a Socratic type: a mature man, the image of wisdom and inner equilibrium, with broad forehead and bushy beard; he appears nude from the waist up, with a white cloak, and carries a philosopher's cane, the personification of philosophical culture - Dionysus' *pedagogus*.

The Dionysiac mosaic of the late Roman villa at Baños de Valdearados (Fig. 3), dated to between the beginning and the mid-fifth century CE, and encompassing an area of 66 square meters, was discovered in a very good state of preservation.<sup>25</sup> The richly polychromatic mosaic paved a room facing north-northwest, probably the *oecus* of the villa, is 9.90 m long by 6.65 m wide. The walls comprise a socle topped by adobe walls decorated in the interior with stucco work. The entrance to this room is preceded by three steps, 3 m. wide. At some earlier stage, the room had featured another mosaic, upon which the Dionysiac mosaic was laid, leading to the straightening of its walls.<sup>26</sup> A border with a band of volutes, framed within four lines of black *tesserae*, is located over the threshold, while an orthogonal composition of adjacent scales appears on the opposite internal side. A border of a three-strand guilloche frames the surface of the pavement proper, formed by a border of double meanders of swastikas, with a two-strand guilloche, leaving six horizontal rectangular spaces



Fig. 3: Baños de Valdearados mosaic  
(after J.L. Argente)

at the sides, two in the larger ones and one in the smaller ones. These are filled by six hunting scenes, four of which are accompanied by a Latin inscription with the names of the winds: *Eurus*, a dog chasing a hare; *Zefyrus* (sic), a dog chasing a gazelle; *Notus*, a dog chasing a deer; *Boreas*, a dog chasing a doe.<sup>27</sup> The corners are filled by four squares decorated with male busts, three of them wearing tunics, while the fourth has a nude torso; each carries a spear over his left shoulder. Although these figures are placed at the angles, there are no details allowing us to identify them as representations of the seasons, or of the winds. A new border of a six-strand guilloche frames the 5 × 2.50 m *emblema* of the mosaic, which is divided into two rectangular panels of different sizes, separated by a line of fragmented multi-coiled volutes; both are decorated with figurative scenes appearing in back view from the entrance, and intended to be viewed from the main part of the room.

The larger upper panel features a band decorated in the centre with a fluted *krater* with a truncated cone foot; scrolls with heart-shaped leaves and vine clusters grow from the *krater*. This is enframed by a rectangular field which resembles the upper part of a building with a pediment, two doves on its roof, and two triangles in the vertices. The pediment presents a line of spirals on the



Fig. 4: Upper register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic (after J.L. Argente)

exterior part and a central rosette, made up of a simple guilloche and several concentric circles, upon a surface decorated with spirals. The figurative scene (2.50 m long by 2.30 m high; Fig. 4) represents the Bacchic procession depicted on a line representing a rocky landscape, in a variegated composition of ten figures near the drunken Dionysus and Ariadne, who occupy the center of the scene. The god, larger than the other figures, is enclosed in an aureole of four circular bands; he is wearing a wide cloak covering his left shoulder and his legs, leaving his torso and feet bare. He is holding Ariadne's right wrist in his right hand and has his left hand around the neck of Ampelos, who is nude, his body dark-colored; the latter resemble the group of the drunken Bacchus of the Complutum mosaic.<sup>28</sup> Ariadne is wearing a long transversally pleated tunic very similar to that worn by Ariadne in the Mérida mosaic;<sup>29</sup> she is holding a *thyrsus* ending in a palm, and has a tall hairdo similar to that of the so-called Eudoxia in the Museum of Torlonia, from the end of the fourth century CE.<sup>30</sup> The pleated folds of the tunics of the divine couple and the anatomical study of the god's chest are conspicuous elements in this representation. Two maenads appear to the right of Ariadne, one of whom has her right arm raised above her head, and a damaged figure of Pan, who is easily recognizable by his

attributes, such as the leg of a goat, the horns on his forehead, the *thyrsus* ending in a palm leaf placed on his left shoulder and behind him, a cup similar to a late form of Spanish *sigillata*. A figure in profile, also with a palm *thyrsus*, completes this group. The group on the right is made up of five figures, of whom the most conspicuous is Silenus --a white-haired, bearded old man, with a young satyr supporting him by his right arm; they are accompanied by a donkey, of which only the front part is visible. Two maenads in tunics with wide pleats stand near them, one holding a palm leaf. The upper half of a figure in profile blowing a horn, can be seen at the end of the panel, close to the frame. All the clothes appear undulating, as if blown by the wind, giving the scene a sense of movement. The background is enlivened by triangles, squares, Maltese crosses, rhombuses and stars.

The iconography of Dionysus embracing Ariadne, alone or accompanied by members of his retinue, is already known from Attic pottery of the fourth century BCE, as well as from small Hellenistic terracotta altars.<sup>31</sup> The presence of Ariadne next to a drunken Bacchus is rather unusual in Roman art, although it is documented in some reliefs and sarcophagi, such as that in the Mattei Palace, or on a mosaic pavement in Antioch from the House of the Bacchic *thiasos*, dated to the first half of the second century CE. In both cases, she was identified as a maenad.<sup>32</sup> The iconographic type of a drunken Dionysus, alone or leaning on a satyr, is very frequent on Roman mosaics pavements: in Antioch, Byblos, Argos, Thessalonica, Mytilene, Rhodes, Koroni, Aquincum, Cologne, and Carthage. In Spain it is documented for the mosaics of Italica, Complutum and Utebo.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the mosaic and sculpture parallels, this iconographic type also lived on in Coptic textiles of the fifth to the seventh centuries CE, in which Dionysus appears enveloped in a halo, as portrayed in the mosaic at Burgos.<sup>34</sup> Guardia Pons finds great similarities between the central group of the Burgos mosaic and that of the Vienne pavement, dated to 220-230 CE, which represent the drunken Hercules between a satyr and a bacchante. Both groups share the same arrangement of Dionysus/Hercules in relation to Ariadne/bacchante, and Ampelos/satyr, as well as the absence of the empty cup that usually dangles from the god's hand.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes the group of the drunken Dionysus leaning on a satyr is replaced by Hercules *bibens*, as for example in the pavements at Cártama, Rome, Lyon, Vienne, House of the Horses in Carthage, Sfax, Gerasa, and Sheikh Zouède; parallel scenes can also be found on sarcophagi.<sup>36</sup>

On the lower panel (Fig. 5), three sides display a band decorated with scrolls of tendrils and heart-shaped leaves, springing from two fluted *kraters* on the base of a truncated cone placed at the lower corners; two pairs of doves are

placed on the *kraters*, three of them leaning over the cup, while the fourth one is erect, its head turned backwards. Two ducks appear within each of the side scrolls, while two busts, one male and one female, are depicted within the two central scrolls of the lower band, and probably represent the owners of the house.<sup>37</sup>

The figurative scene (2.50 m long and 2.22 m high) presents the Dionysiac Triumph, with three figures participating: Dionysus, Ariadne and Pan, who appear on a background of decorative motives - birds, Solomon knots, baskets, and geometrical motifs. Dionysus is standing in his chariot, which is being pulled by two dark-colored panthers moving to the right, along a line of rocky landscape. The god has a strongly modeled nude torso, with a cloak covering his left shoulder and back, falling from under his right arm, and over the chariot box; he is holding the *thyrsus* in his left hand and an overturned *krater* in his right. A bunch of grapes falls on either side of his face, similar to the two representations of the god in the mosaic at Fuente Alamo (see above). This sort of headdress, created by a horizontal rod from the ends of which the two grape bunches hang, is identically documented in the figures of Bacchus, Silenus, a maenad, and Autumn on the Complutum Dionysiac pavement,<sup>38</sup> or in the Autumn bust of the pavement at Los Carabancheles, Madrid, dated as late as the fifth century CE.<sup>39</sup> Outside Hispania, the closest parallel can be found in a mosaic at Lambesis, from the early Severan period, where Bacchus' bust is depicted, also surrounded by an aureole and with two succulent grape bunches on the sides of his face, and the busts of the seasons surrounding him.<sup>40</sup> A female figure is depicted inside the chariot, to his left, her legs not visible. She is probably Ariadne, with a tall hairdo, similar to those in Mérida and Fuente Alamo, wearing a tunic that clings to her waist, a *krater* in her left hand and a *flabellum* with which she is fanning the drunken god, in her right. Behind the chariot a fur-clad Pan is playing the *syrinx*. The chariot has a square box with over-long sides, similar to that in Liédena, and ten-spoke wheels. The chariot box is decorated with guilloche and lattice patterns, painted or sculpted, such as found in other mosaics, e.g. the North African Triumphs at El Djem, Sabratha, Sétif, and Cherchel, and the Spanish ones at Torre de Palma, Valencia de Alcántara, Liédena, and Tarraco - and frequently also on Dionysiac sarcophagi.<sup>41</sup>

The iconography of Dionysus holding an overturned *krater* has been documented in other Spanish Triumphs of the second-third centuries CE: the mosaics of Andelos, Itálica, and Ecija - the latter with the *krater* pouring over a *rhyton* - and also on the late Roman pavement at Torre de Palma.<sup>42</sup> Outside of Spain, the iconographic type of Dionysus in the triumphal chariot, pouring from a *krater* can be found at Ostia, Trèves, Thysdrus at the Bardo Museum,



Fig. 5: Lower register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic (after J.L. Argente)

and of Sheikh Zouède; holding the *krater* in his hand, but not pouring from it, is found in Acholla, and Sepphoris; while on the Corinth mosaic the god seems to be carrying a *rhyton*, thus placing it closer to the scene at Ecija.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to Dunbabin's comment on the North African mosaics, where the presence of the *krater* seems to be an intrusive element,<sup>44</sup> in Spanish mosaics it is the usual attribute of the god since the third century CE, shown by the above-mentioned examples. Its greater prevalence in Andalusia could even suggest that it was an adaptation by Betic craftsmen or workshops.<sup>45</sup> The figurative scene on the Baños de Valdearados mosaic might be illustrating the famous *pompe* of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, described by Atheneus (*Deipn.* V 200 ss.), who mentions one of the triumphs in which Dionysus offers a libation, symbol of divine power.<sup>46</sup>

The figure of Ariadne accompanying the god inside the chariot was documented on Greek pottery as early as the sixth century BCE, and later on in Pompeian wall-paintings, in reliefs and sarcophagi, and on later textiles.<sup>47</sup> The Spanish-Roman mosaics reflect the couple of Dionysus and Ariadne in the chariot found in pavements at Ecija, Cabra, and perhaps also Andelos and Liédena. Elsewhere, both figures appear in the chariot in Gerasa, and in North African mosaics at Sant-Leu, Sabratha, Orange, and Sétif. Although Donderer identified the figure as *Nike* in the latter mosaic on account of the palm leaf she is holding, I do not consider this a determining factor since Ariadne too carries this attribute in the other cases, in which her identification is beyond doubt.

The style of the scenes is characterized mainly by *horror vacui*, the two-dimensionality of the figures and their marked frontality, rounded heads and exophthalmic eyes, as well as their lack of proportion. All these features can also be found on other late Roman pavements in Spain, and are but one more example of the expressionist artistic trends adopted in the Mediterranean region from the end of the fourth century CE. In Spain, the closest stylistic parallels to the Burgos mosaic can be found in Santisteban del Puerto (Jaén), the *Annius Ponius* in Mérida, and in that of Estada (Huesca), within a chronology fixed in the fifth and sixth centuries CE.<sup>48</sup>

Theatrical decoration, evident in the architectural structure with a pediment of the upper register, resembling a *scaenae frons*, flanked by two emblematic figures in profile, and the presence of the portraits of the owners in the lower area, may suggest a scenographic representation of the myth of Dionysus, in which the leading actors are the house owners themselves.<sup>49</sup> Some mosaics are known to depict the staging of certain literary texts,<sup>50</sup> for the rich *domini* enjoyed the staging of Classical myths in their *triclinia* and *oecus*, in which they themselves, their guests and servants played the parts. Such an interpretation has been suggested, for example, for the figures of Silenus and the satyr on the pavement at Fuente Alamo (see above); and for the mosaic of the Bacchic Triumph at "El Olivar del Centeno" (Cáceres), for which the discoverer proposes the theory that the owners of the villa appear as the maenad and Silenus, who can be seen in the background as spectators viewing the scene.<sup>51</sup> Thus too, on the mosaic of the Bacchic Triumph at Tarragona, the god, according to the same scholar, is a divinized depiction of the owner of the villa.<sup>52</sup> This may also be the case for the mosaic of *Annius Ponius* of Mérida,<sup>53</sup> as well as the Dionysiac banquet represented on the Carthage mosaic, where the dancers are clearly imitating Silenus playing the *syrix*, and the maenad with castanets, thus illustrating the literary texts by Nonnos (*Dion.* XVIII 90 ss.) and by Sidonius Apollinarius (*Ep.* IX 13) describing the celebration of Bacchic dances in Late Antiquity banquets, in which the real dancers personified Dionysiac figures as a sign of animation and *joie de vivre*.<sup>54</sup>

On the Sheikh Zouède polychrome mosaic in northern Sinai (Fig. 6), dated to between the mid-fourth and mid-fifth centuries CE, the mythological scenes are likewise split into two registers clearly separated by a frame of two lines of black *tesserae*. A third panel in the lower part of the pavement encloses a *tabula ansata* with an inscription in Greek of welcome, surrounded by a Nilotic frieze, including various birds, plants, a snake and an overturned basket of grapes being pecked at by a bird. This 4.75 m x 3 m mosaic used to decorate the floor of a large rectangular hall, 7.25 m x 6.60 m, while the other pavements displayed



Fig. 6: Sheikh Zouède mosaic (after A. Ovadiah *et al.*)

geometrical motifs.<sup>55</sup>

The scene of a Bacchic *thiasos* appears in the central register, developed horizontally in two friezes with no dividing line in between. The procession starts at the lower right end with a dancing maenad, a *thyrsus* in her right hand and *tympanum* in her left, wearing a swirling *chiton*, almost identical to the assumed Ariadne or maenad accompanying Silenus on the upper register at Fuente Alamo; she is turned towards the satyr who is following her, and blowing his horn, similar to the figure located in the right border of the lower register at Baños de Valdearados, who is holding the *pedum* in his left hand. Pan comes next, dancing and playing castanets in his raised left hand, and he holds a bunch of grapes in his right hand; the *syrinx* and another pair of castanets are under his arm. His head is turned towards the next group, comprising Hercules *bibens* leaning on a satyr, and separated from Pan by a leopard clasping a *krater*. The procession ends with another *krater* at the left. On the upper part, from right to left, a satyr playing cymbals is dancing with a maenad playing castanets, one arm above her head, like the maenads on the Spanish mosaics. They are followed by Papposilenus astride a donkey, and then by Dionysus' chariot pulled by a centaur playing an *aulos* and a centaress strumming the lyre, and led by Eros with the reins in his hands (Fig. 7).<sup>56</sup> The god is sitting in his chariot, of which can be seen only two eight-spoke wheels. His headdress features two bunches of grapes falling over his temples, similar to the Spanish mosaics at Fuente Alamo and Baños de Valdearados. He is wearing a long-sleeved tunic



Fig. 7: Detail of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic (after A. Ovadia *et al.*)

and a cloak that covers his legs, his feet visible beneath. He is holding the *thyrsus* in his left hand while his right one holds a *krater* from which he is pouring liquid towards which a second leopard is running. The god's posture is reminiscent of the figure in the Triumph at Baños de Valdearados. A vine bearing three bunches of grapes closes the scene at the upper left. Several Greek inscriptions indicate the names of *Herakles*, *Eros* and *Dionysos*, as well as the words *skirtos* and *telete*, referring to the Dionysiac mysteries. The entire procession is pervaded by a sense of movement that connects the various groups and lends a narrative continuity to the scene, despite its presentation in two planes.

The upper register depicts the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus by means of three groups of figures. From left to right we can see Phaedra sitting in an *aedicula* with curtains; in the center Hippolytus, dressed as a hunter, in a long-sleeved v-necked tunic very similar to that of Dionysus in both registers at Baños de Valdearados, is accompanied by his dog, and receiving Phaedra's letter from the hands of her nursemaid, in the presence of Eros; on the right, Hippolytus' companions, next to the horse, are waiting for him to set off hunting. The names in Greek of *Phaedra*, *Eros*, *Trophos*, *Hippolitos*, and *Kinagoi* identify the figures. Greek inscriptions at the top and bottom of this register invite the spectator to behold the beauty of the mosaic.<sup>57</sup> Choosing these two mythological episodes for a single pavement was probably intended to underline the



Fig. 8: Detail of the upper register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic, Ariadne, Dionysus, Ampelos, Silenus, satyrs and maenads (after J.L. Argente)



Fig. 9: Detail of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic: Silenus, satyr and maenad (after A. Ovadia *et al.* )

consequences of different behaviours: in other words, they were chosen for their allegorical meaning .

The analogies between the three pavements discussed here are determined first by the division of the figurative space into two superposed registers, and second by the architectural decoration and the border adorned with aquatic birds at Baños de Valdearados and in Sheikh Zouède. However, most surprising is the close stylistic relation they bear, due possibly to the fact that three are



Fig. 10: Detail of the upper register of the Baños de Valdearados mosaic, satyr and maenads (after J.L. Argente)

works of art from the periphery (Figs. 8-10): the pose of the god in the chariot, with the *thyrsus* in his hand, the upturned *krater*, the v-necked tunic, the central position of the figure of Pan, the posture of the maenads with arm raised above the head, the exophthalmic eyes and the similar expressions of all the figures, the shape of the eyebrows and nose, the sense of movement, the lack of proportions of the bodies, the frontal or three-quarter positions, the hairstyles, the clothing, i.e. all those features that characterized the art of the Late Empire, dominated by *horror vacui*, and all in a continuous narrative in two registers. In regard to the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, the Ovadiahs have noted that the heads depicted in profile of the figures of the maenad, the satyr, Pan and Phaedra's nursemaid are one of the few instances of profile views, since these are very rare on pavements of the Holy Land and of the neighbouring countries.<sup>58</sup> However, satyrs and bacchantes are also represented in profile on mosaics of the Dionysiac *thiasos* all dated to the beginning of the sixth century CE: at Gerasa, at the Villa of the Falconer in Argos, and at Sarrîn; particularly in the Nilotic frieze of the latter, one figure stands out, in profile and wearing the garland of the god Nile.<sup>59</sup> The Spanish Dionysiac mosaics of the Triumph, which span a wide period of time, frequently feature figures in profile: e.g. the figure of Pan in the Andelos pavement, that of Bacchus in that of Alcolea, and the two maenads of Torre de Palma, as well as the maenad accompanying Hercules *bibens* in the Cártama mosaic. It is precisely these stylistic features (Figs. 11-14), typical of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, that mark it as the closest to the Spanish



Fig. 11: Detail of the Sheikh Zouède mosaic, satyr and maenad (after A. Ovadia *et al.*)



Fig. 12: Detail of the upper register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, maenad (after J. Lancha)

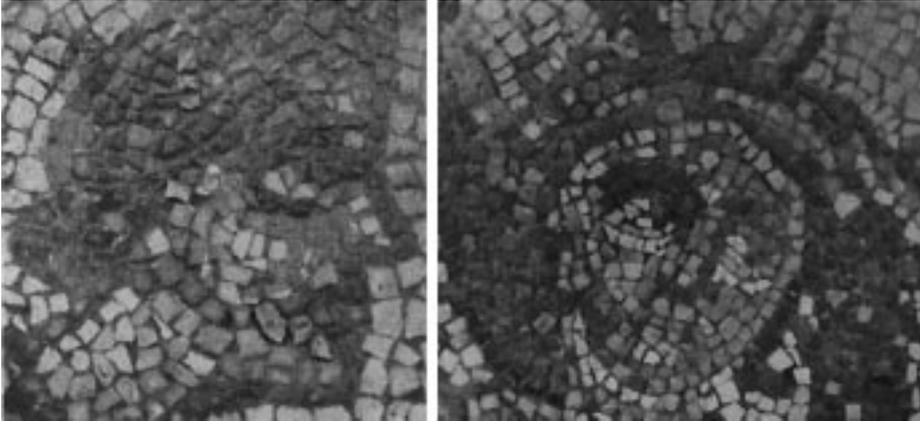


Fig. 13: Details of the upper register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, Ariadne and Dionysus (after L.A. López Palomo)

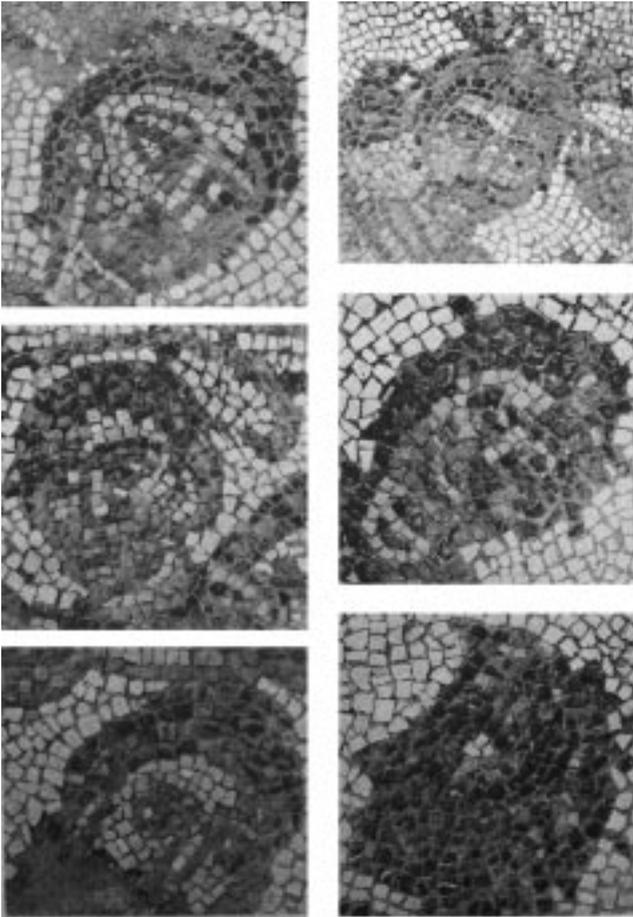


Fig. 14: Details of the lower register of the Fuente Alamo mosaic, Dionysus, Indians, maenads and satyrs (after L.A. López Palomo)



Fig. 15: Dionysiac mosaic at Mérida (Photograph: G. López Monteagudo)

pavements, especially to that of Fuente Alamo, where some figures (e.g. Ariadne, the maenad, Pan or the Indian), are almost identical. Furthermore, in the Baños de Valdearados mosaic the two figures, emblematically placed at either end of the higher panel (Figs. 8 and 10), are represented in profile, as in the Argos mosaic, and are similar to certain Roman sarcophagi from the second and third centuries CE.<sup>60</sup> Another Spanish mosaic of the Late Empire, from Mérida, decorated with two *quadrigas* and figures of the Dionysiac *thiasos* in the central circle, also presents close analogies to the Sheikh Zouède pavement, especially in the figures of the maenads dancing with arms raised, playing castanets and cymbals, and in the panther running towards the *krater* (Figs. 15-16).<sup>61</sup>

Not only do the three discussed mosaics show close similarities in their iconography, but also in possible interpretations conveyed by the images: the

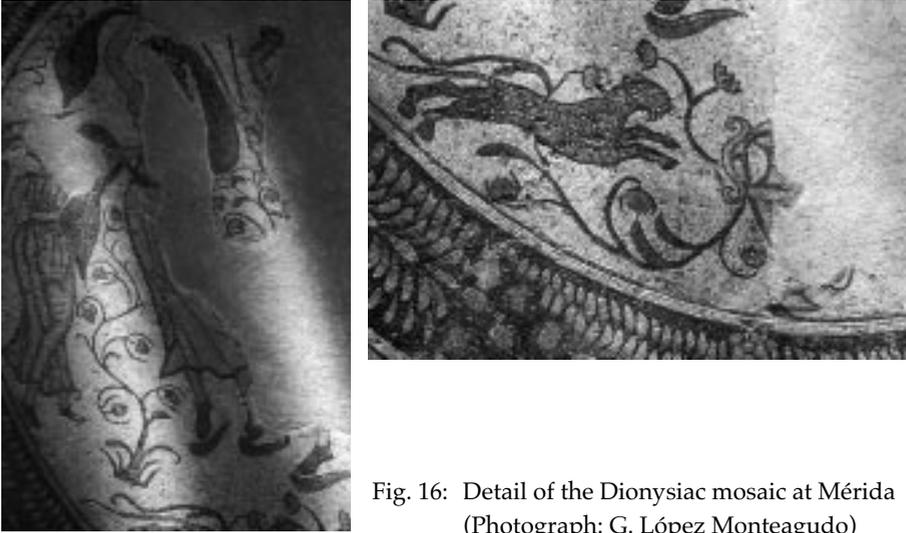


Fig. 16: Detail of the Dionysiac mosaic at Mérida  
(Photograph: G. López Monteagudo)

persistent opposition between the divine and the human, the mortal and the immortal. The Triumph in all of them relates to the virtues of good over evil, depicted at Fuente Alamo by the victorious battle of Dionysus and his retinue against the Indians, who represent the brutal forces of Nature; in the Sheikh Zouède mosaic by confronting the characters of Hippolytus and Phaedra as embodiments of the moral ideas of good and evil,<sup>62</sup> and finally, in Valdearados, the amorous affection of Ariadne for Dionysus, the union of the divine and the human, the *telete* that gives its name to the mystery. Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos, where Dionysus finds her asleep upon his return from India, is brought by the god in his triumphal chariot and made his wife, as expressed by Nonnos (*Dion.* XLVII 428-452), who has Dionysus comfort Ariadne with these words: *Young woman, why do you mourn an Athenian who has abandoned you? / Why do you keep Theseus' memory?, you have got Dionysus for a husband: / Instead of an ephemeral husband, an undying one / ... / Desire saves you for a better wedding. / Happy for having abandoned Theseus' poor heart: / On Dionysus' bed you will see the Star. / Could you ever wish for a greater joy than having at the same time, / Heaven for your home and Cronus' son for a father in law? / ... / I will make a crown of stars for you so that you are remembered / as Dionysus' bright wife...*<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, Hippolytus represents virtue in rejecting Phaedra's proposal of love, for Phaedra is the wife of his father, Theseus. This *sophrosyne* will tragically lead to his death, when out of spite for having been rejected, Phaedra accuses him of trying to seduce her. He will die when his chariot is hurled die against the rocks by a gigantic wave (personified as a sea bull) that Theseus asks

Poseidon to conjure up, when Hippolytus is driving in his *quadriga* by the seashore (Eur.*Hipp.*1201-1248).<sup>64</sup> Hippolytus attains immortality, becoming a constellation, having been borne up to the heavens by divine favor.<sup>65</sup> Thus we see how the sacrifice of mortals, Ariadne in one case and Hippolytus in the other, is rewarded with immortality by turning them into constellations, as a reward for their upright behavior. These mortals are represented in the mosaics by the owners of the house who, through their roles as actors, not only identify themselves with the divine characters, but also subliminally suggest themselves to the viewers as repositories of the virtues embodied by the gods.

## Notes

- 1 Dunbabin 1978: 48-50.
- 2 Bérard 1935: 115-142.
- 3 Bruhl 1931: 109-123; Leschi 1937: 25-41.
- 4 *Recueil Général des Mosaïques de la Gaule* III-1, 1979: 101-117; *ibid.* III-2, 1981: no.307, fig. XLIV.
- 5 Weiss and Talgam 1994: 231-237; see also, Turnheim and Ovadiah 1997: 107-116.
- 6 Joyce 1980: 307 ff.; Theophilidou 1984: 264-266.
- 7 Daszewski 1985.
- 8 Ovadiah *et alii* 1991: 181-191.
- 9 López Palomo III, 1987: 105-115; San Nicolás Pedraz 1994: 1289-1304.
- 10 López Monteagudo *et alii* 1988: 788-795; Blázquez *et alii* 1993: 271-275, figs. 36-38.
- 11 Euzennat 1966: 480; Lavagne 1994: 243-248.
- 12 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420, with a thorough study of all parallels and of the bibliography.
- 13 Donderer 1983: 125, Pl. LXXV, 1.
- 14 *Recueil Général des Mosaïques de la Gaule* I-1, 1957: 61-62, Pls. XXXI, 1 and XXXII.
- 15 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420.
- 16 Donderer 1988: 781-799; Foucher 1994: 70-80, fig. 17; Daszewski and Michaelides 1989: 24-27, fig. 12.
- 17 Matz II, 1968: 212 ff.; Matz IV, 1975: nos. 237-245. In Spain a scene represented in a Roman painting from the end of the first century or the second century CE, found in the House of Mitreo, Mérida, has been recently identified as Dionysus as the object of vassalage by three Indians accompanied by a herald, cf. Altieri 1996; Altieri: in press.
- 18 Fernández-Galiano 1984: 97-120; *LIMC* III: 515 -531, *s.v.* "Dionysos (in Peripheria Orientali)"; *LIMC* III: 540-566, *s.v.* "Dionysos/Bacchus"; *LIMC* IV: 908-923, *s.v.* "Dionysos/Bacchus (in Peripheria Occidentali)"; San Nicolás Pedraz 1994: 1289-1304, featuring the last Spanish findings; Dunbabin 1971: 52-65; Foucher 1975: 55-61.
- 19 *LIMC* III: 557, no.221, *s.v.* "Dionysos/ Bacchus"; Matz II, 1968: nos.78, 82, 84-86, 88, 90, 92, 108, 109, 142, 143, 149A, 149, 150, 161, Pls. 94, 98, 110, 111, 121, 134, 149, 166, 167, 170, 172, 180-183.
- 20 López Monteagudo *et alii* 1994: in press, with complete bibliography.
- 21 Levi 1947: 93-99, Pl. XVIc.

- 22 López Monteagudo 1990: 227, with all Spanish parallels.
- 23 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994: 1298.
- 24 Turcan 1966: 441-472.
- 25 Argente Oliver 1975: 899-912; Blázquez 1982: 407-423; Fernández-Galiano 1984: 107-108, fig. 6; *Corpus de Mosaicos Romanos de España XII*, 1998: 13-16, no.1, fig. 1, Pls. 1-3, 31-33.
- 26 Argente Oliver 1979: 46-58, fig. 18, Pls. II-VII.
- 27 Gómez Pallarés 1997: 76-78, Pl. 23.
- 28 Fernández-Galiano II, 1984a: 160-168, Pls. XXXI, LXXXVIII and XCI, also with parallels to other varieties, wherein the god, following the Praxitelic model, appears pouring from the krater by himself or leaning against a column.
- 29 *Corpus de Mosaicos Romanos de España I*, 1978: 34, no. 15, Pl. 26.
- 30 Bianchi-Bandinelli 1971: 292 ff., fig. 272.
- 31 LIMC III: 483-484, nos. 718-730, s.v. "Dionysos".
- 32 Matz IV, 1975: no. 288, Pl. 312; Levi 1947: 45-46. Pl. VII c.
- 33 *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II 12.2*: 266-429; LIMC III: 521-522, nos. 78-85, s.v. "Dionysos (in Peripheria Orientali)"; LIMC IV: 913-914, nos. 106-128, s.v. "Dionysos (in Peripheria Occidentali)"; Fernández-Galiano II, 1984a: 160-167; *Corpus de los Mosaicos Romanos de España IX*, 1989: 23-24, no. 2, Pls. 8-9 and 33-34.
- 34 Weitzmann 1979: no. 123; LIMC III: 521-522, s.v. "Dionysos (in Peripheria Orientali)"; LIMC III: 547-548, s.v. "Dionysos/Bacchus".
- 35 Guardia Pons 1992: 121-127; *Recueil Général des Mosaïques de la Gaule III-1*, 1979: 101-117; *ibid.* II-2, 1981: no. 307, fig. XLIV.
- 36 Fernández-Galiano II, 1984: 160-167; LIMC V: 158-159 s.v. "Herakles" On the lower panel of the fragmentary mosaic at Gerasa, kept in the Pergamon Museum, the central group made up of three figures: a satyr carrying the cudgel and holding a drunken Hercules who is trying to undress the maenad, presents close parallels to the mosaics at Cártama and Lyon, cf. Kriseleit 1985: 18-21.
- 37 Blázquez 1994: 473-489.
- 38 Fernández-Galiano II, 1984a: 148-171, 179-180, Pls. LXXXI, LXXXV, LXXXVIII, LXXXIX, XCI and C.
- 39 *Corpus de los Mosaicos Romanos de España V*, 1982, 53-54, No. 38; Ferrete 1984: 229-233, Pls. 1-7.
- 40 Dunbabin 1978: 184, Pl. 183.
- 41 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420, with complete bibliography on the parallels; Turcan 1966: 441-472.
- 42 Fernández-Galiano 1984: 97-120, figs. 3, 5; Mezquíriz 1987: 59-61; López Monteagudo *et alii* 1997: in press, with complete bibliography.
- 43 Becatti IV, 1961: 197, no. 367, Pl. LIII; Parlasca 1959: 40-41, Pls. 40-41; Foucher 1975: 55-61, Pls. XX,1, XXI,2, XXIII,2; Dunbabin 1971: 52-65; *Corinth I/V*, Pls. 54, 57.
- 44 Dunbabin 1971: 52-65.
- 45 San Nicolás Pedraz 1994a: 405-420.
- 46 Picard 1948: 810-821.
- 47 LIMC III: 486, nos.763-769 s.v. "Dionysos"; LIMC III: 527-528, nn. 135-137 s.v. "Dionysos (in peripheria orientali)"; LIMC III: 556-557, nos. 208-220 s.v. "Dionysos/Bacchus"; Matz II, 1968: 188-212, Pls. 94-121.
- 48 Blázquez 1987: 28-34.
- 49 Blázquez 1997: in press.
- 50 Lancha 1990: 89-105.
- 51 García Hoz *et al.*, 1991: 396-398.

- 52 Fernández-Galiano 1984: 109-110.  
 53 García y Bellido 1965: 201.  
 54 Parrish 1995: 307-332.  
 55 Ovadiah *et alii* 1991: 181-191.  
 56 On Dionysiac Triumphs pulled by centaurs, cf. López Monteagudo 1998: in press.  
 57 Cf. Ovadiah 1997: 441-444, Figs.1-4.  
 58 Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 178, and nn.162,163.  
 59 Akerström-Hougen 1974: 36, 110-116, Figs. 68, 70, Pls. VII-VIII; Balty 1990: 32-46, 77 and 79, Pls. XVII,1, XXXI,2, XXXII,1 and XL.  
 60 Matz I, 1968: nos. 35 and 40, Pls. 32 and 37; Matz II, 1968: no.139, Pl. 162.  
 61 *Corpus de los Mosaicos Romanos de España I*, 1978, 45-46, no. 43, Pls. 77, 79 and 101.  
 62 For this approach, see Muczniak 1999: 137-138.  
 63 The golden crown or tiara that was turned into a constellation afterwards.  
 64 Such a scene is depicted on an Apulian volute *krater* of the third quarter of the fourth century BCE, cf. *LIMC V*: no.105, s.v. "Hippolytos I".  
 65 A similar scene seems to be represented in the mosaic of the Auriga at Conimbriga, cf. Dunbabin 1982: 84-85; López Monteagudo 1998: 299 ff.

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# *Roman Priestesses: the Case of Metilia Acte*

*Sonia Mucznik*

*Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University*

**M**etilia Acte and her husband Junius Euhodus were buried in a sarcophagus discovered in Ostia, now in the Vatican (Fig.1).<sup>1</sup> The dedicatory inscription within the tabula on the lid provides us with valuable information concerning Metilia Acte and her husband (Fig.2). It reads:

D. M.

C. IUNIUS.PAL.EUHODUS.MAGISTER.QQ  
COLLEGI.FABR.TIGN.OSTOS.LUSTRI.XXI  
FECIT.SIBI.ET.METILIAE.ACTE.SACERDO  
TI.M.D.M.COLON.OST.COIUGSANCTISSIM

*D(is)                      M(anibus)*

*C. Iunius Pal(latina) Euhodus magister q(uin) q(uenalis)  
collegi fabrum tignuoriorum Ostis lustrum XXI fecit sibi et Metilia Acte sacerdoti  
M(agnae D(eum) M(atris) colon(iae) Ost(iensis) coiui(i) sanctissim(e)*<sup>2</sup>

[To the Manes (spirits of the dead): C. Junius Euhodus of the tribe Palatina, five-year magistrate of the twenty-first lustrum of the guild of the carpenters at Ostia, made (this monument) for himself and for his wife, Metilia Acte, priestess of the Great Mother of the gods at the colony of Ostia, most sacred (or most saintly woman)].<sup>3</sup>

The date of the sarcophagus has been determined from the XXI Lustrum of the guild, mentioned in the inscription: from 161 to 170 CE.<sup>4</sup>

Through examination of the inscription on the lid of this sarcophagus, this article hopes to show the importance and duties of Roman priestesses, and



Fig. 1: Sarcophagus of Metilia Acte and Junius Euhodus, from Ostia, now in the Vatican, Inv. No. 1195 (Photo DAIRome No. 72.590)



Fig. 2: Detail of the sarcophagus: the inscription within the *tabula* (Photo DAIRome No. 72.592)

particularly of Metilia Acte and her husband Junius Euhodus. The various elements depicted on the sarcophagus, as well as the connections with the myth of Alcestis that appears on the main panel of the sarcophagus, may enable us to gain a greater understanding of the roles of the deceased couple in the cults of Magna Mater and of Attis.

Several of the elements mentioned in the inscription require elucidation. First, as regards Junius Euhodus: what were the duties and privileges of a *magister* or president of the guild, held by him, and who were the *fabri tignarii*? The former had both civic and religious duties. His numerous civic duties included convening the assembly and presiding at their sessions; he was responsible for the strict observation of the statutes, oversaw the work for repair, improvement or decoration of the guild quarters; and in addition, he supervised the guild finances. Among his religious duties, he performed or oversaw sacrifices and presided at the banquets; on festive days he made libations of incense and of wine. In his official capacity he wore a white toga. The office of *magister* or president implied, in fact, a heavy charge; it was thus necessary to be wealthy in order to be eligible as *magister*. That the office also signified an honour is shown by the title being included on funerary monuments,<sup>5</sup> such as the sarcophagus studied here.

Who were the *fabri tignarii*? They were carpenters - their guild had intimate relations with the *dendrophori*, with whom they were frequently associated in inscriptions; sometimes the two guilds had the same patron.<sup>6</sup> The *dendrophori* were a guild of wood merchants, who in addition to their professional character, had a religious function in the cult of Attis, and they are known to have flourished in Ostia during the second century CE.<sup>7</sup> It was the *dendrophori* who brought the pine-tree, which they had cut down, into the temple on the day of mourning for Attis' death. It is possible that Junius Euhodus also belonged to the guild or association of the *dendrophori*. The display of Attis heads on each end of the lid reinforces the suggestion that Junius Euhodus' position in the cult may well have been as important as that of his wife.

The other elements in the inscription requiring clarification relate to Euhodus' wife. The reference to Metilia Acte as *sacerdos* or priestess of Magna Mater raises several questions: what was the role of a priestess in Roman cults and, more specifically, in the cult of the goddess Magna Mater? Who were the women chosen to be priestesses; what was their social status? Did Roman women in general participate in the religious rites of Magna Mater?

Despite the accepted view that, with a few exceptions, women played only an insignificant role in religion, there is evidence that Roman women, both as priestesses and as participants, did play an active part in various religious

cults, and especially in the cult of Cybele, which according to Plutarch was 'a religion of women and eunuchs'.<sup>8</sup>

The importance of women's roles in religion, and most especially in those cults in which "ecstasy", "frenzy" or "madness" were intrinsic elements, was attested from the Greek and Hellenistic periods on. Thus the "madness" of the prophetess at Delphi, of the priestess at Dodona, as well as of the Sibyl, was seen as divine.<sup>9</sup> Religious ecstasy or "enthusiasm" was characteristic of the cults coming from the East, according to Aristotle, who observed that certain melodies, such as the Phrygian with its wild and relentless music played on the flute, caused some persons to fall into a religious frenzy.<sup>10</sup> The character of the cult of Cybele (or Magna Mater, Magna Mater Deum or Magna Mater Idaea) was such that it led her followers into frenzy, induced by the clashing of cymbals, the beating of drums, and the shrill notes of the Phrygian flute.

The advent in Rome of Magna Mater has been studied by many scholars, and is thus unnecessary to deal here with the partly legendary, partly historical event, and the political circumstances connected with it. The Phrygian goddess became a Roman one, through her connection with Troy, as is told by Virgil's *Aeneas*, and though the Trojan connection had made her acceptable to the Roman state, this was not the case regarding the strange alien elements in her cult, mainly her Phrygian priests, the *galli*, who, in a frenzied state, had castrated themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Women, especially patrician women, seem to have played an important role in the early stages of Magna Mater's introduction into Rome. As told by Livy and Ovid, upon the goddess' arrival from Phrygia at Ostia, in 204 BCE, when her ship sank in the mud and none of the men were able to move it, it was a young patrician woman who succeeded where the men could not. Claudia Quinta, in some versions a Vestal Virgin, in others a matron, extricated the ship, after having invoked the goddess' help to prove her chastity, which had been doubted.<sup>12</sup> This event seems to be depicted on a first-century CE altar dedicated by Claudia Synthyche (Fig.3).<sup>13</sup> The statue of the goddess was then triumphantly passed from hand to hand by the patrician women who were attending, and taken to Rome to the Palatine, where she was placed in the temple of Victory, until her own temple was built in 191 BCE. Annual celebrations, with sacrifices, banquets and games were held in her honour.<sup>14</sup> The *Megalesia* or *ludi Megalenses*, which included *ludi scaenici*, were represented in front of the temple on the Palatine, with the statue of Magna Mater probably placed in its portal.<sup>15</sup> Ovid mentions that the legend of Claudia was presented on the stage, most probably in the *ludi scaenici*, performed since 194 BCE.<sup>16</sup> *Ludi circenses* were also part of the festival instituted in honour of the goddess.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 3: Altar dedicated by Claudia Syntyche  
(after Vermaseren 1977b: Pl. CXIII)

The statue of Claudia Quinta, the Vestal Virgin, erected by the Senate in her honour in the portico of the temple of Magna Mater, miraculously survived unscarred the two fires which destroyed the temple.<sup>18</sup>

Although the organization of the priesthood of this cult is only vaguely known, both a high priest and a priestess appear to have occupied the top echelons of the priestly hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> The duties of the office would probably have included care of the statue of the goddess, the rites of purification, and the safekeeping of gifts.<sup>20</sup> It may be conjectured that the priestess participated prominently in the rituals celebrated from March 15 to 27 for Attis, as well as in the annual ceremonies for Magna Mater and Attis, instituted by the Emperor Claudius, which lasted from April 4 to 10.<sup>21</sup>

As part of the March ceremonies dedicated to Attis, the faithful submitted to fasting and abstinence for nine days. Then, on March 22 the pine-tree was brought in procession into the temple by the tree-bearers (carpenters and wood merchants) called the *dendrophori*. This was followed by a day of mourning for the death of Attis. Then came a day of blood, when the priests flagellated themselves. At the end of the mourning period, the festivities of the *Hilaria*

seem to symbolize the rebirth of Attis. After a day of rest, the statue of Magna Mater, led through the city accompanied by torches, was bathed in the river (a ceremony known as the *lavatio*).<sup>22</sup>

On the last day of the festivities, a long and magnificent procession took place, during which, according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 'the Phrygian priest and priestess carried her image in procession through the city, begging alms in her name...striking their timbrels, while their followers play tunes upon their flutes in honour of the Mother of the Gods.'<sup>23</sup> It seems possible that the scene on a first century CE wall-painting in the Via dell' Abbondanza at Pompeii depicts such a procession: the statue of the goddess appears on a wooden bier, while a priest and priestess dressed in white stand nearby; the priestess holds a *tympanum*. The other participants are mostly women, holding various objects and musical instruments, such as *tympana* and *cymbala*.<sup>24</sup> The silver statue was bathed and purified in the river, and showered with flowers according to an ancient rite.<sup>25</sup> The scheme of the procession may have been similar to that of the Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus, though obviously not as extravagantly sumptuous. The literary description of this procession mentions that priests and priestesses walked behind the carriage of their god or goddess.<sup>26</sup>

### Priestesses of Magna Mater

Metilia Acte clearly was an important priestess of the Magna Mater cult in Ostia. As noted above, Ostia was the port to which the ship bringing the image of Magna Mater had arrived in 204 BCE; many Oriental followers had settled there,<sup>27</sup> and thus it was a thriving centre of Oriental cults, among which that of Magna Mater was one of the most important.<sup>28</sup> The Metroon, as well as a shrine of Attis, many statues, and inscriptions were found in the large sanctuary.

Inscriptions provide evidence for other priestesses of the cult of Magna Mater, from Ostia as well as from other Roman towns. A priestess named Salonia Euterpe, from the Metroon of the *Portus Augusti et Traiani Felicis* in Ostia, is mentioned in a funerary inscription.<sup>29</sup> Another priestess is depicted on a marble relief, dated first century CE: her upper body, placed before a large shell, is in high relief; the inscription below her figure reveals her name and status: '*Laberia Felicia, sacerdos maxima, matris deum magnae Idaeae*' (Fig.4).<sup>30</sup>

Numerous priestesses of Magna Mater (or Cybele) are known from inscriptions, such as Abba, of Histria in Thrace, a high priestess who was in charge of the great festival, and also provided a lavish public banquet.<sup>31</sup> The cultic office, as well as the related religious festivals and activities, was probably very costly, and this implies that the economic and social status of these women was high. Another high priestess of the goddess, whose husband was a high



Fig. 4: Relief of Laberia Felicia (after Vermaseren 1977b: Pl.CL)

priest, a senator and a *quindecimvir* who supervised the sacrificial rites, dedicated an altar to the 'almighty' Cybele and Attis;<sup>32</sup> while yet another priestess, Aelia Antigonā, mentions in an inscription that she had the tomb built for herself, for her beloved husband, their descendants and freedmen. These inscriptions come from a burial ground close by the Tiber, near the road from Ostia to Rome.<sup>33</sup> The priestess Claudia Synthychē dedicated the altar with the representation of Magna Mater's arrival that was found on the bank of the Tiber. A Phrygian cap, pedom and cymbals, all attributes of Attis, appear on the lateral panels of this altar (Fig.5).<sup>34</sup> A priestess of the goddess, Veronia Trophima, is mentioned in an inscription from Verona, dedicated by her husband.<sup>35</sup>

Lists of priests and priestesses mentioned in inscriptions from Campania, indicate that some of the latter held very important positions in the social and political life of the province. These included a priestess, Munatia Reditta, who

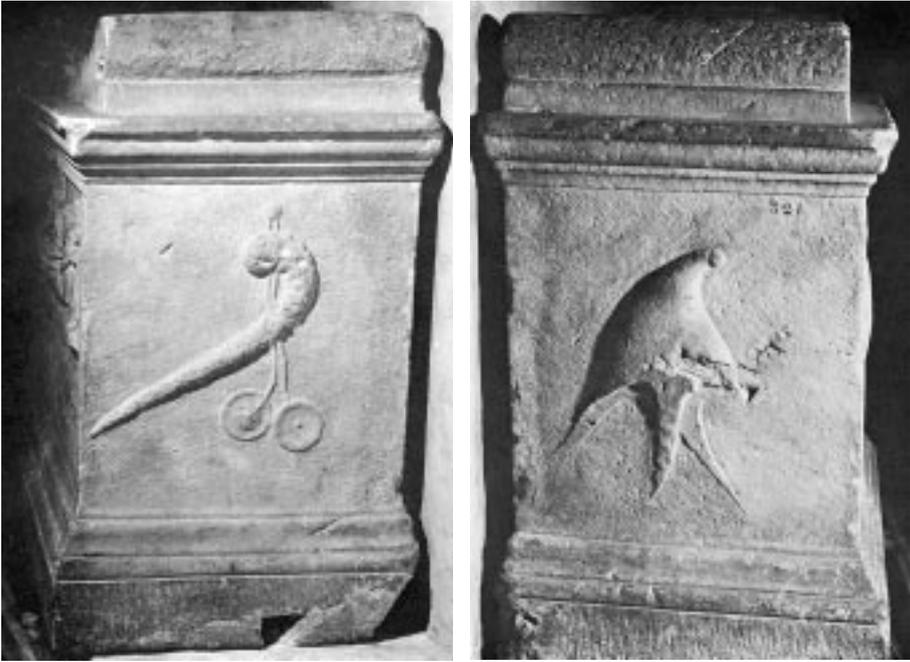


Fig. 5: Lateral panels of the altar of Claudia Syntyche (after Vermaseren 1977b: Pls. CXII, CXIV)

celebrated her investiture by making a *taurobolium*; the daughter of a consul who built a temple at her own expense; and another woman, who made a *taurobolium* in honor of the goddess and gave an offering to her.<sup>36</sup> The inscription appearing on the frieze of a sacrificial altar of the second century CE, from the island of Thasos, mentions that it was dedicated by the priestess of Cybele.<sup>37</sup>

A well-documented case is that of Plancia Magna of Perge in Turkey, who lived in the early second century CE, and was high priestess of Magna Mater for life, as well as priestess of Artemis, and of the imperial cult. She also held important public civic positions, and financed one of her city's most important public buildings: the monumental main city-gate, of which some parts are still visible. Placed along the walls of the city gate were statues of members of the Imperial family, the founders of the city, and her ancestors. There are also three statue bases on which once stood statues of Plancia, only one of which has survived (Fig.6).<sup>38</sup> The inscriptions on these inform us that they were dedicated to her by Perge's assembly and council, who bestowed on her the highest honours of her city. Her two meter high marble statue has survived. The crown on her head indicates that she was a priestess of the imperial cult: it is decorated with four imperial busts. This statue and others were placed in niches along



Fig. 6: Statue of Plancia Magna of Perge (after Inan, Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979: No. 225)

the walls of the city gate, as can be seen in the reconstruction (Fig.7).<sup>39</sup>

It may be conjectured that many other priestesses of the cult of Magna Mater could be found all over the Roman empire. According to inscriptions, it seems that women represented about half the number of the *sacerdos* of Magna Mater.<sup>40</sup> It is also possible that many of the statues identified as representing Cybele could originally have had portrait heads, and thus may have been statues of priestesses, under the guise of the goddess.<sup>41</sup>

What was the role of these priestesses in the cult? Did they play an active part in the cult or was their office only an honorary one?

In the peninsula of Piraeus numerous monuments connected with the cult of the goddess have been found. These have provided ample information,

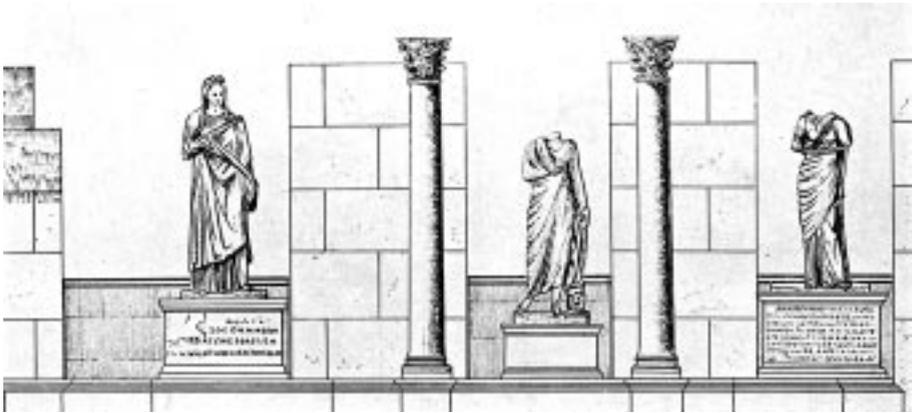


Fig. 7: Reconstruction of the city-gate of Perge (after Mansel 1975: Pl. 35)

including details of religious associations. The *Orgeones* of the Magna Mater, a religious society or association of the cult, was formed in the third century BCE. Many inscriptions related to the dignitaries of this association in the Piraeus testify to the role of the priestesses of this cult. Can this evidence be extended to later periods? The most ancient documents date from the beginning of the third century BCE, and the later ones are from the Imperial period.

Although a priest and a priestess were simultaneously in office, the priest seems to have had less importance than the priestess, for there are more inscriptions referring to priestesses than to priests. According to these, the priestess was chosen by drawing lots; her office was for one year, but she could be chosen for a second year. Her duties included the upkeep of the temple, and she had to tend to all that concerned the service of the goddess, particularly the sacrifices offered by the community. The most important part of her ministry was to preside at the celebration of the festivities and of the mysteries. The *Orgeones* rewarded her zeal and piety by giving her honours. A privilege given to the priestesses after they ended their sacerdocy, was membership in a sort of council charged with the supervision of the celebration of the cult.<sup>42</sup> The first reference to a priest is found in an inscription from 163/64 CE, indicating that at this time a State priest was appointed, probably when, under Marcus Aurelius, the cult became a State cult. This inscription appears under the portrait of the priestess Melitine, found in the Metroon of the Piraeus, where she mentions that 'she had been priestess under the priest Philemon' (Fig.8).<sup>43</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that these data relating to the status of the priestesses of the cult of Magna Mater refer not only to this cult in the Piraeus, but also to all parts of the Roman empire; in other words, they indicate that



Fig. 8: Portrait of the priestess Melitine  
(after Vermaseren 1977b: Pl. LXXXI)

Roman priestesses held positions, duties and privileges similar to those of the Piraeus priestesses. Furthermore, it is important to remember that Magna Mater was frequently associated or merged with other goddesses, such as Isis and Demeter,<sup>44</sup> and thus priestesses would officiate for more than one goddess, as seen above in the case of Plancia Magna. The evidence for the priestesses of Isis is abundant;<sup>45</sup> an inscription dated to the end of the first century CE from south Italy, mentions that the priestess of Isis was also a priestess of Diva Julia (daughter of Titus) and of Cybele. There is evidence that some priestesses held office for a year, while others, especially in the Roman period, held it for life.<sup>46</sup> Is it possible to apply this information to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge of the priestesses of Magna Mater?

Many of the honors and privileges granted to priestesses of other gods and goddesses and of the imperial cult are known, suggesting that this granting of honors might also be the case for the priestesses of Magna Mater. Such honors



Fig. 9: Detail of the lid of the Ostia sarcophagus (Photo DAIRome No. 72.593)

are mentioned on the inscription for the priestess Berenice, who lived in Syros in the second or third century CE, and who became priestess of the heavenly gods, celebrating the rites at her own expense, and was crowned with a gold wreath.<sup>47</sup> Another high priestess of the imperial cult, priestess of Demeter and 'all the other gods', who had built a temple with several cult statues in it, was herself honoured with statues whose inscriptions relate her benefactions to her city.<sup>48</sup> Among the other privileges that priestesses received was that of sitting on a throne high up in the theatre, presiding over shows and games, and being crowned by the city or by followers of a cult.<sup>49</sup>

Musical instruments associated with the cult of Magna Mater are depicted on both sides of the inscription on the lid of the Ostia sarcophagus: Phrygian flutes, tambourines (*tympana*) and *cymbala* (Fig.9). These musical instruments were already attached to the cult of the Mother of the gods from early times;<sup>50</sup> she was even said to have invented them.<sup>51</sup> Played during the rites, their music led the devotees into an ecstatic state and frenzy.<sup>52</sup> Euripides mentioned that the *tympanon* of Magna Mater had been adopted by the Dionsysiac cult and noted the connection of the cult of the Magna Mater with the cult of Dionysos.<sup>53</sup> The cymbals and tambourines provoked the state of frenzy or the 'possession of the initiate by the divinity'.<sup>54</sup> Both *tympana* and *cymbala* were played exclusively by women,<sup>55</sup> further suggesting the important role played by women in these cults. A *pedum*, appearing also on the lid, alludes to Attis, for it is one of the attributes of this god (Fig.10).

A flying Victory is depicted holding each side of the tabula with the inscription. That flying Victories figuring on Roman funerary monuments



Fig. 10: Detail of the lid of the Ostia sarcophagus (Photo DAIRome No. 72.591)

symbolize the victory of the deceased over death and evil spirits is well-known,<sup>56</sup> this meaning may perhaps be traced to earlier works of art, such as Apulian vases.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Victories could also suggest the apotheosis of the deceased, as implied by the representations on South Italian funerary vases.<sup>58</sup> This symbolism certainly became even more evident in Roman works of art, which antedate the Ostia sarcophagus.<sup>59</sup> There is, moreover, another possible reason for the inclusion of this motif on the Ostia sarcophagus: Victory was associated with many other gods and goddesses, including Cybele.<sup>60</sup> It should also be remembered that the goddess, on her arrival, was at first brought into the temple of Victory on the Palatine.

Next to each Victory a burning torch is placed diagonally with the flames downwards. While lowered torches are acknowledged as a symbol of death,<sup>61</sup> burning torches do have a more extensive range of meaning. Their role in funeral ceremonies and their depiction on funerary monuments have been dealt with by various scholars.<sup>62</sup> The symbolism of torches on funerary monuments is well-known, assuring the survival of the soul of the deceased.<sup>63</sup> However, it is possible to perceive that, in the context of this sarcophagus and of the cult of Magna Mater and Attis, torches might have acquired additional symbolical nuances. Fire could provide a mortal with immortality according to ancient beliefs;<sup>64</sup> later, fire was considered as one of the elements that had a role in the purification of the soul.<sup>65</sup> Torches had an important role in the cult of gods, and in the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, Dionysos, and Magna Mater. Torches were important in the procession of the solemn entry of the pine-tree brought by the *dendrophori* during the March festivities for Attis, as well as on

other days of the festivities dedicated to the god and to Magna Mater.<sup>66</sup> Thus, this seems to again point to the deceased couple as initiates and active followers of Magna Mater and Attis. It should, moreover, be noted that Persephone appears on the main panel of the sarcophagus, holding a burning torch, and thus providing an additional suggestion of initiation rites.<sup>67</sup>

Why did Junius Euhodus choose the theme of Alcestis for the sarcophagus in which he and his wife would be buried? A Roman viewer could probably perceive that Euhodus' motives for the choice may have been diverse. It is important to note that the heads of the mythical heroes, Alcestis and Admetus, are portraits of the deceased couple, Metilia Acte and Junius Euhodus, thus emphasizing their complete identification with the immortals. Alcestis' death placed in the central part of the panel formed the main focus of attention: she represented the absolute devotion of the wife who, in a supreme sacrifice, gave her own life so that her husband could be saved.<sup>68</sup> Alcestis' return to life and her reunion with her husband depicted on this sarcophagus, would signify the hope of the deceased couple, Metilia Acte and Junius Euhodus, that they too would merit the same fortune, in light of Metilia Acte's saintly life and her dedication to the goddess, as well as by Junius Euhodus' participation in the initiation and mysteries of the cult of Magna Mater and Attis. Junius Euhodus had probably undergone initiation into the mysteries of Attis, suggested by the Attis heads on the corners of the lid of this sarcophagus; this is reinforced by the attributes of the god - the *pedum*, the *cymbala*, the *tympana*, and the flute. The days of abstinence and fasting cleansed the initiate, who was then ready through the frenetic music of these instruments to attain ecstasy; maceration and flagellation of the body also contributed to this state of body and soul.<sup>69</sup> The piety of the priestess Metilia Acte, to which Junius Euhodus added his own, would certainly be seen as allowing them both to triumph over death and become immortal.

The question of whether the cult of Magna Mater promised immortality to its initiates has been raised. Recently this question has been very thoroughly examined by Sfameni Gasparro, who concluded that, in contrast with many other cases in which this thesis seems difficult to prove, the belief in resurrection and immortality seems clearly expressed in the case of this particular sarcophagus, by the conjunction of various factors.<sup>70</sup> As exposed here, the contents of the inscription, the Attis heads, the musical instruments and the *pedum*, the flying Victories, and the torches on the lid, when taken together in context, and when linked with the myth of Alcestis on the main panel of the sarcophagus, all seem to corroborate these beliefs.

It is hoped that the examination of the sarcophagus and the inscription on its lid, presented in this article, will contribute to a better understanding of the status of Roman priestesses of the cult of Magna Mater, Mother of all the gods. While the high social position of the couple buried in the sarcophagus seems clear, the importance of the roles of Metilia Acte as priestess of Magna Mater, and of Junius Euhodus as magister of the carpenters has, I believe, been shown here; the latter may also have been a member of the *dendrophori*, in the cult of Magna Mater and Attis in Roman Ostia. Despite the somewhat incomplete direct evidence provided by inscriptions, literary sources and works of art, these may throw light upon the important role of women in Roman religion in general, and in the cult of Magna Mater in particular.

## Notes

- 1 Robert 1969: 31, No. 26; Wood 1978: 499-502; Mucznik 1999.
- 2 Robert 1969: 33.
- 3 Wood 1978: 499-500.
- 4 Robert 1969: 32 ; Wood 1978: 500.
- 5 Waltzing 1968: I, 385-399.
- 6 *Ibid.*: I, 241, 444.
- 7 *Ibid.*: II, 122-123, 148; Cumont 1956: 57-58; Pensabene 1982: 70.
- 8 Staples 1998: 4-8; Sfameni Gasparro 1982: 472; Plut. *Amat.*13, 756 C.
- 9 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244.
- 10 Aristotle, *Politics*: VIII.7.4, VIII. 7.9-10.
- 11 Vermaseren 1979a: 38-63, 96; Wiseman 1984: 117-128; Beard 1994: 165-170.
- 12 Ovid, *Fasti* IV.291-325; Livy, XXIX.10-14.
- 13 Vermaseren 1977 b: 45, No.218, Pls.CXII - CXIV; Beard *et al.* 1998, 2: 45-46.
- 14 Livy XXIX,14; Ovid, *Fasti* IV.357.
- 15 Vermaseren 1977a: 125; Pensabene 1982: 76, the *ludi* seem to have taken place in front of the temple of the goddess.
- 16 Ovid, *Fasti*: IV. 326; Bremmer 1979: 10.
- 17 Ovid, *Fasti*: IV.305-360.
- 18 Valerius Maximus 1.11 (first century CE), mentions that the statue stood intact on its base, during the two fires which destroyed the temple of *Mater Deum*; Fantham *et al.* 1994: 220, and see Fig. 7.7, for a coin with the depiction of the statue.
- 19 Wissowa 1971: 320-21.
- 20 Kraemer 1992: 81.
- 21 Scullard 1981: 97-100; Carcopino 1942: 48-75.
- 22 Vermaseren 1977: 113-124.
- 23 Dion. Hal.: II.19.4-5.
- 24 Vermaseren 1977a: 108-109; Vermaseren 1978: 17-19, No. 42, Pls. XI -XVII.
- 25 Ovid, *Fasti*: IV. 340-345; Cumont 1956: 52-57.
- 26 Rice 1983: 11, 60.
- 27 Bieber 1969: 40.
- 28 Meiggs 1977: 354-64; Squarciapino 1962: 1-19.

- 29 Squarciapino 1962: 15.
- 30 Vermaseren 1977b: 68-9, Pl. CL.
- 31 Kraemer 1992: 84 and n. 27.
- 32 Vermaseren 1977a: 47-48.
- 33 *Ibid.*: 57.
- 34 Vermaseren 1977b: Pls. CXII, CXIV.
- 35 *Ibid.*: 69.
- 36 Tran Tan Tinh 1972: 93, 99, 120.
- 37 *Ibid.*: 80, pl. 28; *Thasos* 1967: 137, No. 40, Figs. 89, 80.
- 38 Inan, Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979: No. 225; Van Bremen 1983: 235; Fantham *et al.* 1994: 363-4; Boatwright 1991: 249-55.
- 39 Mansel 1975: Pl.35.
- 40 Kraemer 1992: n. 27.
- 41 Bieber 1969: 39, 40.
- 42 Foucart 1975: 20-22, 85.
- 43 Vermaseren 1977a: 35; 1982: 69, 95, no.315, Pl.LXXXI.
- 44 Dunand 1973: 266-68, and n. 4, mentions dedications to Isis and Magna Mater. For the association of Magna Mater with Demeter see, among other scholars, Sfameni Gasparro 1982: 473.
- 45 Heyob 1975: 89-110.
- 46 *Ibid.*: 90-91.
- 47 Kraemer 1988: No. 82.
- 48 Van Bremen 1988: 223, and n. 6.
- 49 MacMullen 1980: 215. In Athens priestesses had assigned seats in the Theatre of Dionysos, see McClees 1920: 9.
- 50 *Homeric Hymns* XIV; Pindar, *Dithyrambs*: Fr. 79 b; Eur. *Bacch.*:123-9.
- 51 Diod.Sic.: II.2-4.
- 52 Catullus, *Poems*: 63.
- 53 Eurip. *Bacch.*: 59-60,78,129-30; Burkert 1987: 25.
- 54 Burkert 1987: 35.
- 55 Anderson 1994: 185.
- 56 Cumont 1942: 101, 165, 487.
- 57 This concept may have been inherited by the Romans from various sources: such as vases from South Italy, where the funerary character of Nike/Victoria is already manifest. For some fifth century BCE vases, see Goulaki-Voutira, 1992: 880, Nos. 364-366. Apulian vases, most of which were found in tombs, would also have offered the same ideas. See Schauenburg 1987:199-232.
- 58 Nike holds a crown towards Herakles, while nearby Deinaira holds a folded garment, see a fourth century BCE Sicilian calyx krater, Trendall 1989: III. 428.
- 59 On a funerary altar dated c. 41-68 CE, two Victories hold a large wreath with the dedicatory inscription within it; see Altmann 1975:101, Nr. 86; Reinach 1912: 515,4. See also on funerary urns, Sinn 1987: Nos. 496, 626, especially 687. For an almost identical representation of flying Victories holding a *tabula* on a late Hadrianic sarcophagus, see Vollkomer 1997: No. 252. See also Sinn 1987: Nos. 496, 626, and esp. No. 687.
- 60 Daremberg and Saglio 1963: 844.
- 61 Cumont 1942: 341.
- 62 Rushforth 1915: 149-164; Daremberg and Saglio 1963: 1390.
- 63 Torches used from ancient Egypt in funeral ceremonies and in the cult of the dead and of the gods, were adopted by Greeks and Romans, who attached further

- significance, see Cumont 1949: 48-51.  
 64 *Hymn to Demeter* II, 238-242, 300 (trans. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., London 1977).  
 65 Servius, *Comm.in Verg.Aen.* VI, 738-747; Burkert 1987: 98.  
 66 Turcan 1961: 49-50. Torches appear in the wall-painting at Via dell'Abondanza, representing a procession of Magna Mater, see above n. 24.  
 67 Muznik 1999: 75-76.  
 68 *Ibid.*  
 69 Cumont 1959: 116-117,121.  
 70 Sfameni Gasparro 1985: 84-106, esp. 98.

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# *On the Wings of an Eagle - Medieval Transmutations of a Classical Metaphor*

*Ruth Bartal*

*Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University*

**A**n unusual iconographic scheme of a figure being lifted to heaven on the wings of an eagle appears in two major medieval representations of the Song of Songs: the fourteenth century Chemmo mural paintings (fig. 1)<sup>1</sup> and the 1465 Netherlandish block-book (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> The iconographic scheme is similar in both works of art: the bride is being borne up to heaven on the wings of a huge eagle while the angels and the daughters of Jerusalem gaze in admiration at the vision. The similarity of these unusual compositions points to a mutual source of inspiration, probably that of an earlier manuscript depicting the Song of Songs.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 1: Chemmo, *The Ascension of the Bride* (Photo R. Bartal).



Fig. 2: *Canticum Canticorum, The Ascension of the Bride* (Photo B. N. Paris)

The ascent to heaven on the wings of an eagle has its origins in the Classical tradition as well as in Biblical sources. In Classical literature and art, ascent on the wings of an eagle is linked to love and eternal life. Both Ganymede and Psyche ascend to heaven and immortality on the wings of the eagle/Jupiter to be united with their lovers (fig. 3).<sup>4</sup> In these myths, love, death and immortality are interwoven.<sup>5</sup>

In the Biblical sense this act is perceived more as an act of rescue: Moses uses this metaphor to describe the Divine rescue of the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt.<sup>6</sup> (Ex.19,4) These two traditions became fused in later Christian sources, and inspired many literary and visual expressions. The transmission and Christianisation of the metaphor of the wings can already be noted in Boethius' *Consolatione*, which had a great influence on medieval literature and thought. We can trace its influence in the mystic writings on the one hand, and in lay literature such as the *Roman de la Rose* on the other.<sup>7</sup>

In these later medieval writings, as in the Classical and Biblical sources, the metaphor of the wings symbolizes elation, freedom and release from earthly bonds. The powerful eagle appears as the divine power - a means by which mankind can reach a higher sphere.



Fig. 3: *Ganyমেদে and the Eagle*, Mosaic Vienne, Musée d'Archéologie et de Peinture (Photo after Phillips, *Art Bull.* 1960).

A study of the iconography in the Chelmno wall paintings and in the Netherlandish block-book raises several questions: why did the respective artists choose this particular metaphor, which is otherwise so rare in medieval art? What were their literary sources, and what is the meaning of these depictions?

It is important to point out that in Chelmno the scene of the “Assumption of the bride” appears as the final event, placed at the end of the cycle. The bride-soul is depicted ascending to eternity on the wings of an eagle after she has completed her long pursuit of her bridegroom - Christ, and is finally united with him. The passages from the Song of Songs present the admiration of the angels and the daughters of Jerusalem “Quae est ista quae ascendit de deserto delicijs (deliciis) enixa (innixa) super dilectum suum?” VIII,5 (“Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?”), and the maidens reply: “Ista est speciosa inter filias Jerusalem viderunt eam filie (filiae) Syon” (“She is the most beautiful among the daughters of Jerusalem, the daughters of Zion have seen her”).

I believe that the image portrayed in the Cistercian nunnery in Chelmno, and probably also in the German manuscript that served as its source, was

inspired by the writings of German female mystics. In these writings the metaphor of the wings is frequently used to describe the divine love that represents Christ. The human soul and mankind can be rescued from its earthly bonds only through this divine love. For Hildegard of Bingen the wings symbolize humility - the sign of Christ's humanity:

But it was not fitting for divine love not to have wings. For when the creature began circling aimlessly about in the beginning, it wished to fly, despite its earthbound nature, and so it fell, but it was the wings of divine love that lifted it up. These wings were holy humility. For when horrible misjudgment laid Adam low, divinity kept a sharp eye on him so that he might not perish utterly in the fall but that divinity itself might redeem him in the holiness of humanity. These were wings of great power, for humility-which was the humanity of the Savior-raised up mankind who was lost.<sup>8</sup>

In the same context, the metaphor of flying on the wings of a bird appears in the poems by Mechthild of Magdeburg. The bird is the human soul, which by its wings can free itself from its earthly desires; the wings are the wings of love, the vehicle for human salvation:

By remaining on the ground too long, a bird causes its wings to atrophy and its feathers to grow heavy. Then it rises to the heights, moves its feathers, and climbs until it takes to the air and glides into flight. The longer it flies, the more blissfully it soars, hardly touching the ground to rest. Just as the wings of love have taken from it all earthly desire, so we in the same way, should prepare ourselves to come to God. We must rise to God on the wings of our longing.<sup>9</sup>

In another poem, even closer in its sense to the Song of Songs, the meaning of the metaphor changes, and the wings represent Christ, while the flying figure is called the lady, referring to Mary:

When you fly on the wings of your yearning  
To the blissful heights to Jesus, your eternal love  
Thank Him there for me, lady,  
That although I am contemptible and unworthy,  
He still wished to be mine<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 4: *Canticum Caticorum, The Bride Instructing a Couple* (Photo B. N. Paris).

This passage may be the source of inspiration for the visual image of the farewell of the maidens as representing mankind.

In the Chelmino cycle the eagle represents Christ as the incarnation of divine love. The bride-soul attains salvation on the wings of the eagle - Christ.<sup>11</sup> This scene of the soul ascending to heaven, where the angels welcome it as if it were one of them, seems to be the most appropriate closure for the symbolic mystic representation of the Song of Songs.

Although the artist of the block-book probably copied this image from the same manuscript, he accorded it a different sense. The block-book is in fact a guide book of "true love," in which the ardent love between the bride and the bridegroom is depicted as a model of conjugal affection sanctified by the sacrament of marriage. The depiction of the bride ascending on the wings of the eagle in this context, and its place in the sequence, relates a different meaning and probably derives from different literary sources. In the block-book the scene appears on page 10b, in the middle of the narrative, immediately after the scene on page 10a where she is presented instructing a human couple on the multiple facets of love (fig. 4). The instruction scene on page 10a, which would be out of context in the mystical cycle, is missing in Chelmino, but has a major role in the context of the block-book. This page is in fact the key to understanding

the objective of the block-book and also to perceiving the new meaning of the ascent on the wings of the eagle.

The scenes on page 10a and b provide an interval in the narrative of the Song of Songs. In scene 10a the bride withdraws from her story and descends to the earthly sphere, in order to instruct a human couple on the nature of love, and its options. The room where this scene occurs is very different from all the other inner spaces portrayed in the block-book: it is furnished with a cupboard loaded with dishes, among them a plate with pears and a jug; and a large lit open fireplace. This kind of interior, conventional in Netherlandish genre representations, is meant to represent mundane space. The furnishing of the room includes several elements of disguised symbolism: a knot over the fireplace symbolizes the union of the couple; the pears on the plate are attributes of Venus and symbolize love.<sup>12</sup> The bride is standing in the center of the room, her head turned to the couple kneeling on the left in the well-known posture of donors. The bride is pointing with her finger at two female figures standing to her right, one of whom is holding a burning torch while the other is inadvertently spilling water from a jug on the floor. The fire and the water indicate the opposite and conflicting natures of love. A discourse is going on between the bride and the couple, for which the artist has selected passages from the Song of Songs that discuss the nature of love and its dangers, and adapted them to the symbolic meaning of the personifications.

The bride says: "Lampades eius (ejus) sicut lampades atque flammaram." ("The torches thereof are fire and flames.") The inscription above the personifications reads: "Aque multe (multae) non poterunt extingue (extinguere) caritatem" ("Many waters cannot quench charity.")

The couple says: "Si dederit homo omnem substantiam suam pro dilectione quasi nichil (nihil) despiciet eam." ("If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing.")

The passages from the Biblical text are carefully chosen to transmit a double message. By comparing love to fire the bride emphasizes its strength on the one hand, and its dangers on the other. The bride's words are reinforced by the passage above the figures: "Many waters cannot quench charity". The burning torch and the spilled water echo the passages and emphasize the symbolic meaning of the discourse. Love can be dangerous and uncontrolled. Yet the word *caritas* which appears in the vulgate as a translation of the Hebrew word *ahava* is used in most cases in positive connotations: it may represent the love of God, or human love. Thus the reader can also relate to the positive meanings of the passages and understand that the bride is speaking of the love of God. However in the twelfth century the word *caritas* was already used in the context

of conjugal love.<sup>13</sup> Thus the message can also be understood in the negative sense, and as a warning, when it is referring to carnal love: when *caritas* turns to *cupiditas*.<sup>14</sup> The most interesting passage is inserted above the couple. They speak about material matters: men are ready to give up all their wealth for love. This time the artist uses the word *dilectio* and not *caritas*. The term *dilectio* is also used to represent the love of God and human love. Thus, it can refer to men's intention of giving up all their riches for the love of God. If, however, it is earthly love, the same will be considered as folly. It should be noted that the material issue in the context of love, as it appears on page 10a, is an essential argument in all the guides of love.<sup>15</sup>

These two natures of love<sup>16</sup> are also personified by the attributes of the two maidens: the torch represents the blessings of the "right love", the love of God and brings to mind the Wise Virgins. The other option, which is personified by the maiden spilling the water, represents the negative powers of love. In contrast to the Virtue of *Temperantia*, which is usually represented by the careful pouring of water from a jug, the careless spilling of water represents irrationality - folly, evoking the Foolish Virgins. It symbolizes worldly carnal love, in which men and women lose their minds, and could also lose all their worldly riches. In this context it is worth referring to the original Hebrew text, well-known to those who chose the passages: "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love he will be despised."

All the arguments of the ongoing discourse represented on page 10a can be found in the treatise by Richard of Saint-Victor, *The Four Degrees Of Passionate Charity*.<sup>17</sup> Richard of St. Victor accords a great importance to affection in the marital state and in this context, as in our text, he uses the word *caritas*. In order to describe the power of love, he quotes the same passages from the *Canticles* that appear in the block-book: "Many waters cannot quench charity" and "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love...". He also makes frequent use of the metaphor of fire in order to illustrate the violence of love: "the heart is profoundly touched when the inflamed treat of love penetrates the human soul"; "it burns stronger when the soul is already bruised." Richard of St. Victor warns against this violent nature of love, a state when love becomes a folly.

Love as a state of folly was a well-known concept in the Middle Ages.<sup>18</sup> This state occurs several times in the block-book and represents love as a disturbed state of mind. On page 10a the bride represents the voice of Reason,<sup>19</sup> instructing the couple on the two natures of love: its destructive power when concerning carnal love and the rewards of "true love", the love of God. It is this latter love that is the correct model of conjugal affection that sanctified by

the sacrament of marriage, will redeem the couple.<sup>20</sup> The image of the bride-soul being lifted up on the wings of the eagle follows this scene and must be understood in the context of this sequence. Its meaning in this sequence is not unequivocal, as it is in the Chelmo cycle where it represents the final journey of the soul to the heavenly sphere. In the context of the block-book the ascending figure could be the bride or the soul or even both. If it refers to the bride it may represent her passage from the earthly to the heavenly sphere, illustrating that she has finished her earthly task in instructing the human couple and is returning to her heavenly realm. However, since the bride also represents the human soul, it can also refer to the soul being lifted up to heaven. In this case, the question is: what is the significance of giving the soul access to the heavenly sphere at precisely this point of the narrative?

As already mentioned, the bride on page 10a represents the voice of Reason. The encounter of the soul with the bride-Reason affords the soul a better understanding of the two natures of love, and thus the metaphorical scene may signify the soul being raised to a higher sphere by the aid of Reason. In this case the image in the Netherlandish block-book is closer to the Boethian sense in its Latin version and in its medieval transmissions. For Boethius the wings represent Reason rather divine love or the humanity of Christ.

In several passages in his *Consolation*, Boethius uses the metaphor of the wings to demonstrate the soul's ability to reach the divine sphere by means of reason. He describes the elation of the soul on the Wings of Reason:

Wherefore let us be lifted up, if we can, to the peak of that highest intelligence; for there reason will see what it cannot contemplate within itself (Book V, 5); in another passage Philosophy consoles Boethius and says:

And I will also fasten wings upon thy mind, with which she may rouse herself, that all perturbation being driven away, thou mayest return safely into the country by my direction, by my path and with my wings. (Book IV : 1, 2).

In yet another passage the wings are the means by which mankind can return to its former existence in paradise:

For I have swift and nimble wings which I will ascend the lofty skies, With which when thy quick mind is clad, it will thy loathed earth despise, And go beyond the airy globe, and watery clouds behind the leave....

Thou then wilt challenge to thyself, saying: This is the glorious land, Where I was born, and in this soil my feet forever-more shall stand. Whence if thou pleasest to behold the earthly night which thou hast left.... (Book...)

Boethius considers that only by reason and knowledge can a man be freed from human passions and earthly bonds, and thus be redeemed.

The artist of the fifteenth century block-book must have been familiar with Boethius' Latin version, but he was probably also familiar with Boethius' vernacular thirteenth century translations in which the "wings" offered by Philosophy in Book 4 meter 1, are glossed as the Virtues:

There are two principal virtues: love of God  
and love of a fellow Christian, which we call Charity.  
Your mind now asleep, thus awakened by the flight, will, through  
contemplation, experience great consolation.<sup>21</sup>

In this context the page 10a encounter of the human couple with the bride - Reason enables their souls to contemplate and make their choices. If they choose 'true love' -- the love of God, it will change their fate. I believe that the depiction of the ascent on the wings of the eagle in the block-book represents the state of the soul after it has made the right choice, and that its flight symbolizes the experience of bliss and consolation. The block-book propagates the sacrament of marriage as a path to salvation, through the analogy of conjugal affection to the love relations of the heavenly bride and bridegroom.

In conclusion, the transmission and merging of the Classical and Biblical metaphors in Christianity would appear to have but slightly changed its primary meaning. Flying on the wings of the eagle in medieval literature and art, as in its Classical and Biblical sources, is a metaphor of release from earthly bonds. There is nonetheless a difference between the Jewish and the Christian perceptions of this metaphor. Whereas the Biblical passages refer to a collective notion, to the national rescue of the people of Israel, the Christian concept is closer to the Classical insight and addresses the individual. In Christian literary sources as in the Classical myth the flying on the wings of an eagle represents the ability of the individual human soul to gain eternity through divine love, which leads to immortality. The visual depictions of the Chelmino mural paintings and the block-book, also derive from Classical prototypes and are in fact transmutations of the representations of the ascent of Ganymede and Psyche. The two different approaches to the metaphor derive from the different contexts for which the Song of Songs was intended.

## Notes

- 1 For a brief description of the cycle in Chelmno, see: Domaslowski *et al.* 1990 :10-12; Domaslowski 1983 : 44-46. Brutzer 1936 : 21-24; Hamburger 1992 :113-114; Hamburger 1990 : 84-87, ns. 138,139,144,150.
- 2 For the comparison I used the copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris which belongs to the first edition (1465); On the block-book, see Bouvet 1961; Berjeau 1860; Hind 1963 : 207-215, 243-244; Engemmare 1993 : 379-381; Engemmare 1991: 319-326; Stevenson 1967 : 84-85.
- 3 A German manuscript from the thirteenth or early fourteenth century probably served both the artist of Chelmno and the artist of the block-book. According to Stevenson, Hans Memling was responsible for the drawings of the block-book. If this is correct, this work was probably produced by Memling when he was still in Rogier van der Weyden's workshop in 1464. Chelmno belonged to the cities of the Hansa league, see Dzianisza 1967 :13-14 and there is a great probability that a manuscript from Chelmno reached the shores of the Netherlands.
- 4 On the meaning of the myth of Ganymede and Psyche see Neumann 1973 : 45, and his commentary on 116; Turnheim : 1998 : 37-43.
- 5 On the intercourse between love, erotism and death, see Bataille 1986 144-146 and on the affinities between erotism and mysticism, 245-248; Kristeva describes passionate love as "a fragile crest where death and regeneration vie for dominance", see Kristeva 1987 : 5.
- 6 The metaphor also appears in several Jewish manuscripts such as the Bible of Cervera, which features an eagle clasping in its claws a small bird, probably a dove representing the Jewish people, see Cervera Bible fol. 443r.
- 7 On the Medieval tradition of Boethius, see: Huot 1993 :166.
- 8 Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), *The Letters*, I, 193-194; II, 40-41; 114-115; On the metaphor of the eagle as means of salvation and the two options that man can choose, see II, 13, 21-25. The Wings are knowledge " So too man flies on the two wings of rationality, that is to say, with the knowledge of good and evil. The right is good knowledge and the left is evil... "
- 9 Mechthild of Magdeburg , Book. 7, 61, recalling the words of Boethius, Book 5; 5.
- 10 *Ibid.*, Book 7, 65.
- 11 On the symbolism of the eagle as representing Christ, see Schiller, 1974: 120-128; Hamburger , 1997: 46-47.
- 12 Pears as the attributes of Venus, see Tervarent 1958: col. 309.
- 13 The applications of the words *caritas* and *dilectio* are from the text of the Vulgate and in both cases these are translations of the Hebrew word *ahava* (love) in the original text. *Caritas* is used for both, human and divine love, in the context of marriage, see Hildegard of Bingen in *Scivias* : I, 11, pp 77; Richard of St. Victor, see Dumeige 1952: 133-152; Leclercq 1982 : 28-32; Robertson 1951 : 24-49.
- 14 Arendt 1996: 18-21.
- 15 On the material matters in the guides of love, see Capellanus: 144-148.
- 16 Blakeney 1987: 47-53.
- 17 Richard of St Victor, see Dumeige 1952 : 133-152.
- 18 Wack 1990 : 24- 26.
- 19 The image of Lady Reason and her resemblance to the bride, see Fleming 1969: fig. 28, 29: B.N. ms. fr. 380, fol. 21r, B.M. Add. ms 42133, fol. 21r. On the identity of Reason, see Huot 1993 : 97.
- 20 On the the sacrament of marriage, see Baldwin 1984 : 60- 64; Leclercq 1982 : 25-28.
- 21 Bolton Hall n.d. : 153; Huot 1993 :166.

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# *Royal, Aristocratic and Bourgeois Patronage: the Examples of Chartres Cathedral and the Church of St. Martin in Candes*

*Sara Lutan*

*Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University*

**T**he role of medieval patronage of the pictorial arts and of literary works in the 12th and 13th centuries has been investigated mainly from the historical, social and cultural aspects.<sup>1</sup> The role of the patron as a co-producer of the work of art, however, has only recently begun to be studied systematically.<sup>2</sup> The relationships between influential patrons and the works of art they commissioned are examined here through the sculptural programs of the southern porch of Chartres cathedral and of the northern porch of the collegiate church of St. Martin in Candes.

Three cycles in Chartres cathedral, each depicting the lives of the saints emphasize different modes of representation and consequently raise the question of their possible patrons.

The 16 sculpted jamb-statues of the saints in the two doorways of the southern portal of Chartres cathedral (dated between 1210-1235)<sup>3</sup> constitute the first cycle of images of saints. Their figures share high-ranking monumental and hieratical features and their representation is of a non-narrative nature.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for example, St. Denis, as a revered bishop with an elongated face and styled hair, clothed in an ornate habit, raises his right hand in an act of blessing; St. Theodore holds a bannered lance in his right hand, while his left rests on a shield decorated with four *fleurs de lis*; and St. Martin and St. Gregory display their richly ornate habits and their clerical attributes.

In the stained-glass cycle (dated also to 1210-1235)<sup>5</sup> the saints are depicted in three modes of representation. The monumental depiction closely resembles that of the jamb-statues mentioned above. All are shown frontally, either standing or seated on an embellished seat, haloed and carrying the holy book

or the bishop's scepter, or both. Among others they include St. John the Baptist (in a window bearing the coat of arms of the Clement family), St. Solenne, St. Symphorien and St. Lawrence.

The second mode of representation, though monumental as well, is also characterized by a minimal narrative that involves the saint with another figure with whom he shares a common experience, such as the scene in which a knight of the Clement family receives the banner of the Abbey of St. Denis from the saint himself.

The third mode of representation of the saints in the windows of Chartres cathedral is narrative. A colourful depiction involving a large number of figures and events, displays animated episodes, remarkable adventures and miraculous deeds of the saints: St. Theodore and St. Vincent occupy a window donated by the weavers; St. Sylvester - a window donated by the builders and stone workers; St. Lubin - a window donated by the taverners and the wine merchants; and St. Cheron - a window donated by the masons and sculptors.

The 96 small sculpture reliefs on the southern porch in Chartres depict on the outer piers scenes from the lives of the saints and on the inner piers the Virtues and Vices and the 24 Elders of the Apocalypse. The 48 reliefs depicting the lives of the martyrs (on the western pier) and confessors (on the eastern pier) in the cathedral, dated between 1230-1250<sup>6</sup> constitute the third and, chronologically most recent artistic cycle representing lives of the saints. When originally sculpted, therefore, these small reliefs could have related to the two earlier saints' cycles in the cathedral: the monumental jamb-statues and the stained-glass windows. Several saints do, indeed, appear in all three cycles.

Many of the reliefs feature, by means of a concrete and realistic representation, the miraculous lives of the saints and their glorious deeds.<sup>7</sup> They constitute a series of narrative depictions presenting the saints in a multitude of circumstances, positions and gestures. The tall figure of St. Theodore, for example, is shown half naked, tied to a column and being tortured; the corpse of St. Vincent is being watched by a raven and a wolf; and St. Martin is giving his blessing to his former enemy who kneels before him, while the ax with which he intended to kill the saint still lies beside him (Fig. 1).

In what way do these images of the saints in the different pictorial cycles in Chartres cathedral relate to each other; and who were their possible patrons?

A detailed examination of the different representations of the same saint in windows donated by different donors reveals that both the theme and the mode of representation are often determined by the donor. Moreover, they also reflect the different nature of patronage and taste of the royal and noble donors versus those of the burghers. The five windows depicting St. Martin serve as a case in



Fig. 1: St. Martin blessing his enemy,  
Chartres cathedral, southern porch,  
1230-1240

point. In the two windows donated by the people of Tours,<sup>8</sup> as well as in those donated by Thibault VI, the Count of Chartres<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 2), the saint is represented as a monumental hieratic figure, bearing the attributes of a distinguished bishop. All four show, among other miraculous happenings, what might be deemed the most famous act of grace associated with the saint's life - the giving of part of his coat to a beggar at the gate of Amiens, and Christ appearing in his dream, wearing it.<sup>10</sup> The representation in the fifth window, however - that donated by the shoemakers, is quite different.<sup>11</sup> The forty narrative scenes that include numerous figures, architectural settings and floral elements, present a tale of many of the events that constituted the life and death of the saint, including the act of mercy to the beggar: St. Martin meeting St. Hilairy of Poitiers; his resurrection of a dead man; his forcing out the soul of a robber who has previously been honoured as a martyr, and many others (Fig. 3).

St. Eustache is depicted in two windows. His image in the window donated by the Beaumont family<sup>12</sup> contrasts highly with that donated by the fur and cloth merchants.<sup>13</sup> While the noble donors had commissioned an heroic image of the saint, fearlessly confronting the sinful Roman ruler, the 33 medallions of the window donated by the merchants narrate vividly and dramatically the

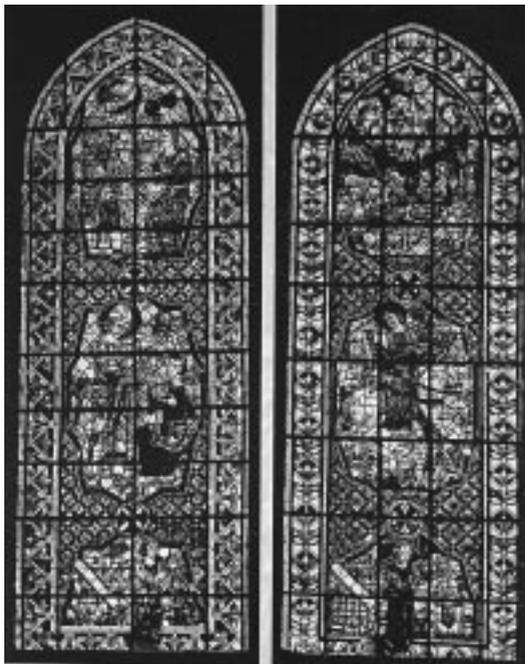


Fig. 2: St. Martin's Windows ,  
Chartres cathedral, choir,  
1215-1235

adventurous life of the saint from his very first steps into the Christian world up to his martyrdom together with his wife and children (Fig. 4).

All these examples suggest the same conclusion: there is a clear difference in approach to representation between the windows donated by the nobility or clergy and those donated by tradesmen. While the former echo the monumental depiction of the jamb-statues in their formal and emblematic nature, the latter take a highly developed narrative form that emphasizes the dramatic aspects of the saint's life, which are moulded in a concrete way involving a multitude of events and characters.

The small reliefs on the piers of the southern porch appear to relate to two small sculpted groups of the monumental sculpture, both of which are marginal series framing the jamb statues: one is the group of miniature sculpted corbels at the feet of the monumental jamb-statues and the other is the architectural canopies over the same statues. The reliefs, however, bear the closest relation to the narrative windows of the cathedral and include images and subjects that closely resemble them. Both depictions deviate from the strictly monumental and concise representation of the jamb-statues. It seems plausible that the narrative windows depicting the lives of the saints (produced about two or three decades earlier), probably served as a main iconographic and stylistic source for the small reliefs. The relief sculptor sometimes appears to

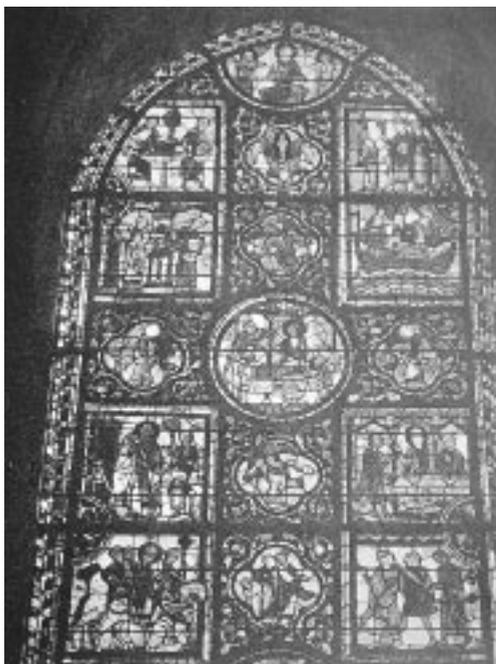


Fig. 3: St. Martin's Window, (detail -upper section), Chartres cathedral, south-eastern part of the ambulatory, 1215-1235

have selected a scene or a mode of representation (such as the martyrdom of St. Theodor or St. Vincent) or even an architectural setting from the chronologically earlier narrative cycle (as in the St. Cheron window), and adapted it to his own use (Figs. 4, 5).

In order to argue for specific identity of the patrons of these different artistic expressions, one should consider the historical and social position of Chartres at the time of their production.

Four such patrons were bishops of Chartres at the time concerned: Renauld de Mousson (1182-1219), Gauthier (1219-1234), Hugues de la Ferte (1234-1236) and Aubry Cornut (1236-1243). The first two were specially famed for their skill in persuading the clergy and nobility to contribute to the building of the new cathedral. Renauld de Mousson (who participated together with Philip Augustus in the crusade of 1191, and in 1213 led the troops against the Albigenses together with Simon the Monfort) was responsible for the building of the central and western portals of the southern facade as well as for most of the stained-glass windows of the cathedral. Bishop Gauthier participated in the 1226 crusade to the south of France in which Louis VIII died; served as counselor to Blanche of Castile (1187-1252) and fought at her side against the rebellious barons of Brittany. During his time as bishop the portals of the martyrs and confessors, as well as the windows of the cathedral were completed. The



Fig. 4: The martyrdom of St. Eustach, (detail of window), Chartres cathedral, the northern aisle, 1215-1220.

sculpture of the southern porch, however, was completed only in the time of Hugues de la Ferte and after him, that of Aubry Cornut, when Chartres was already in a state of decline and no longer considered a leading political or spiritual center.<sup>14</sup>

There is only a little evidence of royal donations to the cathedral after the fire of 1194.<sup>15</sup> In the windows of the southern part of the choir there is, however, visual evidence for the donations of noble families, such as those of Clement, Beaumont, Courtenay and Monfort, who are also known for their participation in the war against the Albigenses (1213-1229). One might assume that, with the encouragement of the bishop of Chartres at the time, these knights chose to have depicted their own noble images and coat of arms in the windows of the cathedral.

Numerous clergymen, mostly the canons of the church, shared in the efforts to build the new cathedral, by providing donations, as can be read in the cathedral's windows: Pierre Baillard, canon in Chartres till 1142; Peter de Roissy, head of the cathedral's school between 1200 and 1213, Robert de Berou, chancellor of the cathedral between 1211 and 1216; as well as Geoffray Chardonnell and Guillaume de la Ferte, the bishop's brother.

While the above mentioned donors contributed to the building of the new cathedral at the beginning of the 13th century, there is no evidence of any large



Fig 5: The martyrdom of St. Eustach, pier relief, Chartres Cathedral, southern porch, 1230-1240

donations relating to the construction of the southern porch, which was built after the bishopric of Gauthier (about 1231). By about 1234 Pierre de Dreux, considered to be the major donor of the southern portals,<sup>16</sup> had left the political stage, defeated by Blanche of Castile.

Forty two windows were donated to the cathedral by the rising groups of burghers and craftsmen (whereas only 32 were donated by the nobility).<sup>17</sup> Among the former we find masons, shoemakers, bakers, butchers, carpenters, weavers, furriers, blacksmiths, water-carriers, money-changers, wine merchants, carpenters, and coopers. The cathedral's records attest, to the taxes imposed by its chapter on these socially and financially rising groups.<sup>18</sup>

Given that the small stone sculptures of the southern piers include images and subjects that closely resemble the narrative windows donated by the trade guilds, it seems plausible that they might have been donated by the same, or similar corporations of tradesmen and craftsmen.

It is my contention that the different cycles representing the lives of the saints, commissioned by different patrons, demonstrate the significant role of the patron in deciding upon the formal meaning of the work of art. As long as the noble and clerical patrons provided the means for construction and decoration, they would assumedly have seen to it that the image of the saint would reflect of their own intentions and attitudes.

Changes of patronage, however, brought about simultaneous changes in the nature of the work of art, and in its artistic vocabulary as meant for a

potential audience. The structure of the small sculpted reliefs, as well as the narrative windows, points at local and popular patrons. Different positions were presented in the monumental images of the tympana, the jamb-statues and in the monumental windows. Their artistic expression bears an articulate complexity and was probably meant for the *Illuminatis* who could interpret the subtle meaning of the symbolic presentation and presumably could see beyond the concrete form of the image, into its theological significance.

The burghers, in contrast, chose to depict their guarding saints, the patrons of their guilds, by means of narrative representations. Thus they set forth an animated image of the *vita activa* of concrete images that appealed to the bourgeois taste and fashion, so different from the royal and aristocratic abstract, emblematic images, which only hinted at reality.

The sculpted reliefs were installed in the porch where the tradesmen conducted their commercial fairs and daily business. They actually reflected the new social status of their patrons. On the one hand their sculptors adopted and adapted images and subjects from the monumental central art of the cathedral. On the other hand they were, in a sense, expressing a process whereby the ascending burghers were adopting and using the values and standards of the clergy and nobility.

An additional system of patronage, through which different social and artistic developments can be examined, is that of the Plantagenet Kingdom in western France.

The sculptural programs of western France have traditionally been studied merely as a local expression derived from and influenced by the monumental sculpture of the leading artistic centers of the 12th and 13th centuries, and especially that of Chartres.

I believe that western Gothic sculpture reflects local conceptions and attitudes different from those of the Ile-de-France. Parts of its autonomous artistic expressions can also be regarded as a manifestation of the Plantagenet royal patronage. The collegiate church of St. Martin in Candes serves as an example to support my argument.<sup>19</sup>

The northern facade of St. Martin in Candes, which faces the confluence of the Vienne and Loire rivers, consists of an exterior wall (fortified in the 15th century) and an inner porch (Fig. 6). The porch consists of a multi-ribbed vault supported by a central column, with the St. Michel chapel on its upper level. The sculptural program of the inner porch comprises three main representations: *The Last Judgement* in the tympanum and the only left-side sculpted archivault; fourteen figures of saints on either side of the central door; and nine sculpted heads, which form a series of royal images, on the socles.



Fig. 7: St. Martin in Candes,  
northern porch, left socle,  
c. 1180

Of the latter, from left to right we can clearly identify the heads of a young girl and a young boy, a young queen and a young king, a princely loving couple, a mature crowned couple and a male head wearing a cap. All heads are set into floral frames. Above them, in ten arched niches, are miniature figures (an amorous pair of birds, a knight slaying a dragon, a guardian angel, a merman and a mermaid), while beneath them monsters and hybrid creatures are interwoven with foliage scrolls (Figs. 7, 8).

This depiction of progressive images of men and women of different ages and appearance grouped together, constitutes a meaningful representation of royalty. Their place in the portal's hierarchical program beneath the images of the saints follows a long pictorial tradition of reflecting the Christological concept of heavenly and earthly hierarchies, usually enhanced by royal patrons.<sup>20</sup>

The manner in which this concept of royalty was formulated in Candes, leads to the assumption that the socle sculpture represents the kings and queens as patrons and benefactors of the church. In 1180 Guibert of Gembloux reported to his patron, Philippe de Heinsberg, the archbishop of Köln, that the building



Fig. 6: St. Martin in Candes, northern porch, c. 1180-1230

of the new church at Candes begun in 1175. Furthermore, an inscription, which no longer exists, and which dated completion of the building to 1215, was mentioned in several 19th century sources. Thus, we may assume that the collegiate church of St. Martin in Candes was, for the main part, constructed under the Plantagenets' reign - Henry II, his queen Eleonor and their sons Richard the Lion-Heart and John Lack-Land. From 1204, when Philip Augustus defeated John Lack-Land and annexed Anjou, Maine and Touraine, it became an integrated part of the royal domain.

It is attested that in 1156 Henry II erected a royal *châtellenie* in Chinon, having jurisdiction over Candes, Champigny, la Haye, Azay, l'Île-Bouchard, Saint-Epin, Saint-Maure and Bourguil.<sup>21</sup> It was during the crucial years of the Plantagenet empire, between the 1170s and 1204, that they found it essential to glorify not only their noble origins as counts of Anjou, Maine and Touraine and dukes of Aquitaine,<sup>22</sup> but also to reinforce their royal descent as kings of England. By enhancing his royal lineage and exalting his royal ancestors on his mother's side (the Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I, king of England) Henry II (and his sons after him) presented a royal dynasty parallel to that of the Capetian king of France, who enjoyed a long established, unquestioned, royal legacy.

The royal heads on the socle of the northern porch of St. Martin in Candes, which I consider the earliest phase of the sculptural program, should be examined in this frame of reference, as part of a vaster program planned by



Fig. 8: St. Martin in Candes, northern porch, right socle, c. 1180

the Plantagenets to portray themselves both as individuals and as members of a noble and royal dynasty. It is my belief that the royal images on the northern socle in Candes, although of different gender and age, constitute an homogeneous pictorial group, whose individual members can be identified as components of a unified royal succession: the founder (the only mature, uncrowned figure), the king and queen, the couple in love, the prince and princess and the courtly children. Moreover, their depiction within floral frames bears a definite associative power to the traditional image of the *Tree of Jesse*, which was often used by patrons during the 12th and 13th centuries to enhance both their royal and ecclesiastical images.<sup>23</sup>

When we examine the Plantagenets' activities as patrons of genealogical literature, both in England and in Anjou during the 12th and 13th centuries,<sup>24</sup> together with their other royal visual representations in the near vicinity of Candes in this period,<sup>25</sup> it seems quite probable that the unusual images of royalty in Candes constitute an additional and significant chapter in the manifestation of their dynastic conception. The works of art created under their patronage were meant to consolidate their royal position as rulers and to make their claims to sovereignty and royal succession accessible to a wide audience.<sup>26</sup>

Henry II continued the royal patronage enhanced by his grandfather (Henry I, king of England) and his uncle (Robert of Gloucester) in whose court he had been educated.<sup>27</sup> By adopting a prominent royal tradition, the Angevin court

of Henry II and Eleonor, renowned for its vast literary and artistic activity,<sup>28</sup> made use of royal patronage as a means to achieve and establish political power.

The three cycles representing the saints in Chartres cathedral, and the sculpted royal heads on the socles of St. Martin in Candes, demonstrate the significant role played by the patron in determining the intended meaning of the work of art. At the same time they reflect the social status and political strategy of their patrons.

## Notes

- 1 See Bezzola 1963; Hollister 1997; Lejeune 1958; McCash 1966; Salter 1988; Southern 1970; Tyson 1979; Williams 1993.
- 2 See Kemp 1993, 200-217.
- 3 Bulteau 1850; Houvet 1919; R. de Lasteyrie 1926; L.Lefrançois-Pillon 1931; Grodecki 1951: 156-164; Meulen 1967: 152-172.
- 4 See Lutan 1998: 149-162
- 5 Delaporte and Houvet 1926: 9; Frankl 1963: 301-322; Grodecki and Brisac 1985: 63; Manhes-Deremble 1993: 9-17; Williams 1993: 16.
- 6 See note 1.
- 7 Lutan 1998.
- 8 Located in the western arm of the northern transept, dated c. 1200.
- 9 Located in the choir, dated 1215-1235.
- 10 The same episode is depicted on the lintel of the Confessors' Portal of the southern porch.
- 11 Located in the south-eastern part of the ambulatory, dated 1215-1235.
- 12 Located in the eastern arm of the northern transept, dated 1225-1235.
- 13 Located in the northern aisle, dated 1200-1215.
- 14 Chedeville 1973: 439, 457, 506-525
- 15 A chart recording Philip Augustus' visit to Chartres after the riot of 1210 testify to his 200 livres donation to the construction works. Visual evidence in the rosette and four windows of the northern transept attests to additional royal donations, such as those by Philip Hurepel (Philip Augustus' son, 1200-1234) and Agnes de Meraine; Ferdinand III of Castile (first cousin of Louis IX, 1217-1252). See Williams 1993: 26; Delaporte and Houvet 1926: 483, 502-503.
- 16 His depiction can be seen at the feet of the *Beau-Dieu* on the southern *trumeau* and in the five lance windows beneath the southern rosette. See Bulteau 1850; Delaporte and Houvet 1926: 5-9, 458-459, 463, 469; Adams 1961; Williams 1993; Grodecki 1963; Frankl 1957.
- 17 See Kemp 1997: 163-164.
- 18 The charter of May 26, 1224 concerning the moneychangers is published in its English translation in Branner 1969: 98-99; see also James 1981: 365; Sauerländer 1972: 114.
- 19 The sculptural programs of St. Martin in Candes are the subject of my Ph.D.

- dissertation, supervised by Prof. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar.
- 20 The reading of the portal's sculptural program from the tympanum downward recalls the iconographic program of the sanctuary of St. Vitale in Ravenna (6th c.), where the portraits of Justinian and Theodora with their retinues are set in the lower mosaics, beneath the images of the heavenly hierarchies.
- 21 Cougny de 1874: 206.
- 22 Boussard 1956; Warren 1973.
- 23 Johnson 1961; Manhes-Deremble 239-248.
- 24 Bezzola 1963: 3-20; Southern 1970: 135-158; Salter 1988: 19-28; Tyson 1979; Hollister 1997.
- 25 For example: *The Crucifixion Window* in St. Pierre cathedral in Poitiers (1150-1170), the mural painting in Ste. Radegonde chapel in Chinon (see Kenaan-Kedar 1999) and the Plantagenets' tombs in Fontevreau.
- 26 Duby 1977: 149-157; Tyson 1979.
- 27 Southern 1970: 206-233; Hollister 1997:12-15.
- 28 Lejeune 1958; Bezzola 1963: 3-20; Caviness 1966: 128-131.

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# Taddeo Zuccaro's Fresco in the Apse-Conch in S. Sabina, Rome

Golda Balass

*Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University*

**T**addeo Zuccaro painted the apse-conch fresco in S. Sabina, Rome in 1559-60. The common opinion among scholars is that this fresco is based on the 5th century mosaic that was *in situ*. Other possibilities, as well as the reasons for re-creating this Early Christian work of art in the middle of the 16th century, have never been researched.

In the first part of this article I explore the Early Christian sources from which Taddeo may have taken his ideas. The reasons for invoking Early Christian art will be discussed in the second part.

## **The Apse-Conch Fresco and its Sources**

The commission and a payment of one hundred scudi for painting the apse-conch fresco at the basilica of S. Sabina was given to Taddeo in 1559-60 by Cardinal Otto Truchsess von Waldburg, the titular Cardinal of the church between 1550 and 1561.<sup>1</sup> In view of the fact that the fresco has since been repainted several times, it is impossible to identify the original colors; hence, any attempt to discuss them would be futile.<sup>2</sup>

In the symmetrical composition of the apse-conch painting (Fig. 1) the figure of Christ is on the central axis, flanked on either side by male and female saints. Christ is seated on a mountain, while lambs drink from a stream flowing from the mountain toward the front plane of the composition. Although the saints' figures are characterized by considerable variation in features, clothing and movement, most of them are not identifiable, as they carry no attributes. At the extreme left of the fresco stands a group of female figures (Fig. 2) which have been identified by scholars as St. Sabina, St. Serafia and St. Marcella with her spiritual daughters.<sup>3</sup> To the extreme right we can see St. Dominic clothed in the Dominican habit. A Pope is seated on a chair in the left foreground, with



Fig. 1: Taddeo Zuccaro, Apse-conch fresco, S. Sabina, Rome, 1559-1560.

a Bishop kneeling behind him. Berthier has identified the Pope as Alexander I, who is buried in the basilica; and the Bishop as the patron - Otto Truchsess.<sup>4</sup> Salmi, however, suggests that the Pope may be Celestine I, during whose pontificate the basilica was founded - as mentioned in the famous mosaic inscription on the inner face of the west facade.<sup>5</sup> In this latter case we may assume that the Bishop behind him is Petrus of Illyria, the founder of the church - according to the same inscription.<sup>6</sup> In the right foreground a Bishop is seated, with a deacon kneeling behind him. According to Berthier these are St. Eventius and St. Theodolus, who are also buried in the basilica.<sup>7</sup>

All scholars are in entire agreement that the fresco depicted by Taddeo Zuccaro is a 16th century reinterpretation of the subject and composition of the original apse mosaic that was *in situ* as early as the 5th century.<sup>8</sup> As Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini had already carried out restorations in this part of the church in 1441, it seems that by the middle of the 16th century this mosaic must have been in such poor condition that it had to be removed altogether.<sup>9</sup>

The mosaic, replaced by the fresco of Taddeo Zuccaro, was not documented, verbally or visually, before its final removal. Moreover, it is impossible to know whether Taddeo had seen its remnants, if any such remained by his time. We may obtain some idea of its appearance by comparing the fresco to other 5th century Roman apse mosaics with which Taddeo and his patron, Cardinal Truchsess, must have been familiar.



Fig. 2: Taddeo Zuccaro, Apse-conch fresco, S. Sabina, Rome, 1559-1560 (detail of fig. 1).

Based on the fresco, we may assume that in the mosaic Christ was seated on a little mountain in the center of the composition, flanked on either side by the figures of standing saints. The four rivers of paradise flowed from the mountain while the mystic lambs drank from its water or, alternatively, just stood nearby.

Salmi argued that such use of several figures symmetrically flanking Christ's figure, may reflect certain paintings in the catacombs of S. Domitilla and SS. Marcellino e Pietro, and also several apse mosaics dated from the Early Christian period, such as those of S. Pudenziana and S. Constanza.<sup>10</sup> In the latter, which is the most indicative one among Salmi's examples, Christ is standing, flanked on either side by Peter and Paul, while at his feet flow the four rivers of paradise with four lambs nearby.

It is possible that the composition of S. Sabina's mosaic is reflected in some other 5th century apse mosaics, which were still extant in Rome during the 16th century. Two good examples for our purpose are now lost, but Ciampini's

(1690) designs provide us with some idea of them. In the apse-conch mosaic in S. Agata dei Goti (Fig. 3) Christ was seated on a globe with the twelve Apostles flanking him, six on either side.<sup>11</sup> At S. Andrea in Catabarbara (Fig. 4) Christ appeared in the center, flanked on either side by three Apostles. Four streams flowed from the little mountain supporting Christ.<sup>12</sup> In both compositions we can notice the symmetrical grouping of many figures around a central element, all pushed against the front plane of the pictorial surface. The figures are gently turned from ends to center. Similar compositions can be found in other Roman church mosaics, dated after the 5th century.<sup>13</sup>

Looking at the 6th century apse-conch at S. Vitale at Ravenna, we can see the same idea: Christ, enthroned upon a globe, is flanked by standing angels; St. Vitale and Bishop Ecclesio appear beyond this honor guard and four rivers flow at Christ's feet.

It is thus highly likely that Taddeo could have obtained an idea of the appearance of S. Sabina's mosaic from mosaics that were still extant in Rome during the 16th century and from the one at Ravenna.<sup>14</sup> Though it is possible that Taddeo and his patron could have taken some ideas from the catacombs, it is more likely that their knowledge was acquired from sources readily available above ground throughout the city, and far easier to reach than the ones hidden within the dark, dangerous tunnels of the ancient cemeteries.

The triumphal arch mosaic had a somewhat better fate. Cardinal Truchsess was able to repair it<sup>15</sup> and thus it was saved until at least 1690, when it was drawn by Ciampini (Fig. 5),<sup>16</sup> and reinterpreted later according to this drawing. The triumphal arch comprised 15 or 17 medallion portraits or *imagines clipeatae* set around the archway. The central *clipeus* contained the bust portrait of Christ, flanked on either side by bust-length figures of unidentified men, obviously a combination of apostles, evangelists and saints. On the right and left sides of the triumphal arch appeared the cities of Bethlehm and Jerusalem, with eight doves between them, flying towards the center of the arch.

Such elements of decoration, in various different combinations, had existed since the 5th century in several churches in Rome: e.g. the depiction of Bethlehm and Jerusalem on the triumphal arch of S. Maria Maggiore; the bust-portrait medallions at old S. Pietro and at S. Paolo fuori le Mura; and especially those above the entry door to S. Zeno Chapel at S. Prassede, dated between 817 and 824.

Outside Rome, at Ravenna, as early as 424-434, ten secular figures in medallions - Christian members of the Imperial family - adorned the edge of the soffit of the triumphal arch at S. Giovanni Evangelista.<sup>17</sup> The subject matter soon became standardized: Christ, or His symbol, at the summit of the arch,

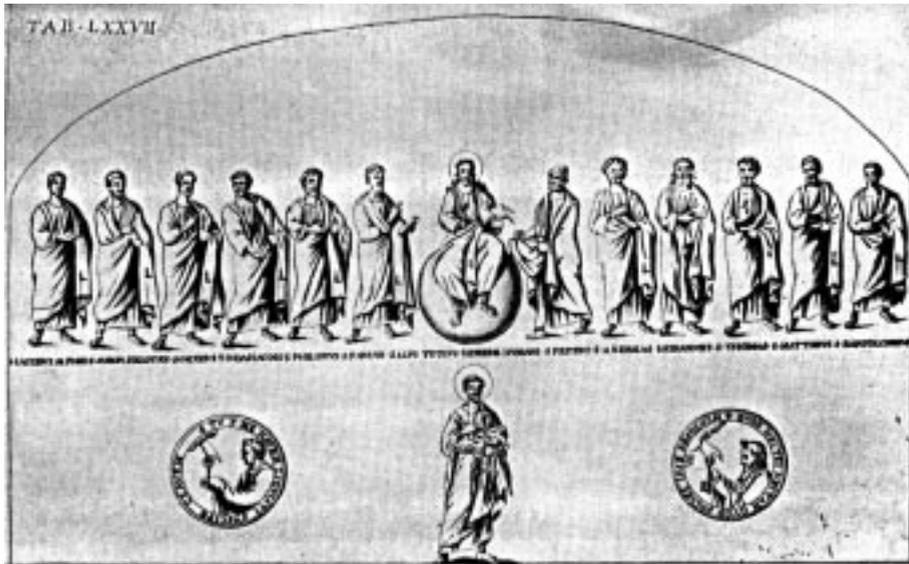


Fig. 3: Apse-conch mosaic once in S. Agata dei Goti, 462-472 (after Ciampini 1690).

was surrounded by holy figures, each in his own medallion.<sup>18</sup> Examples from the 6th century, most similar to the S. Sabina medallions, survive in Ravenna at the Archbishops' chapel and on the arch soffit of the apse at S. Vitale. The triumphal arch of the latter also features a depiction of Bethlehm and Jerusalem.

Thus it seems that the entire decorative program of the apse area at S. Sabina could also be found at S. Vitale in Ravenna, created a century later.

In the apse-conch fresco at S. Sabina, Taddeo adhered, iconographically, to Early Christian prototypes. Nevertheless, some of his figures are new, such as St. Dominic, who lived during a later period; and Pope Alexander I, St. Eventius and St. Theodolus, whose bodies were transferred to be buried in the basilica of S. Sabina in the 9th century.<sup>19</sup>

Stylistically, Taddeo did not re-create the 5th century mosaic, but opted instead for a more complex composition with the characteristics of a much earlier time. Although he adhered to the symmetrical arrangement of the figures on either side of Christ, his composition did not succumb to either monotony or rigidity. He used a pictorial depth, and arranged the figures in the several planes of the pictorial space in a variety of postures. Christ and the two groups of figures flanking Him create a sort of arch - parallel to the structure of the lower part of the apse-conch. Here, Taddeo was undoubtedly directly inspired by Raphael's "Dispute" fresco. Yet this new composition does not characterize

Taddeo's style, as can be seen in the greater part of his religious paintings. The frescoes in the Mattei Chapel at S. Maria della Consolazione and in the Frangipani Chapel at S. Marcello al Corso - Taddeo's most important surviving religious works - reveal an asymmetrical composition with an off-center vanishing point, complexity of form, and repoussoir figures in exaggerated poses created to be admired as objects in themselves, irrespective of the subject-matter of the compositions in which they feature.<sup>20</sup> These are some of the qualities which Shearman notes as especially characteristic of the Mannerist style.<sup>21</sup> Taddeo's apse fresco at S. Sabina has none of these characteristics.

Furthermore, iconographically and stylistically, Taddeo's fresco at S. Sabina did not resemble the other apse frescos which had replaced mosaics of Early Christian basilicas in Rome in the second half of the 16th century. It is sufficient to mention those at SS. Giovanni e Paolo, S. Vitale (Fig. 6), S. Susanna (Fig. 7), S. Prisca and S. Balbina,<sup>22</sup> in all of which, the artists did not adhere to the Christian artistic approach of the distant past. They were presented, rather, in the latest artistic trend, common in apse frescos painted in contemporary built churches. These were usually of two kinds. In the first, the apses were divided into several fields by narrow strips of decorative painting and stucco. The compartments between the strips were "filled up" with scenes such as "quadri riportati" (S. Susanna, S. Prisca). In the second kind, the artists chose to treat the apse as one unit and, consequently, covered the entire surface with one scene, created according to the personal style of each artist (SS. Giovanni e Paolo, S. Vitale, S. Balbina). Hence, Taddeo's fresco was quite unique for his period, both for the artist's own repertoire and among other apse-frescos.

It would seem that Cardinal Truchsess had asked Taddeo to adhere to the iconography of the original mosaic, or alternatively to other 5th century mosaics, in order to evoke a sense of Early Christian art, giving Taddeo only limited freedom concerning his presentation of the subject-matter.

With regard to the reasons for the Cardinal's interest that the painting should appear Early Christian, two issues should be discussed. The first relates to the impetus in the second half of the 16th century to refurbish Paleochristian churches, which included conservation, restoration and revival of Early Christian art, and for research in Christian history and archaeology. This impetus had its roots in specifically Counter-Reformation thought. The second reason, concerns the character of the patron - Cardinal Truchsess himself.

### **Christian Art as a Weapon against Protestant Heresy**

From the third decade of the 16th century, systematic actions began to be taken in Rome to improve the physical conditions of the city, coupled with a spiritual



Fig. 4: Apse-conch mosaic once in S. Andrea in Catabarbara, 468-483 (after Ciampini 1690).

renewal. At the seventh session of the Council of Trent, held in March 1547, it was decreed that: 'the local ordinaries shall be bound to visit every year with apostolic authority all churches...and to provide by suitable legal remedies that those that need repair be repaired'.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, in 1559 the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Giacomo Savelli, initiated a series of visits to the city's churches. These were intended to investigate their administrations, the performance of divine worship and their state of repair, structure and decoration.<sup>24</sup> In 1561 Pope Pius IV (1559-1565) inaugurated a comprehensive program for the restoration of churches in Rome. In a Consistorial Act he ordered that all cardinals should undertake the renovation of their titular churches. The Pope himself carried out extensive restoration works in many Paleochristian churches, particularly at S. Giovanni in Laterano.<sup>25</sup> The succeeding Popes followed this pattern.<sup>26</sup> Naturally, the restoration projects varied from church to church, according to the exact condition of the building and its decoration.

Many cardinals initiated such works: St. Carlo Borromeo, for example, had S. Prassede extensively remodeled between 1560 and 1565.<sup>27</sup> At S. Lorenzo in Damaso the restructuring work which had been started in 1559 by the *Fabbrica*, was followed in the mid-1560s by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese's renovation.<sup>28</sup> Later on, still in the second half of the 16th century, other cardinals adopted

this practice, including: Cardinal Antonio Carafa at SS. Giovanni e Paolo,<sup>29</sup> Cardinal Enrico Caetani at S. Pudenziana<sup>30</sup> and Cardinal Cesare Baronio at SS. Nereo ad Achilleo.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, not all the patrons were interested in reconstructing the churches or their decorations in an Early Christian style. As discussed above, some apse frescos which replaced Paleochristian mosaics in the second half of the 16th century, were created according to the contemporary artistic trend. It would seem that Cardinal Truchsess was the first patron of that period to express a wish to evoke Early Christian art, and thus, to lay the foundations for a phenomenon which was implemented later in other Paleochristian and medieval churches.

Cardinal Alessandro Farnese insisted on preserving the medieval appearance of the abbey church of S. Maria at Grottaferrata and that of the cathedral of Monreale. Although Alessandro found the church at Grottaferrata in great need of repair, the mosaics were left intact.<sup>32</sup> When he reconstructed (1582-84) the church of S. Maria della Scala, part of the Abbazia delle Tre Fontane at Rome, he had the east conch apse decorated with mosaic. The use of mosaic was intended to recall the decoration of the earlier church, as the Jesuit Simone Bartoldo remarked in his appeal to Alessandro's heirs, urging them to complete the decorative project: 'Because the tribune of the high altar of the [former] church was decorated in mosaics, the Cardinal had started paintings and ornaments in mosaic in the new tribune, even more beautiful than those that were there before'.<sup>33</sup>

Cardinal Baronio led the efforts carried out in Rome at the end of the century to conserve, restore and revive Christian antiquities. He succeeded in reconstructing his titular church of SS. Nereo ad Achilleo in Early Christian style.<sup>34</sup> The triumphal arch mosaic was repaired but the conch mosaic was in such poor condition that it had to be removed. The fresco that Baronio had made to replace it (Fig. 8) was a conscious revival of Early Christian art: ten saints flanking a jeweled cross, the dove of the Holy Spirit flying above it and lambs drinking from the four rivers below it. The church of S. Cesareo de' Appia was restored under the auspices of Pope Clement VIII, with Baronio as author and supervisor of the program.<sup>35</sup> The apse-conch and the triumphal arch were decorated with mosaics. The apse composition - God the Father seated in the center next to a globe and flanked by half-length angels - is a variation on an Early Christian motif.<sup>36</sup> The use of mosaic established historic veracity in the restoration by incorporating an Early Christian mode of decoration into an Early Christian church, thus reminding the spectator of the era that had produced it. Baronio failed to stop the final destruction of old S. Pietro and the



Fig. 5: Triumphal arch mosaic once in S. Sabina, 5th century (after Ciampini 1690).

modernization of S. Paolo fuori le Mura. The mosaic in the apse of the Constantinian basilica was sketched, so that its general character at least would be retained.<sup>37</sup>

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Paleochristian and medieval mosaics were being restored and copied.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, even in newly built churches mosaic decorations were being used. Such decisions reflect a new interest in imitating Paleochristian mosaics and the revival of what was considered to be Early Christian tradition.

In the early 1580s Cardinal Farnese intended to have the apse of the Gesù covered with mosaic.<sup>39</sup> Mosaic had come into fashion with the decoration of the Cappella Gregoriana in 1578 and the Cappella Clementina in 1601 - both in St. Peter's.<sup>40</sup> The vogue for mosaics at this time culminated in the decoration of the cupola of this church, between 1599 and 1612.<sup>41</sup> The mosaics were neither archaic in style nor imitative of the pre-existing mosaics in the basilica. Yet, due to the medium, they shared a common language and spirit with the decoration of the Early Church.

The impetus for the refurbishment of Paleochristian churches had its roots in Counter-Reformation thought. It was a way to prove that the authority and practices of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church were based on those of the Christian past, and thus to refute the Protestant charges that the Catholic Church had departed from its earliest teaching and practices. These efforts, however, should be looked upon in historical perspective. They were but a link in a long chain of attempts, begun as early as the 5th century, to revive the Church on the basis of a return to its origins.<sup>42</sup>



Fig. 6: Andrea Comodi, Apse-conch fresco, S. Vitale, Rome, 1595.

This approach toward the churches of Rome as precious relics of the past (as *tesori nascosti* - to borrow from the title of a guidebook of the time), and therefore worthy of preservation, reflects the broader interest of this period in the study of Church history.<sup>43</sup>

As early as 1522, a Catholic theologian had noted that ‘the challenge of the Protestants was one that concerned more a historical than a theological question; for it involved the destruction of what had consistently been received and passed on...about the beliefs of the Early Church’.<sup>44</sup> The Protestants had appealed to history in support of their accusations that the beliefs and practices of the Roman Church were corrupt. In turn, the Catholics also saw history as a polemical tool for proving their side of the argument.

Between 1559 and 1574 the Lutheran Matthias Flacius Illyricus and a team of associates published a thirteen-volume history of the church, known as the Magdeburg Centuries.<sup>45</sup> It aimed at tracing the corruption of the Roman Church from apostolic times through the 13th century.

The principal researcher of Catholic history was Cesare Baronio, who was a member of the Oratory of Filippo Neri and hence inspired to love every aspect of Early Christianity.<sup>46</sup> In 1559 Baronio began lecturing in the Oratory on the history of the church, from its inception to contemporary times. His thirty years of research and lecturing yielded the *Annales ecclesiastici*, published in twelve volumes from 1588-1607, covering the history of the Church from the Incarnation up to the year 1198.<sup>47</sup> Relying on what he believed to be authentic documents - especially Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers,



Fig. 7: Cesare Nebbia, Apse-conch fresco, S. Susanna, Rome, 1597.

numismatic and epigraphical sources - Baronio attempted to demonstrate the uninterrupted continuity of the Roman Church under the leadership of the Papacy, and that the Roman Church had not degenerated nor had it strayed from tradition since the first century.

The emergence of Early Christian archaeology was closely associated with the study of ecclesiastical history and Filippo Neri's influence.<sup>48</sup> Among the earliest proponents of Christian archaeology was Cardinal Marcello Cervini (reigned as Marcellus II in 1555), who sponsored the Augustinian monk Onofrio Panvinio in his studies on the Paleochristian basilicas and the catacombs of Rome. During the 1560s, Filippo Neri and Carlo Borromeo explored Christian catacombs. Neri fostered the Oratorians' interest in ancient churches and other Early Christian monuments. Carlo Borromeo investigated Early Church architecture and in 1577 published his *"Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae"*.<sup>49</sup> The important discovery in 1578 of a catacomb on the Via Salaria gave rise to an intensive study of the physical remains and practices of the primitive Church, led by such men as Pompeo Ugonio, Antonio Gallonio, Alfonso Ciaconio (Chacon), Baronio and Antonio Bosio.<sup>50</sup> These and other scholars presented what they believed to be a historically accurate picture of the origins of Christian Rome, to serve as a moral and instructional guide for the faithful.

Early Christian archaeology was inspired by the same devotional, antiquarian and polemical spirit that inspired Baronio's *Annales*. The restoration of the churches of Rome and their decorations is also associated with this

Counter-Reformation ethos. The desire for 'renewed communion with the ideals and forms of the Early Church',<sup>51</sup> contributed to the Early Christian revival. The study and restoration of mosaics, the exploration of the catacombs and the publications of books on the history and traditions of the Church are emblematic of this revival, begun in the middle of the 16th century. It is important to emphasize that this revival was not homogeneous, but articulated in diverse ways in different contexts. Moreover, it should not be thought of in terms of explicit quotations or copies, but rather as a pattern employed to evoke associations with the past through re-creating Early Christian forms.

The conservation of these "historical proofs" lent the sacred art the documentary role of Christian truth. This sacred art was intended to present, archaeologically, correct historical information that would help legitimize and strengthen the faith, by providing visual evidence that Roman Catholic belief and practice of the day were rooted in a tradition that had remained uninterrupted since Early Christianity. Thus, art in its documentary role - as in its didactic role - was meant to teach in an historical way, based on the establishment of authenticity.

In view of the discussion above, the importance of Taddeo's fresco on the apse-conch of S. Sabina is very clear. It reflects the interest in conservation and revival of Early Christian art. It would seem however, that its importance is derived primarily from the fact that this fresco was probably the first emanation of this striving for revival.

### **The Patron-Cardinal Otto Truchsess von Waldburg**

Some characteristics of Cardinal Truchsess' life and personality shed light upon his motives for restoring and reviving Early Christian art at S. Sabina.

Cardinal Truchsess (b.1514 Swabia - d.1573 Rome) studied law at Padua (1531-33), Bologna (1534-35) and Pavia (1535-36). In Bologna he became lifelong friend of a fellow student - Alessandro Farnese, who would later become the most prominent Cardinal in 16th century Rome. In 1537 Truchsess went to Rome, where he was appointed a papal chamberlain (*camerarius secretus*). In 1542 Pope Paul III (Farnese) made him a delegate (*nuncio*) with the task of presenting the convocation bull of the Council of Trent to the Emperor, the Reichstag and the German prelates. Following his success in the mission he was elected Bishop of Augsburg (1543) and then elevated to Cardinal (1544). He was the first German bishop to send representatives to the Council's opening on 13 December 1545. He was appointed by Emperor Charles V as an official intermediary between the Emperor and the Pope, and in 1558 - as a Cardinal-Protector to the German Nation.<sup>52</sup>



Fig. 8: Apse-conch fresco, SS. Nereo ed Achilleo, Rome, 1596-97.

The central issue of the papal-imperial discussions throughout this period was how to stop the Lutheran advance. Truchsess maintained a firm Roman Catholic position on the Pope's right to decide all religious questions.<sup>53</sup> In 1544 he accompanied Cardinal Farnese to Worms to meet with Emperor Charles V and Ferdinand I, King of the Romans, concerning waging war against the Lutherans.<sup>54</sup> Cardinal Truchsess strived to defeat the Reformation powers and to see the whole of the German Nation united in one faith under the Pope's leadership.<sup>55</sup>

The personal religious development of Cardinal Truchsess was strongly influenced by his close relationship with the Jesuits. In 1542 he began his training in the Spiritual Exercises with Petrus Faber, the first companion of Ignatius Loyola and the first Jesuit priest on German soil, sent there by Cardinal Farnese. The Jesuit fathers, especially Petrus Canisius, became his most influential advisors on theological and reform issues.<sup>56</sup>

In 1552 Rome, together with Cardinal Morone, Ignatius Loyola and Petrus Canisius, Cardinal Truchsess founded the Collegium Germanicum for the training of talented young Germans for the Jesuit order.<sup>57</sup> In 1562 and 1568, respectively, Cardinal Truchsess laid the foundation stones of the Jesuit church of S. Annunziata<sup>58</sup> and, together with Cardinal Farnese, that of the Gesù.<sup>59</sup> In

addition to his donations to the Jesuits, he supported many confraternities with which he was associated.<sup>60</sup> From 1562 until his death he was the Cardinal Protector of the confraternity of SS. Trinità dei Pellegrini e Convalescenti, which had been founded by Filippo Neri<sup>61</sup> - hence he must have been intimately familiar with Neri's devotion to everything Early Christian.

Truchsess' vast collection of antiquities and relics was kept in the Holy Tower" (Heilige Turm) in his palace.<sup>62</sup> In 1565 he commissioned Livio Agresti to create the paintings in this special personal project in Dillingen. The first floor of the round tower served as an oratory and contained a library. Paintings covering the walls and ceiling illustrating the Kingdom of God from Creation to the Last Judgment, the Virtues, the works of mercy and the duties of a bishop. On the second floor were displayed liturgical instruments and relics in bejeweled reliquaries. On the third floor was a chapel, where Cardinal Truchsess celebrated daily mass. Above the altar was a painting of Christ with the pelican piercing its breast to feed its children, a symbol which Truchsess had adopted for himself. Here, he had a collection of relics in expensive reliquaries. The walls and ceiling were painted with scenes of saints and martyrs as well as four paintings of women doing penance. A stairway ("Scala Purgativa") led to the reliquary room on the fourth floor. Among the Cardinal's extensive collection were pieces from the stall in Bethlehem, Christ's manger, the column of the Flagellation, the crown of thorns, the purple mantle, the cross, remains from the room where the Immaculate Conception took place and from the Virgin's girdle. At the end of the "Holy Tower" were steps which led to the floor called "paradisus".

Cardinal Truchsess regarded relics with the highest veneration, judging from his vast collection. This offers an additional aspect to his interest in Early Christian "authenticity" regarding the restoration which he commissioned at S. Sabina.

However, this does not mean that Truchsess was an ascetic, ecclesiastically-minded Cardinal whose life and deeds were motivated only by deep religious sentiments. He was well educated, sought to embellish his palaces and did not decline to live luxuriously.<sup>63</sup> His commission of the fresco at S. Sabina was only a small part of his vast patronage of the arts in Italy and in Germany, which caused him to incur enormous debts.<sup>64</sup>

Cardinal Truchsess was closer in his lifestyle to that adopted, for example, by Cardinal Farnese, than to the ascetic life of Cardinal Baronio.<sup>65</sup> Yet, he nonetheless believed that the crisis in the Church was a result of its misconduct and, therefore, tried to revive the Church on the basis of a return to its origins.<sup>66</sup>

In conclusion, in the second half of the 16th century artists and patrons

were reacting to the new religious atmosphere in various ways, reflected in the different artistic styles in simultaneous use in Rome itself, as well as in other regions. It seems that the patron's decision and the ability (or desire) of the artist to adapt himself to the patron's wishes - were the decisive factor in dictating the artistic product that, therefore, changed according to the circumstances.

## Notes

- \* This paper is based on my Ph.D. dissertation prepared under the supervision of Prof. Avraham Ronen, to be submitted to Tel Aviv University.
- \* I am grateful to Prof. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar for her contribution and fruitful ideas concerning Early Christian art.
- 1 An inscription "Otto Truchses de Waldeburg S.R.E. presb. card. augustanus vetustate absidem collapsam restituit et ornavit. MDLX", now lost but quoted in Berthier 1910: 357 n. 3. In later repaintings of the inscription, the text and the date changed: "Otho Truchses card. S. Sabine. apsidem. pingi curavit AN.D.MDLIX". Forcella 1869-84: VII, 302. For the payment, see Berthier, *Ibid*: 356. For Truchsess as Cardinal Titular, see Cristofori 1888: 44,57,125,129.
- 2 The fresco has been repainted at least three times, in 1630,1830 and 1919. See Berthier 1910: 358; Darsy 1961: 100.
- 3 Berthier 1910: 357; Salmi 1914: 5; Darsy 1961: 12
- 4 Berthier 1910: 357
- 5 Salmi 1914: 5 n.5. The mosaic inscription is cited by Krautheimer 1937-77: IV, 75.
- 6 In the inscription he is called a presbyter, but in the Liber Pontificalis he is recorded as a bishop, see Duchesne 1886-92: I, 235.
- 7 Berthier 1910: 357. Salmi 1914: 5 n.5 doubts this identification. The Pope Eugenius II (824-827) transferred to the high altar of the basilica the relics of these two saints as well as those of Pope Alexander I. See Krautheimer 1937-77: IV, 75.
- 8 Ihm 1960: 152 and bibliography on p. 153. In 1946, Matthiae and Darsy found remains of the 5th century mosaic under the Zuccaro fresco in the left part of the apse-conch. See Darsy 1961: 47.
- 9 The bad condition of the mosaic is mentioned in the restoration's inscription of 1559-60. See note 1.
- 10 Salmi 1914: 8-10.
- 11 The apse mosaic in S. Agata dei Goti was created between 462 and 472 and destroyed when the vault collapsed in 1589. See Huelsen 1924: 192; Krautheimer 1937-77: I, 2-4. Ciampini's drawing is derived from a series of colored drawings made before the vault fell. See Waetzoldt 1964: 19, 28, and ills. 1-13; Ciampini 1690: pl. LXXVII.
- 12 The apse mosaic in S. Andrea in Catabarbara was created between 468 and 483, and destroyed with the church in 1686. A copy of the composition was made by Antonio Eclissi in 1630. See Waetzoldt 1964: 29 and ill.15; Ciampini 1690: pl. LXXVI.
- 13 Waetzoldt 1964: ills. 33,38,170,490,494.
- 14 In 1552 Taddeo accompanied Duke Guidobaldo II of Urbino on a visit to Verona. On their way they could have passed through Ravenna. For the visit to Verona, see Gere 1969: 30.
- 15 Rodocanachi 1898: 24 : "Si fa' il volto alla capella maggiore"
- 16 Ciampini 1690: pl. XLVII.

- 17 Ihm 1960: 16-17,170-171.
- 18 For a history of the interest in the imago clipeata, see Vermeule 1965: 361-397.
- 19 See note 7.
- 20 This analysis is based on my Ph.D. research on Taddeo Zuccari.
- 21 Shearman 1963: 195-196.
- 22 For the apse fresco at SS. Giovanni e Paolo painted by Niccolo Circignani at 1587-88, see Prandi 1957: 88 and fig. 27; for S. Vitale - painted by Andrea Comodi in 1595, see Huetter and Golzio 1938: 57 and fig. 17; Briganti 1960: 35; for S. Susanna - painted by Cesare Nebbia in 1597, see Affanni 1993: 38-39 and fig. 21; Hibbard 1971: 112 and fig. 5b; for S. Prisca - painted by Anastasio Fontebuoni in 1600, see Sangiorgi 1968: 48 and fig. 15; for S. Balbina - painted by Anastasio Fontebuoni in 1600, see Sricchia Santoro 1974: 30-32 and fig. 8.
- 23 Schroeder 1978: 58.
- 24 Monticone 1953: 228. For visits held from the 1530s see Beggiao 1978: 24.
- 25 Pastor: XVI, 441-442 and docs. 12 and 14.
- 26 For Gregory XIII restorations, see Pastor: XX, 574-598; for those of Sixtus V, see Pastor: XXII, 279-281.
- 27 Davanzati 1725: 506-507; Krautheimer 1937-77: III, 236,238.
- 28 Robertson 1992: 162-168.
- 29 Prandi 1957: 88.
- 30 Waetzoldt 1964: 73-74.
- 31 Herz 1988: 590-620; Zuccari 1981: 171-185; Krautheimer 1967: 174-178.
- 32 Robertson 1992: 170-172.
- 33 *Ibid*: 200.
- 34 See note 31.
- 35 Hertz 1988: 593-594; Zuccari 1981: 184-185.
- 36 The motif of Christ enthroned upon a globe can be found at the apse mosaics of S. Constanza, S. Agata dei Goti and S. Teodoro at Rome, and at the apse mosaic of S. Vitale at Ravenna. See Ihm 1960:tav. V fig. 2, tav.VI fig. 2, tav. VII fig. 1.
- 37 Kirwin 1981: 147 and n. 31 for a list of the published descriptions.
- 38 Waetzoldt 1964: 49, 54, 73-74; Röttgen 1968: 72.
- 39 Pecchiai 1952:81,86-87. The Cardinal's plans were abruptly terminated by his death at 1589. His heirs rejected the Jesuits appeals to continue his patronage.
- 40 The decoration of Cappella Gregoriana had been entrusted to Girolamo Muziano. He designed the mosaics in the interior of the dome, the pendentives and the lunettes, which were carried out with the aid of a large workshop that included Cesare Nebbia and Giovanni Guerra. See Siebenhüner 1962:268-278; Chappell and Kirwin 1974:127-128. Cristofano Roncalli was placed in charge of the decoration of the Cappella Clementina. The designs for the mosaics in the dome, the pendentives and the lunettes were produced by him and executed by Paolo Rossetti and assistants. See Chappell and Kirwin 1974:128-129.
- 41 The Congregazione della Reverenda Fabbrica of S. Peter first entrusted this work to Cristofano Roncalli who, by order of Pope Clement VIII, was later relieved of the commission in favor of Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino. The designs were carried out by a large team of artists. See Röttgen 1973: 119-121; Chappell and Kirwin 1974: 125-126.
- 42 For studies on the idea of the primitive Church as a model of reform, see Herz 1988:nn. 2-7.
- 43 For studies on the historical consciousness of this era, see Bouwsma 1964-65:303-14; Cochrane 1981: esp.445-478; Pullapilly 1975;

- 44 Cochrane 1981:457.
- 45 On the Magdeburg Centuries, see Cochrane 1981:457-458; Pullapilly 1975:50-53; Brodrick 1962:677-711.
- 46 Neri's interest in Early Christianity is discussed in Ponnelle and Bordet 1932:passim; Fremiotti 1926:5-12,42-52; Cecchelli 1938.
- 47 For the Annales, see Pullapilly 1975: passim; Cochrane 1981:458-463; Walz 1963:259-287; Herklotz 1985:60-72.
- 48 For the broad subject of Early Christian archaeology in the second half of the sixteenth century, see esp. Fremiotti 1926; Cecchelli 1938; Ferretto 1942; Cochrane 1981:445-478; Wataghin Cantino 1980.
- 49 For Borromeo's treatise and its influence, see esp. Volker 1977; Volker 1988; (both including bibliography).
- 50 See note 48.
- 51 Hibbard 1971:66.
- 52 Zoepfl 1955:205-208; Zoepfl 1969:269;Ehse 1913:136-137; Cardella 1792-94: IV,258-261.
- 53 Siebert 1943:173-187,383-390.
- 54 Zoepfl 1955:213.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 204.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 209,231-235; O'Malley 1993:324.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 234; Villoslada 1954:25.
- 58 Ernesto 1914:93.
- 59 Zoepfl 1955:241; Pecchiai 1952: 34 n.2,35,57.
- 60 Zoepfl 1969:237,278,378,403.
- 61 Vasco Rocca 1979:100.
- 62 Wollesen-Wisch 1985:318-319.
- 63 Severe criticism had been expressed against the wasteful lifestyle, banquets, excessive hospitality, clothing style and household expenses of the Cardinal. He was famous for his love and support for music. The leading composers of the day - Palestrina, Orlando di Lasso, Jakobus de Karle and Tomas Luis de Victoria - dedicated some compositions, sacred and profane, to him. See Siebert 1943:342-343,349-356; Zoepfl 1955:245; Zoepfl 1969:462.
- 64 Truchsess collected paintings by Titian, Lorenzo Lotto, Paris Bordone and others. In 1554 he commissioned Pellegrino Tibaldi to paint and decorate with stucco his chapel at Loreto. For Truchsess patronage of art, see Siebert 1943:342-356; Zoepfl 1955:244-247; Zoepfl 1969:446-463. For his chapel at Loreto, see Grimaldi and Sordi 1988:9-12.
- 65 For general survey of Counter Reformation Cardinals, see Antonovics 1972; Hallman 1985. For the manner of life of Cardinal Farnese, see Robertson 1992:passim. For this of Cardinal Baronio, see Pullapilly 1975:passim.
- 66 Zoepfl 1955:231.

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# *Gaspar Ofhuys' Chronicle and Hugo van der Goes*

*Nevet Dolev*

*Department of Art History, Tel Aviv University*

**I**n 1863, Alphonse J. Wauters published a translation of a *Chronicle*<sup>1</sup> written in Latin at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Gaspar Ofhuys (1456-1532). The *Chronicle* documented the history of the Rodee Clooster, a monastery located near Brussels. Ofhuys was nineteen when he joined the cloister, eventually to become its *infirmarius* or Master of the Sick as well as its Prior, during which time he wrote the *Chronicle* (ca. 1512). The modest *Chronicle* now enjoys enduring fame, mainly due to the chapter which relates events concerning the life at the monastery of Hugo van der Goes (?1435-1482), spoken of by the chronicler as one of the greatest Flemish painters of the time "on our side of the Alps."<sup>2</sup> Covering a period of about seven years, the core of the chapter in question focuses on a psychotic episode which Hugo underwent around 1480 – its cause, effect and, above all, the lesson to be learned from it.

Ofhuys the Chronicler-*infirmarius* depicts the physical aspect of Hugo's mental breakdown, but Ofhuys the Chronicler-prior is far more concerned by his spiritual breakdown, the death of the soul. Therefore, of particular significance, to my mind – but totally ignored by the many scholars who have treated this document – is the fact that both the opening and closing sentences of the relevant chapter deal with Hugo's death.

In spite of the fact that the *Chronicle* was known before its re-discovery and translation by Wauters, no one seems to have noticed the reference to the artist. However, its publication in the 19<sup>th</sup> century evoked an avalanche of interest in Hugo's biography. Since the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century his life and personality and especially his mental breakdown, have been in the limelight of many interdisciplinary scholarly pursuits.<sup>3</sup> The most thorough treatment of the medical aspects of Ofhuys' document is William A. McCloy's unpublished – but extensively quoted – doctoral dissertation, *The Ofhuys Chronicle and Hugo*

*van der Goes*.<sup>4</sup>

The dissertation was acclaimed by art historians and psychologists alike for its important contribution to the psychiatric understanding of Hugo's life in general and his artistic achievements in particular.<sup>5</sup> In the wake of McCloy – and fascinated by what seemed to be a novel psychological approach – scholars unanimously saw in the *Chronicle* "a masterpiece of clinical accuracy,"<sup>6</sup> ignoring its completely traditional exhortatory nature. The *infirmarius* does indeed display his acquaintance with the contemporary relatively recent and up-to-date medical literature and describes the symptoms of Hugo's malady in detail as well as attempting to give them a medical and scientific explanation.

It is my contention, nonetheless, that the medical discourse is but a thin veneer for Ofhuys' underlying proselytizing intentions. To make my point I would even go as far as to say that Ofhuys coerces the so-called "scientific facts" to service his religious ends, merely paying lip-service to physiological causes (e.g., humoral imbalance, the effect of alcohol on the brain, etc.), whereas the *Chronicle* should actually be read as a sermon or morality play that has a clear didactic message and an undisguised eschatological warning: *memento mori*.

### **Ofhuys' account**

In 1475, at the height of his career as a famous artist and as the Dean of the Painters' Guild in Ghent, for reasons which have remained a matter of conjecture – Hugo joined the Red Cloister, a monastery affiliated with the Windesheim Congregation.<sup>7</sup> Accepted as *frater conversus*,<sup>8</sup> he continued painting and was granted several extravagant privileges by Father Thomas, the Prior:

immediately after his initiation and throughout his novitiate Father Thomas, the Prior, allowed him to seek consolation and diversion in many ways after the manner of the worldly, though with the best of intentions, as Hugo had been an honored person among them. He was more than once visited by persons of high rank and even by his Serene Highness, the Archduke Maximilian. Since these people came as visitors on his account, father Thomas gave him permission to go up to the guest quarters and there dine with them. And so it happened that while he was with us he became more acquainted with the pomp of the world than with the ways of doing penitence and humbling himself. This caused strong disapproval in some. Novices, they said, should be humbled and certainly not exalted.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to this recognition of his lofty status as an artist, Hugo was also permitted to take his meals with the "choir brothers" rather than in the special

refectory set aside for the lay brothers lower in the monastery hierarchy.

About five years after entering the monastery, on the way to Cologne in the company of several monks (amongst them Hugo's half-brother Nicolas, who related the events as eye-witness to the chronicler), the artist suffered a severe mental breakdown: "... our brother convert Hugo incurred a strange mental disease as a result of which he kept saying that he was a lost soul and deserved eternal damnation; furthermore, he was intent on injuring himself physically and committing suicide ..."<sup>9</sup> The monks returned to Brussels and called for Prior Thomas, who hastened to the city to relieve the anguished monk. The Prior 'diagnosed' Hugo's affliction as resembling that of King Saul, namely, that he was possessed by an evil spirit. Father Thomas immediately prescribed music for the patient – but to no avail. His condition did not improve – "... but still delirious, he pronounced himself the son of perdition."<sup>10</sup> Hugo was taken back to the monastery where – voluntarily relinquishing all former amenities – he "abased himself very much as soon as he regained his health, leaving the table at our refectory of his own accord and abjectly obtaining his meals with the laity."<sup>11</sup> A year or two later he died.

Ofhuys deemed a mere skeletal exposition of the bare fact insufficient, and he attempted to give an explanation of causes. Basically three kinds were considered possible: demonological, humoral-physiological and providential. In spite of symptoms reminiscent of King Saul ("the evil spirit"),<sup>12</sup> demonical possession summarily dismissed by the *infirmarius* since "Hugo never wanted to injure anyone except himself."<sup>13</sup> Greater attention is paid to the humoral or purely medical aspects of the infirmity: "First we may say that it was a natural sickness and some kind of phrenitis or madness."<sup>14</sup> In keeping with the symptoms, various causes are pondered, such as "the malignance of a corrupt humor,"<sup>15</sup> or one of several kinds of illness "sometimes engendered by melancholy-induced foods."<sup>16</sup>

Although the description of Hugo's disease was ostensibly based on personal acquaintance and eye-witness accounts, in the chronicler's desire to be scientific he turned to Bartholomeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*, a medical text written ca. 1260 that deals with the causes of madness. Quoting verbatim a passage from it, Ofhuys considered the possibility that Hugo had suffered from melancholy caused by humoral pathology.<sup>17</sup>

Other hypotheses forwarded by Ofhuys are clearly far more blatantly moralistic (i.e. value laden) rather than purely medical (i.e. value-neutral). Interspersed between the *infirmarius*' attempts to fathom Hugo's symptoms scientifically are the irresistible touches of malice which appear when Ofhuys the Clergyman intuits the dangers inherent in the intellect (the "Flemish book"),

the senses (the "strong wine") and the imagination. In attributing Hugo's "infirmity" to "drinking strong wine" Ofhuys was adhering to Anglicus' humoral theory of melancholy. But is it not a barely-disguised tinge of envy of those palates pampered by dining with royalty that motivates the chronicler's self-righteous interjection that "it was undoubtedly on account of his eminent guests" that Hugo drank wine thus "aggravating his natural inclination" [to melancholy]?<sup>18</sup>

Is it not also the traditional ecclesiastical ambivalence to learning voiced by *religiosi* from Augustine, Jerome and up to Hugo's own time, that explains Ofhuys' moral indignation with regard to Hugo's devoting himself "too often to the reading of a Flemish book,"<sup>19</sup> (the book clearly not being the Scriptures, the reading of which could never be "too often")? Are not Ofhuys' zealous suspicions concerning the spiritual dangers incurred in "imagining and fantasizing" – arrived at by grafting a branch of medicine onto the trunk of morality – the reason for his hinting that perhaps Hugo's art may have had more than a little to do with his breakdown (Frate Hugo "an outstanding painter may have sustained a lesion in some blood vessel as a result of excessive imagining")?<sup>20</sup> And let us remember that Cennino Cennini's definition of painting calls for "imagination and skill of hand,"<sup>21</sup> but also that the "excessive imaginings and fantasies" – the painter's lifeblood – were held in opprobrium by the Fathers as well as later ecclesiastics. Saint Augustine aligned fantasy with pride "centered in man and his radical freedom which may be sinful."<sup>22</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Burton stated that "the Devil works primarily upon the imagination and he moves the fantasy by mediation of humors."<sup>23</sup>

Whereas until now Ofhuys has tempered his medicine with morality, in stating his third, last and real reason for Hugo's collapse, the 'Master of the Sick' becomes pure pulpiteer and we are left in no doubt as to what he believes to be its real cause: Divine Providence. Not the Fiend's machinations, nor an imbalance of humors, but a God-ordained affliction: "We can talk of this infirmity by holding that it befell him according to the most benevolent Providence of the Lord."<sup>24</sup> Hugo's "heart was elevated," by honors and visits, "whereby the Lord, not wishing him to perish, out of compassion sent him this humiliating infirmity by which justly he was reduced to great humility."<sup>25</sup> As the *Malleus Maleficarum* demonstrated only too well,<sup>26</sup> God's corrective measures can be very painful. The heavens which conspired the overthrow of the reprobate Dr. Faustus who was "swollen with pride" spared Hugo, but not without causing him great anguish: "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth." By learning that heaven's gates are lowly arched and that he who would enter must go upon his knees, Hugo was saved from eternal damnation.

### Moralized medicine

For all its ostensibly non-judgmental medical "objectivity", Ofhuys' sermonizing *Chronicle* is an expression of the basic tenets and values of his cloistered world. The theological concepts of humility – the source of virtue – and pride, its diametrical opposite,<sup>27</sup> are the essence of his version of Hugo's story. As the recipient of glowing acclaim, Hugo was particularly susceptible to that most malignant of vices, pride, which was "not of the Father but of the world."<sup>28</sup> Ofhuys exploits Hugo's plight to expound on the concept of vainglory: "Novices should not exalt themselves but humiliate themselves".<sup>29</sup>

Having indulged his readers in Hugo's miserable fate, Ofhuys urges "if thou art proud abase thyself."<sup>30</sup> His words reverberate with the authority of the Fathers of the Church. *The Golden Legend* quotes Gregory in his advocacy of humility: "All the prouds of heart ... seek glory."<sup>31</sup> The Lord incarnate spurns worldly goods and flees glory."<sup>32</sup> The contemporaneous *Meditations on the Life of Christ* attributed to the Franciscan Bonaventura obviously extols humility, one of the Order's three supreme virtues. Saint Bernard is enlisted by the author to exemplify the concept of humility and, using sartorial imagery, he explicates: "Everyone who serves God perfectly may call himself the hem, the last part of the Lord's garment, because of his humble repute."<sup>32</sup>

In his exhortatory capacity, Ofhuys uses words and expressions charged with evangelical meaning. Hugo's terrestrial renown is shown to be vain and transitory and may be more to his detriment than to his advantage; only Jesus' fame is eternal.<sup>33</sup> The worldly consolations which Hugo enjoyed are ultimately deceptive and may be juxtaposed to the "everlasting consolations" of the blessed in heaven.<sup>34</sup> Hugo's "special gifts"<sup>35</sup> which "elevated his heart" resulted in a descent into the abyssal depths of melancholy. Hugo's fate reflected an old tenet of moral philosophy, namely, that "pride is the root of all sin, despair its end product."<sup>36</sup> His trials and tribulations taught him "to walk humbly with God;"<sup>37</sup> he who had dined with the high and mighty willingly cast aside the idols of mundane achievement and "of his own accord abjectly took his meals with the laity."<sup>38</sup>

The Red cloister, like the other monasteries that joined the Windesheim Congregation, adhered to the teachings of Thomas à Kempis, *Imitatio Christi*, which instructed humility and renunciation: "Neither do thou esteem thyself ...;" "truly all human glory, all temporal honor, all worldly highness ... is vanity and folly."<sup>39</sup> The *Little Alphabet of the Monks* compiled by à Kempis had brethren "shun conversation with worldly men, for thou art not able to be satisfied with both God and men, with things eternal and things transitory."<sup>40</sup>

As Hugo's breakdown occurred on the way back from an excursion to

Cologne, might one not also be reminded that "God does not love worldly priests"<sup>41</sup> and the Golden Legend's warning to monks of the traps and dangers awaiting them outside the protective walls of the monastery: "Just as fish die when they are thrown up on dry land, so monks who tarry outside their cells and mingle in the affairs of the world, weaken in their good resolutions."<sup>42</sup> Closer to home were the statutes of Windesheim, which required brothers to be "withdrawn from the world ... practice mortification and silence." The ultimate death blow to the painter may have come from à Kempis' assertion, "the beholding of beauty is temptation."<sup>43</sup> Shattered by cross-pressures, torn between the cell and the world, Hugo was incapable of renouncing his art despite living within the community of stern brethren whose condemnation of his "worldly consolations" he could not fail to perceive.

Hugo's *psychomachia* may have resulted in a syndrome known since the Middle Ages as *pusillanimitas* or "scrupulosity", the essence of which was "a morbid doubt in the adequacy of devotion."<sup>44</sup> People tormented by 'scrupulosity' were crushed by the burden of their sins, feared punishment and despaired of salvation. In the early days of Christianity, the phenomenon was described in a letter written in 380 by John Chrisostom. The Greek Doctor of the Church spoke of his disciple and protégé Stagirius who suffered "terrifying nightmares, disorders of speech, fits and swooning;" not unlike the anguished Hugo was to suffer a millenium later, Stagirius "despaired of his salvation and was tormented by an irresistible urge to commit suicide."<sup>45</sup> These symptoms which were the lot of many a monk and hermit, were described by the Egyptian desert fathers. Around noontime at the heat of the day, the hermit was visited and tempted by the demon of *acedia*, frequently called "the noonday demon": "The demon sends him hatred against the place, against life itself and against the work of his hands and makes him think he has lost the love among his brethren and that there is none to comfort him." One aspect of the vice of *acedia* was "a certain bitterness of the mind" which inclined it to despair and sometimes "drives its victim to suicide when he is oppressed by unreasonable grief."<sup>46</sup> Occasionally, medieval texts attributed the cause of *acedia* to the influence of the melancholy humor. The original meaning of *acedia* as *taedium vitae* and *tristitia* was replaced in Renaissance thought by the ostensibly more psychological or secular notion of melancholy;<sup>47</sup> however, the moralistic connotations were as untractable as ever. Timothy Bright (1550-1615), a physician turned cleric referred to "that heavy hand of God upon the afflicted conscience tormented with remorse of sin and fear of his judgement."<sup>48</sup> Robert Burton, that most perceptive of clergymen, in his monumental *The Anatomy of Melancholy* described the self-inflicted torment of persons in the grip of a sense

of sin as the greatest cause of this malady. Echoing Hugo's plight Burton indicated that "the party oppressed thinks he can get no ease but by death and is fully resolved to offer violence unto himself." Evincing enormous subtlety and penetrating observations into the human psyche throughout the book, it is Burton the clergyman who judges "the sinner who committed some foul offense" as justly deserving God's anger.<sup>□49</sup> The poet and preacher John Donne, warned the melancholiac sinner that "the hand of divine justice shall grow heavy upon him." He will be apathetic, listless and "tend to desperation." Just as the melancholy humor is the hardest to purge "so is melancholy in the soul that distrust of our salvation."<sup>□50</sup>

### **From Bad to Mad: Hugo on the Couch**

In spite of the fact that Ofhuys' moralistic exhortations are relentless and his castigations pitiless, 20<sup>th</sup> century students of Hugo have hailed the *Chronicle* as a "masterpiece of clinical accuracy." Panofsky considered Hugo's breakdown "an acute attack of suicidal mania;"<sup>□51</sup> Friedlaender stated that "we get from Ofhuys a clinical report of mental illness."<sup>□52</sup> Most recently Koslow and Jochem Sanders have been deeply impressed by McCloy's dissertation on the *Chronicle*, whose chapters treat – among others – Hugo's psychosis (X), its diagnosis (XI), "evidence of abnormality in Hugo's work (XII); etc."<sup>53</sup>

Almost ignoring the *Chronicle's* sweeping evangelical nature, scholars fascinated by the new science of psychiatry tend to emphasize its medical aspects, insensitively imposing modern terminology on a Renaissance document and turning it into a "case study" or pathography.<sup>54</sup> McCloy's dissertation only epitomizes a process which had already started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was characterized by an urge to pathologize Hugo's plight, reducing "his personhood to a series of medical facts."<sup>55</sup> Typical of this diagnostic zeal is Hjalmar Sander, who in 1912 diagnosed Hugo's "emotional disquietude" and other symptoms that he copied straight from a book by the contemporaneous high priest of psychiatry Emil Kraepelin.<sup>56</sup> Although McCloy comes to the inevitable conclusion that Ofhuys' final verdict was a non-medical one, he nevertheless oscillates between accepting or rejecting the psychiatric speculations of former writers on the subject. He has reservations about "involutional melancholy", as inappropriate (Hugo was too young to be diagnosed by a term reserved for the aged); by contrast, he enthusiastically endorses "neurasthénique" (a totally anachronistic diagnostic label coined in 19<sup>th</sup> century America).<sup>□57</sup>

Regarding Hugo's artworks, McCloy observed that "it is clearly evident that we are looking at the productions of a psychologically abnormal person

with a tenuous grasp on reality."<sup>58</sup> In the 'Death of the Virgin', Panofsky saw signs of "the calm before the storm"<sup>59</sup> [Ill. 1]. Fierens – Gevaert discerned a "hallucinatory gaze" in one of the shepherds in the Berlin 'Nativity' [Ill. 2] which perhaps reflects the psychosis of the artist.<sup>60</sup> But why be led so psychologically astray? Should not the shepherds, who are the first to witness to the Epiphany, have a hallucinatory gaze; as indeed they have more than a century earlier in, for example, Bulgarini's 'Nativity'?<sup>61</sup>

Meyer Schapiro in "pointing to the weaknesses" in Freud's monograph on Leonardo found that "in works by psychoanalysts" explanations are too often based on a single datum (Leonardo's "dream"; Ofhuys' report, etc.) and "too little attention given to history and the social situation in dealing with individuals."<sup>62</sup> Following in the footsteps of Schapiro, Susan Koslow rejects the notion of Hugo's "psychosis" and contends that "The Death of the Virgin" must be interpreted in light of contemporaneous values, namely, "the spiritual concerns of the religious community to which Hugo belonged."<sup>63</sup> Thus, although critics find it strange that Ofhuys did not mention a single specific painting by Hugo, this absence should be understood in light of the fact that Ofhuys' interest lay not in the earthly achievement of erring humanity but in man's spiritual welfare in the life to come.

### **Conclusion: the Malign and the Divine**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been considered by many writers as the Psychological Age. With the advent of Freudianism, the individual, his biography, the inner recesses of his mind and soul, his unconscious motivations and psychopathological aberrations have become the focus of interest and investigation. Psychiatric terms and rhetoric have crossed professional boundaries, pervading the arts, literature, historiography and other realms of cultural endeavor. This cross-fertilization has given rise to the now highly esteemed interdisciplinary sub-fields of psychobiography, psychohistory, psychopolitics and others. This paper hoped to rid a 16<sup>th</sup> century document of the psychological over-emphasis which has accrued to it and, by de-medicalizing it, to restore it to its cultural matrix. 'Shrinking' the account of an *infirmarius*, who was first and foremost a doctor of the soul seems to be an anachronistic imposition on the text.<sup>64</sup>

I have attempted to show that Ofhuys' evangelism was so integral a part of his life and thought that even his purely scientific observations were filtered through the glass darkly of theology and not devoid of moral-judgmental connotations. Thus, contrary to the opinions voiced by scholars such as Klibansky, I do not believe that Ofhuys was capable of drawing a sharp line

between the "*ex accidentia naturalis*" view and the "*ex dei providentia*" perspective.<sup>□65</sup> On the contrary, a deep-rooted tradition made the two entities – the theological and the medical-inextricably linked. The hybridization of morality and medicine in the writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen – who related the medical *humor melancholicus* to the moral Fall of Adam and Eve<sup>□66</sup> – continued into the Renaissance, which had "continuous frontiers on one side with theology and moral philosophy just as on the other side its borders marched with those of physiology."<sup>□67</sup> Showing anything but clear-cut boundaries, the "virtuous and sinful, rational and irrational, healthy and unhealthy, were often blurred and tended to become closely associated one with another."<sup>□68</sup> Reflecting what would become the Calvinist dichotomy of healthy-elect and sick-damned, Hugo's affliction is presented by Ofhuys as simultaneously partaking of both sickness and sinfulness.<sup>□69</sup> In cases of "mixed diseases" such as melancholy ["the devil's bath"], Robert Burton advises the sick-sinner to "submit himself to the advise of [both] good physicians *and* divines."<sup>□70</sup>

Moral connotations even hover over that most purely medical of institutions, the Anatomy Theatre at Leiden.<sup>□71</sup> In keeping with the Theatre's function, a collection of human and animal skeletons were arranged around the dissection area and on the interior walls of the building. But in very much the same way that Vesalius' anatomical drawings of skeletons had explicit *memento mori* overtones, so too were Leiden's skeletons both anatomical specimens and God's avenging instruments bearing appropriately moralizing instructions. Mottoes such as *Pulvis et Umbris Sumus* [we are dust and shadows] reminded Ofhuys' contemporaries of the moral nature of all human intercourse and that even in the Anatomy Theatre we are not to forget that doctors dress wounds, but only God heals them.

In re-reading the chronicle it becomes clear that Ofhuys wants to teach us the correct Christian path to God. He does so by relating the story of the 'fall' of a sinner who, chastened, made amendments and was saved. The sinner, like the heroes of Renaissance tragedy, fell from the greatest height (the most celebrated painter "on our side of the Alps") and as such was all the more fitting a subject to serve as an *exemplum*: "could not what happened to him also befall us?"<sup>□72</sup>

"Preachers and moralists pointed to death to counter vanity."<sup>□73</sup> Hot upon the heels of Ofhuys' admonitions about the debilitating effect of imagining and the condemnation of fantasy as vain, he begins to espouse eschatology. The bracketing of Hugo's case in between the first and last lines of the chapter which relate to his death should have alerted students of the subject to the fact

that we are in the world of the morality play, the sermon, the painted Last Judgement. The part which scholars alighted upon – Hugo's psychological-physiological ailments – ostensibly came under the jurisdiction of Ofhuys the doctor; but it is Ofhuys the doctrinaire, for whom cure meant creed and remedy religion, who ends his fire and brimstone tirade by beseeching us, his readers, to escape "temporal affliction and eternal torment."

By the end, Hugo the individual is so negligible that Ofhuys does not even refer to him by name. "He was buried ..."

## NOTES

1. Wauters 1863: 723-743.
2. McCloy 1958: 16.
3. Sander 1912: 579-545; Destrée 1914; Friedlaender 1926; Panofsky 1953.
4. McCloy 1958.
5. Koslow 1979: 45; Sanders 1992: 16.
6. Panofsky 1953: 331.
7. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century there were three classes in monastic life: (1) the highest were the choir brothers who were devoted, mainly, to the work of God and to religious studies. (2) Convert brothers were members in full standing who took the three monastic vows, namely, poverty, chastity and obedience. (3) The oblates were of a lower order than the converts since they did not take the three monastic vows. Both converts and oblates were grouped together as lay brothers who were occupied, when not concerned with religious duties, with manual labor and the secular affairs of the monastery. Hyma 1950: 134; Herberman 1910: 93.
8. McCloy 1958: 17-18.
9. *Ibid.*: 19.
10. *Ibid.*: 20.
11. *Ibid.*: 23.
12. I Kings 16:15.
13. McCloy 1958: 21.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Anglicus cited in *ibid.*: 32.
18. McCloy 1958: 19.
19. *Ibid.*: 20.
20. *Ibid.*: 24.
21. Cennino 1960: 1.
22. Summers 1981: 110.
23. Burton III 1949: 429.
24. McCloy 1958: 23.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Kraemer and Sprenger 1948.
27. Bloomfield 1952: 84; Katzenellenbogen 1964: 63.

28. *I John* 2:16. See also e.g. *Luke* 18:14; *I Peter* 5:6.
29. McCloy 1958: 17.
30. *Ibid.* 26.
31. De Voragine 1969: 5.
32. Ragusa and Green 1961: 167.
33. "Herod heard of the fame of Jesus," *Matthew* 14:1. "His fame went throughout all Syria," *Matthew* 4:24.
34. "Our Lord Jesus Christ has given us everlasting consolation," *Thessalonians* 2:16.
35. McCloy 1958: 23.
36. Snyder 1965: 55.
37. Micah 6:8.
38. McCloy 1958: 23.
39. Á Kempis 1973: 123, 145.
40. Kettlewell II 1882: 120.
41. Koenigsberger 1989: 183.
42. De Voragine 1969: 101.
43. Wittkower 1969: 112.
44. *Ibid.*: 112-113.
45. Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl 1979: 76
46. Wenzel 1967: 5, 160.
47. *Ibid.*: 186.
48. Jackson 1986: 83.
49. Burton III 1949: 400.
50. Donne 1952: 459, 480.
51. Panofsky 1953: 331.
52. Friedlaender 1926: 14.
53. Koslow 1979: 45; Sanders 1992: 16.
54. Lange 1931: 102.
55. Susko 1994: 112.
56. Kraepelin 1913.
57. Cushman 1996: 133-139.
58. McCloy 1958: 102.
59. Panofsky 1953: 337.
60. Fierens-Gevaert 1929: 52.
61. Kempers 1992: 114.
62. Shapiro 1968: 335.
63. Koslow 1979: 32.
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# *The Madonna's Brooch as an Allusion to Verrocchio's Name\**

*Luba Freedman*

*Department of Art History, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

"**A**ndrea del Verrocchio of Florence was in his time a goldsmith, perspectivist, sculptor, carver, painter and musician." So begins Giorgio Vasari's account of the artist's life (1435-1488).<sup>1</sup> Reading this artist's biography, one remains impressed by his constant development and striving toward new options and higher levels of perfection. Not only did he own books, a rare but not completely unusual feature - Benedetto da Maiano also owned a few books<sup>2</sup> - but he also owned a lute,<sup>3</sup> an exceptional acquisition among the artists of Quattrocento Florence. In light of his ambitions and of the diversity of the works he and his assistants produced,<sup>4</sup> it is likely that such a pensive and virtuoso artist would think of devising some means by which at least certain of his works could be instantly identified as products of his workshop. Among these works, I single out the Marian devotional images.

Popular on both sides of the Alps, Marian images were common products of many workshops, including those in Tuscany. Certainly, the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio was not exceptional. What is unusual is that several of the Marian images assigned to his workshop feature a specific type of brooch - an oval-shaped lustrous clasp - fastened on the Virgin's robe. The frequency of its appearance may bespeak its importance. Verrocchio seems to be especially inclined toward this particular brooch because its shape and the mode of its rendering allude to the master's own name.

I am far from claiming that every Marian image attributed to Verrocchio's workshop features this type of brooch. Clients commissioning such images might have imposed their own demands and expectations, which would certainly constrain the artist's freedom to introduce unique features within his paintings. However, as we shall see, the majority of such works do feature this type of brooch. The consistency with which it appears would not, however,

arouse our interest or curiosity were it not for the prominence of Verrocchio's workshop and the mystery surrounding his name.

When compared to other 15th-century workshops, Andrea's workshop was distinctive in character.<sup>5</sup> His commissions included statues in marble and bronze, tombs of porphyry, reliefs in silver and terracotta, devotional images and busts in terracotta, painted altarpieces, and others. This diversified activity was fueled by Verrocchio's wide-ranging interests as well as aspiration to master every type of work and technique available.<sup>6</sup> Verrocchio took on the problem of motion in sculpture, exemplified by his celebrated *Putto with a Dolphin*. He studied the physical and emotional interaction between two figures, exemplified by his bronze group statue *Christ and St. Thomas*, and the expression of diverse emotions, as exemplified by the smiling David and the fierce *Bartolommeo Colleoni*. He also took a vivid interest in Classical sculpture: he not only employed the appropriate subjects and motifs in his own work, but he also participated in a rare enterprise for the time, the restoration of antiques, such as the *Marsyas*, from Lorenzo de Medici's collection.

Thus, being uncommonly multifaceted in its activity, Verrocchio's workshop differed from that of, for example, Antonio Pollaiuolo in executing works in marble, and from that of Benedetto da Maiano in producing both paintings and bronzes. It truly dominated the cultural scene of Florence in the second half of the 15th century, not least because its major commissions were provided by the Medici family. This prominence was reinforced by its apprentices, distinguished by their number and quality, such as Lorenzo di Credi and Pietro Perugino. Other painters, such as Domenico Ghirlandaio and Sandro Botticelli, were associated with Verrocchio early in their careers. In addition, the master trained several sculptors, among whom were Giovanni Francesco Rustici, Francesco di Simone, and Agnolo di Polo.<sup>7</sup> His most illustrious pupil was, of course, Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>8</sup>

The recent collection of essays edited by Steven Bule *et al*, *Verrocchio and Late Quattrocento Italian Sculpture* (1992), and the monograph by Andrew Butterfield, *Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio* (1997), highlight the significance of Verrocchio as a master and, as a result, of his workshop. In the present article, I have but one purpose in mind: to show that such an artist, alert to contemporary issues in art and avidly experimenting with diverse techniques, surely sought a way to make his paintings carry his trademark. 15th-century devotional images of the Virgin, that is, paintings showing the Virgin holding the Child in a half-figure format, were supposed to be produced *as if anonymously*. They never bore their artists' signatures, like other types of art, such as altarpieces. The brooch's recurrence in the Marian images lies, I suggest,



Fig. 1: Verrocchio Workshop. *The Young Madonna* (attr. to Lorenzo di Credi). Drawing. Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen (photo: Museum).



Fig. 2: Verrocchio Workshop. *Head of Madonna*. Drawing. Paris, Louvre (photo: Museum).

in its "function" as a substitute for an explicit signature. I suggest, furthermore, that the specific brooch served such a purpose because of its *visual* allusion to the master's adopted name, chosen to convey his professional pride.

The origin of the master's name has puzzled generations of scholars.<sup>9</sup> Andrea's last name is obviously an adopted, not a paternal name. Andrea's patronymic is Cioni, a common Florentine name.<sup>10</sup> (Incidentally, Lorenzo Ghiberti's patronymic was also Cioni.<sup>11</sup>) As Andrea's father was a customs collector (and a brick-maker in his youth), we may assume that the reason for adopting a new name was most probably professional, reflecting the son's dedication to the profession of his choice. Why he selected "Verrocchio" is still unresolved.

In one attempt to solve the enigma, it has been suggested that Andrea adopted the name Verrocchio after studying in the workshop of a jeweler by the name of Giuliano del Verrocchio.<sup>12</sup> In the 15th century it was possible for an apprentice to adopt the name of his master, as in the case, for example, of Piero di Cosimo, whose name reflects his respect for his master, Cosimo Rosselli. However, it is hard to support Andrea's connection to the aforementioned workshop because he was twelve years older than Giuliano.

It has also been suggested that Andrea adopted the name of one of his patrons, Fra Giuliano del Verrocchio, a member of a Florentine patrician family. Andrea is said to have carved a tomb slab for Fra Giuliano, but this cannot be confirmed, nor the fact that Fra Giuliano was ever Verrocchio's patron.<sup>13</sup> More significantly, the practice of assuming a patron's name became acceptable only half a century later, as Francesco Salviati's adoption of his patron's name illustrates.

Before investigating the connection between Verrocchio's profession and the name he adopted, I suggest inquiring into the name's spelling in the contemporary documents. This may provide us with a clue as to why the enigma of the artist's name cannot be resolved. One of the earliest documents in which his name is spelled out in full - "Andrea di Michele del Verrocchio" - is dated June 29, 1467.<sup>14</sup> The spelling of Andrea's last name, as was common in Renaissance Italy, varied according to clerks making the entry; hence, we discover "Verocchio," "Varochie," "Veroch," "Varroccho," and, of course, "Verrocchio."<sup>15</sup> Because no document signed by the artist himself has been preserved, although he was definitely literate,<sup>16</sup> it is not known how he in fact spelled his name.

Vasari's spelling - "Verrocchio" - has been uniformly adopted by scholars. According to the Cassell's Italian-English Dictionary, "Verrocchio" literally means "olive-press." Such appellations were quite common among Renaissance



Fig. 3: Andrea del Verrocchio and Lorenzo di Credi. *Piazza Madonna (Madonna Enthroned between John the Baptist and St. Donatus)*. Pistoia, Cathedral, Chapel of the Sacrament (photo: Alinari / Art Resource).



Fig. 4: *Madonna*. Detail of Fig. 3. (photo: Alinari / Art Resource)

artists in Italy, but they usually made reference to an important characteristic of the professionals' families or their native cities. For instance, the last name of Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, meaning "poulterer," refers to their father's occupation, as does the last name of Domenico Ghirlandaio, meaning "garland maker"; the last name of Andrea del Castagno, translated as "chestnut-tree," relates to the artist's native village; and the last name of Sandro Botticelli, meaning "keg," relates to the nickname given the artist's brother, and so on.<sup>17</sup>

Now, why would Andrea have taken a new name, one detached from parental occupations or other biographical details, and gone so far as to assign it to his younger brother as well? In Verrocchio's Florence, among the practicing artists, only architects such as Leon Battista Alberti and Antonio Averlino (better known as Filarete) had, at one point or another, adopted pseudonyms. When writing the comedy *Philodoxeus*, Alberti chose the name Lepidus in order to persuade his readers that the piece had been written by an ancient author.<sup>18</sup> As the name Lepidus means "jokester," or "laughing one," it probably carried some personal import. Averlino adopted the name Filarete under the influence of the humanist Francesco Filelfo (an expert in Classical Greek at the Sforza court).<sup>19</sup> Significantly, he used this pseudonym, meaning "love of virtue" in Greek, only when he wrote his treatise on architecture; he did not do so when he completed the *porta argentea* for Old St. Peter's.<sup>20</sup> In view of these facts, Andrea's adoption of the name "Verrocchio" may well illustrate his wish to set himself apart from his immediate colleagues, and closer to architects.

Andrea appears to have adopted the name "Verrocchio" because, for him, the name carried a meaning other than "olive-press." Spelt with one "r" (Verocchio) - analogous to Veronica ("true image") - the name would mean "true eye."<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the name is an apt reference to a painter's activity that, according to Alberti, 'aim[s] to represent things seen.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, his name's two meanings (in dependence on its spelling), "olive-press" and "true eye," both hint at his profession.

This interpretation of the artist's name is somewhat supported by an unknown author's inscription. Inscribed on a sheet of paper (now in the Louvre) bearing studies of naked putti, it puns, if indirectly, on the artist's name: 'A glory to Florence, believe me, stout Verrocchio [incidentally, spelled "Varochie"]/ who more than their eyes regard and esteem you.'<sup>23</sup> In Verrocchio's Florence, punning on names was quite fashionable.<sup>24</sup> It is sufficient to recall one of the Eclogues, dedicated by Naldo Naldi to Lorenzo il Magnificent, which plays with the words: daphne-laurus-Laurentius-Lorenzo.<sup>25</sup> If we follow this example, the pun on Andrea's last name corroborates its association with the "true eye."

Punning was itself only one manifestation of the attention paid to a name's

meaning, a fascination so characteristic of Renaissance culture, which inherited from Antiquity a belief in a mysterious relationship between a man and his name. Therefore, considering the ambience of Medicean Florence, the Andrea del Verrocchio described by Vasari could, of course, have been contemplating his mission as an artist when choosing a name to adopt. In tandem, he probably searched for an object appropriate for encoding his adopted name.

In the following, I want to suggest that the oval lustrous brooch recurs in the works representing the Madonna because its properties capture a *dual* reference to the master's adopted name. Being lustrous, reflecting a beam of light, the brooch can be accurately rendered by painting only in oils; its presence in paintings thus alludes to the "olive-press." By being oval as well, the same brooch resembles an eye, and thus it alludes to the "true eye."

Moreover, a brooch, as an object of dress, has traditionally been used as a vehicle for transmitting symbolic meanings, particularly when rendered in the Marian images.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, a few words should be added about the appearance of brooches as part of the Virgin's attire. By the Renaissance, a brooch's appearance in Marian paintings, statues, and reliefs was taken for granted and so were its symbolic meanings, which we need not discuss here. In fact, brooches of all kinds feature in the Marian paintings from Verrocchio's workshop. In the painting at the Berlin Museum, the brooch is small, and dotted with pearls.<sup>27</sup> In the Frankfurt painting,<sup>28</sup> the rhomboid brooch contains a cross in an overt reference to the Crucifixion. Likewise, in the London painting,<sup>29</sup> the brooch is ornated with pearls in a cruciform setting. However, in the Madonna paintings from other workshops, such as those of Fra Filippo Lippi or of Domenico Veneziano, the Virgin's brooch never has a shining, light-reflecting surface. In addition to the three paintings mentioned as products of Verrocchio's workshop, at least six more paintings, to be considered shortly, all feature an oval brooch with a lustrous surface.

Ronald G. Kecks, in his study of Florentine Marian devotional images, observes that the brooch placed on the Madonna's robe constitutes an important element of the compositional schemes devised by Verrocchio.<sup>30</sup>

Two drawings from Verrocchio's workshop provide further evidence that one specific brooch - a shiny piece in the form of an oval - was more important than the others. The type of drawing referred to - a female head with an ornament on her dress - is rare in Renaissance practice. Therefore, it may be more than mere coincidence that *two* such drawings, each showing an oval lustrous brooch attached to the dress, were produced in the Verrocchio workshop. In both these drawings, presently in Dresden (Fig. 1) and in the Louvre (Fig. 2),<sup>31</sup> an oval brooch reflects a ray of light, rendered by means of a



Fig. 5: Verrocchio Workshop (Domenico del Ghirlandaio?). *Madonna*. Washington, National Gallery of Art (photo: Museum).



Fig. 6: Verrocchio Workshop. *Dreyfus Madonna*. Washington, National Gallery of Art (photo: Museum).



Fig. 7: Verrocchio Workshop. *Madonna*. London, Courtauld Institute Galleries (photo: Museum).



Fig. 8: Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci. *Madonna with a Carnation*. Munich, Alte Pinakothek (photo: Museum).



Fig. 9: Verrocchio Workshop (Domenico del Ghirlandaio?). *Madonna*. Paris, Louvre (photo: Alinari/ Art Resource).

white wash. I would suggest that such drawings could have served as *exempla* for Verrocchio's apprentices,<sup>32</sup> when producing the Marian images.

Additional evidence that this type of brooch was chosen to serve as a trademark for the Marian images issuing from Verrocchio's workshop is provided by a painted terracotta relief, now in the Bargello,<sup>33</sup> and attributed to the master himself. The brooch is very prominent although partially, that is, optically, covered by the Child's hand, raised in benediction. Despite its visual obstruction, the viewer can clearly discern that the brooch's shape is oval with a slightly concave surface.

Additional testimony supporting my contention is provided by the *Piazza Madonna* (*Madonna Enthroned between with Child and Saints John the Baptist and Zenobius* (or *Donatus*; Fig. 3), commissioned from Andrea in 1478 for the Chapel of the Sacrament in the Pistoia Cathedral. (The decoration of the Chapel was undertaken at the behest of Bishop Donato de' Medici.<sup>34</sup>) Whether the painting was only designed by Verrocchio and executed by Lorenzo di Credi, or partially executed by Verrocchio himself but completed by his pupil, is unknown. The work itself is painted in oils on wood. The Virgin (Fig. 4) is depicted wearing a

shining brooch shaped like an oval clasp. To further emphasize the point, we observe that St. Zenobius (or Donatus), too, wears a similar brooch, partially blocked from view by his hand.

The same kind of brooch appears in six other paintings showing the Virgin with a Child in half figure, all assigned to Verrocchio's workshop. These works can be found at present in various locations: in a private collection,<sup>35</sup> in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (this work has been questionably attributed to Ghirlandaio; Fig. 5);<sup>36</sup> in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (the so-called "Dreyfus" *Madonna* [Fig. 6]);<sup>37</sup> and in the Courtauld Institute Galleries (Fig. 7).<sup>38</sup> Another painting, known as the *Madonna with a Carnation*, in Munich (Fig. 8), is considered to be Leonardo da Vinci's youthful work, executed while in Verrocchio's workshop.<sup>39</sup> Yet another devotional image displaying this type of brooch, in the Louvre (Fig. 9), is now attributed to Ghirlandaio.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the six paintings assigned to Verrocchio's workshop, at least two more paintings feature the same type of brooch. They are both by Leonardo, *The Benois Madonna* (in the Hermitage) and *The Virgin of the Rocks* (in the Louvre).<sup>41</sup> The presence of the lustrous brooch in Leonardo's paintings caused W. R. Valentiner to observe that among the motifs borrowed from Verrocchio was "the pearl-fastened carnelian of the Madonna's breast ornament."<sup>42</sup> Its presence in Leonardo's paintings bears testimony to the importance that this type of brooch had for Verrocchio and to the persistence with which it was used in his workshop.

The question remains as to why Verrocchio would be attracted to this type of brooch. Perhaps it was due to his preoccupation with the glimmer of enamel intaglio, which concerned him as a practicing goldsmith. In this medium, luster was to be avoided as it interfered with the visibility of the work's details.<sup>43</sup> But in painting, the imitation of luster on a shining surface was intensely pursued. Even as late as the 1470s, the rendering of reflected light on a glassy surface continued to pose a challenge to the Florentine artists who were trying to emulate the technical virtuosity of Flemish masters.

During the 15th century, only the Flemish masters were able to convincingly render textures and shining surfaces in their paintings. They alone possessed the requisite technical dexterity needed to apply several coats of glaze containing pigments dissolved in linseed oil.<sup>44</sup> The adroit rendering of textures and highlights was admired as one of the marvels of painting in oils because it could not be achieved in other techniques, such as tempera. The Flemish aspiration to represent every detail of the surrounding world and their fascination with textures - what Johan Huizinga considered a hallmark of the late Middle Ages - was precisely what attracted Florentine artists.<sup>45</sup> Verrocchio

was well aware that the Florentines highly valued oil paintings.<sup>46</sup>

It was in Florence, however, not the Lowlands, that attempts were made to explain in writing how to depict reflected light or highlights (*lustrri*) on polished surfaces; we need only recall Alberti's *De Pictura*.<sup>47</sup> Although Verrocchio, so unlike Alberti, never wrote a treatise on the visual arts, his sustained interest in *lustro* expressed itself in the aforementioned workshop drawings (Figs. 1 and 2) and in the *Piazza Madonna* (Fig. 3), a painting, as noted, directly commissioned from Andrea and completed in oils. The recurrence of the brooch seems, therefore, to bear witness to his fascination with rendering its oval lustrous surface. This might be expected, I suggest, from an artist whose adopted name refers to an "olive-press," in turn considered as the means for obtaining the ingredient necessary for capturing those effects, though olive oil itself was not used for that purpose.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, as stated, the brooch, with its oval shape and reflective gleam, alludes to an eye. Verrocchio was undoubtedly familiar with the lofty associations evoked by the eye in the thought and culture of his time. An eye is, above all, the time-honored symbol of the Almighty.<sup>49</sup> On a more mundane level, the eye has been described as 'the keeper of justice and guardian of the whole body,' which Verrocchio could have gleaned from Diodorus's *Bibliothèque Historika* (III, 4), as known from Poggio Bracciolini's Latin translation. (The same passage is cited in Alberti's treatise on architecture, *De re aed.*, IX, 8.) In addition, Feo Belcari's vernacular play *Abraham and Isaac*, staged in Florence in 1449, might have "taught" Verrocchio that: 'The Eye is called the first of all the gates / Through which the Intellect may learn and taste.'<sup>50</sup> Verrocchio, conscious of these associations, might have adopted the name "true eye" because it reinforced the association between his profession and vision, considered the noblest of senses by his contemporaries.<sup>51</sup> Such a link was brought out in the aforementioned inscription that puns on Verrocchio's name. There is little doubt that such an interpretation of his name was more complimentary to the master than any other.

Furthermore, Verrocchio's Florence was familiar with a graphic image of a winged eye, used as part of Alberti's emblem.<sup>52</sup> It appears in a plaque bearing Alberti's effigy and on the reverse of Matteo de' Pasti's medal, struck in Alberti's honor. What was possible for Alberti, a member (albeit an illegitimate one) of a noble Florentine family, was not, however, possible for Verrocchio, the son of a common Florentine citizen. Quattrocento practicing artists did not have commemorative medals struck in their own honor. Even Antonio Pisanello, the virtuoso master of medals, was not presumptuous enough to do so. Only a century later did it become acceptable for artists of the stature of Michelangelo

and Titian to strike their own medals. Alberti's medal was not an exception for the Quattrocento because he was not a practising, professional artist: his medal was directly related to his social status, and the emblem stamped upon it hints at his humanistic and artistic preoccupations, not occupation. Verrocchio's professional pride, conveyed by the name he adopted, might have bolstered his resolve to find an object that, by its shape and appearance, could serve as an alternative to a medal. A glimmering brooch, rendered in oils within paintings produced by his workshop, might have been, for Verrocchio, an appropriate solution.

\* \* \*

To summarize, several reasons can be found for the frequent appearance of one particular type of jewel - an oval lustrous brooch - in the Marian images that came from Verrocchio's workshop. Being lustrous, such a brooch could be rendered exclusively by the Flemish technique of painting in oils. But, being both oval and lustrous, it also resembles an eye, the organ traditionally symbolizing the noble trait of perspicacity. In the Quattrocento milieu, although a name could be chosen by an artist to reflect his self-image or self-esteem, it could not consistently be attached to the fruit of his labors. To remedy this situation, Verrocchio, I suggest, selected the brooch to act as his signature or trademark in those paintings - the Marian images - that social norms demanded be produced "anonymously."

## Notes

- \* A short version of this paper was read at the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America at Indiana University (Bloomington), April 18-21, 1996. I am grateful to many colleagues who were then present, especially to Liana DeGirolami Cheney, Bruce Cole, Janet Cox-Rearick, Claire Farago, Francesca Fiorani, Amy Golahny, Paul Grendler, Werner Gundersheimer, Sarah McHam, and Charles Rosenberg for making valuable comments. My gratitude is extended, as always, to my *maestro*, Professor Moshe Barasch.
- 1 Vasari 1980:95. The basic studies of Verrocchio as a versatile artist are Cruttwell 1904; Passavant 1969; and Androsov 1984. In the present study, I try to limit my citations to a minimum.
  - 2 Gilbert 1980:43-45 (an inventory of this sculptor's belongings).
  - 3 Covi 1966:99; cf. Vasari 1986:446, for the characterization of Verrocchio as "musicio perfettissimo."
  - 4 Chastel 1959:191-193, eloquently describes the unusual character of Verrocchio's workshop and the master's versatile activity.
  - 5 See the general studies on workshop organization, such as Wackernagel 1981, and

- Cole 1983. Though Thomas 1995 offers valuable insights into the organization of workshop activity, it is, however, limited to the first half of the 15th century.
- 6 References to Verrocchio's works can be found in the studies mentioned in note 1.
  - 7 For the pupils and associates of the master, see Passavant 1969:202.
  - 8 Cellini 1967:5: 'Andrea del Verocchio [sic!], the sculptor, remained a goldsmith up to the time of manhood. He was the master of Leonardo da Vinci, painter, sculptor, architect, philosopher, musician - a veritable angel incarnate of whom I shall have heaps to tell whenever he comes to mind.'
  - 9 Covi 1992:14-15, discusses the genesis of Verrocchio's name as an historiographic problem.
  - 10 In this respect we recall the 14th-century artists who bore the same family name: Nardo and Andrea di Cioni, the latter is better known as Andrea del Orcagna. I know of no study focusing on the origins of Florentine names, let alone those of artists.
  - 11 Poeschke 1993:461.
  - 12 Covi 1987:157, with note 9.
  - 13 Ibid.:157-161, and Covi 1968:4-9.
  - 14 The document records a payment for "un candelabro di bronzo" for the "sala dell'audienza." Cf. Gaye 1840:569.
  - 15 Androsov 1984:25 was the first to pay attention to the various spellings of the artist's name. See examples by Cruttwell 1904:245 (December 2, 1468) for "Verochio" and 240 for "Veroch." See Seymour 1971:173, for "Varochie," and Covi 1966:103, for "Varrocho." Examples of different spellings can be easily multiplied as there are many documents that refer to this artist's activity. One example of documentation for the spelling "Verrocchio" was cited in the previous note.
  - 16 See notes 3 and 9, above. In addition, see Grendler 1995:161-174 for questions raised about the literacy of 15th-century artists.
  - 17 The easiest route to becoming acquainted with the meanings of the artists' last names is Hartt 1981:316, 262, 355, 326, respectively. However, artists' nicknames cannot always be explained by their relation to families or native cities, for example, Paolo di Dono, known as Uccello.
  - 18 Gadol 1969:4. Cf. Schneider 1990:263, on Alberti's general interest in names.
  - 19 Onians 1971:110-111, on the origin of Filarete's name.
  - 20 Poeschke 1993:415, for the transcription of the signature.
  - 21 Wallace 1995:10 with note 3.
  - 22 Alberti 1991:64 (*De pictura*, II, 30). Cf. Baxandall 1972:29-108 ("The Period Eye").
  - 23 Seymour 1971:173, with the author's notes.
  - 24 Chastel 1959:227. Cf. Wittkower 1977:113-128, for the excellent characterization of this ambience.
  - 25 Grant 1962:145.
  - 26 A brooch as the adornment on the Madonna's chest was first noted by Kondakov 1914:I, 270-285 (espec. Fig. 187) and Kondakov 1914:II, 370. Heydenreich 1988:97-100, sees the brooch as symbolic of the Passion because of its red color, but no reference is suggested. The light-reflecting brooch, having a mirror-like appearance, easily becomes symbolic of the Virginal purity. Mirror-like objects are noted by Levi d'Ancona 1957:55.

- 27 Kecks 1988:Pl. 90.  
 28 *Ibid.* 1988:Pl. 89.  
 29 *Ibid.* 1988:Pl. 145.  
 30 *Ibid.* 1988:105.  
 31 Both drawings are reproduced by Valentiner 1950:Figs. 151 and 158, respectively. The color reproduction of the Louvre drawing is in Bacou 1968:Pl. 8.  
 32 See the classic study of the subject, Scheller 1963.  
 33 Poeschke 1993:467, no. 270, with the relevant references, which show that although the relief is not documented, all scholars agree on its attribution to Verrocchio himself.  
 34 Passavant 1969:190, Cat. no. 22.  
 35 Kecks 1988:Pl. 117b.  
 36 *Ibid.* 1988:Pl. 126.  
 37 Passavant 1969:App. 42.  
 38 Shearman 1967:121-127, believes this painting to be by Verrocchio himself; Passavant 1969:App. 41, assigns it to Luca Signorelli. Yet Ames-Lewis 1989:113, believes this painting to be by Ghirlandaio.  
 39 Kecks 1988:Pl. 97. Ottino della Chiesa 1967:Cat. No. 12.  
 40 Ames-Lewis 1989:112.  
 41 Ottino della Chiesa 1967:Cat. Nos. 9 and 15.  
 42 Valentiner 1930:53, remarks that one of the motifs that Leonardo borrowed from Andrea del Verrocchio was "the pearl-fastened carnelian of the Madonna's breast ornament," and states that it was noted not only by Bode 1921, but also by Suida 1929.  
 43 Cellini 1967:17: 'the shine made by the metal tools on the plate will make it difficult for you to see your work.'  
 44 Snyder 1985:100. Cf. Panofsky 1971:151-152, and Gombrich 1976:31.  
 45 Huizinga 1954:274: 'Now this scrupulous realism, this aspiration to render exactly all natural details, is the characteristic feature of the spirit of the expiring Middle Ages.'  
 46 Ames-Lewis 1979:255-273. Goldhwaite 1993.  
 47 Alberti 1991:84 (*De pictura*, II, 47). Cf. Barasch 1978:22-23.  
 48 See the standard study of the subject, Doerner 1984:96 and 114.  
 49 Wittkower 1977:120. Cf. Tervarent 1958:286-288.  
 50 Quoted from Baxandall 1972:153.  
 51 See, for example, Medici 1971:25, who elevates "seeing" above all the senses.  
 52 Schneider 1990:269. Cf. Woods-Marsden 1998:71-77, with updated references.

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# *The Cherubim on Torah Ark Valances*

*Bracha Yaniv*

*Jewish Art Department, Bar-Ilan University*

**S**ince Antiquity, the design and content of the synagogue have been based on the idea of the synagogue as a 'little sanctuary' (Heb. *mikdash me`at*), that is, a substitute for the Temple. Accordingly, the prayer service and the public reading of the Torah come in place of the sacrificial rite, the *bema* on which the Torah scroll is placed substitute for the altar, the Torah ark for the Ark of the Covenant and the Torah scroll kept in it for the Tablets of the Law.<sup>1</sup> As a further manifestation of this overall conception, a new ritual object appeared in late 17th-century Europe: the Torah ark valance, which came to be called in Hebrew *kapporet* and was seen as a substitute for the original *kapporet* in the Temple - the cover of the Ark of the Covenant.

The valance is a short curtain hanging over the Torah ark above the Torah ark curtain, either separate or attached to it. The valance and curtain from Hochberg, southern Germany (Fig. 1), provide an example of the former possibility. Sewn onto the center of the curtain is a rectangular central panel, upon which a dedicatory inscription is embroidered. Suspended over the curtain is a basically rectangular valance, its lower edge cut into the shape of five scallops. This valance structure is typical of the 18th century.

Most Torah ark valances, like other ritual objects in Europe, were lost during World War II. The gap in our information about valance shapes is particularly obvious with regard to Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, a general picture can be reconstructed on the basis of the few valances that have survived, as well as archival photographs and pre-World War II publications.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this incomplete information, we also have a comprehensive collection of valances from Bohemia and Moravia, in the collection of the Prague Jewish Museum. Most of these valances were designed in Prague, and one can trace their evolution over some two hundred years, until the decline of the Torah ark



Fig. 1: Valance and Torah ark curtain, Hochberg, southern Germany, 1764; Harburger Collection, no. 496.

valance in general.<sup>3</sup> The pattern gained from these data reflects general, sometimes also local, developments; what is lacking, however, is the early stage in the development of these objects, that is, the situation in the first half of the 17th century.

On the basis of the available information, one can divide valances into three groups, according to origin: valances from Germany, Central Europe and Eastern Europe. All three groups have a common iconographic denominator, as they all feature three motifs. The first two are the motif of the cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant and the motif of the Torah crown or the three crowns described in the Mishnah (*Avot* 4:13) both of these motifs appear in the



Fig. 2: Valance, Poland, 1780/81; Stieglitz Collection, Israel Museum, no. 152/246.

upper part of the valance. The third motif is that of the Temple implements, depicted on the scallops of the lower edge. The earliest, and most important, of the three motifs is that of the cherubim; analysis of its iconographic evolution indicates that the other two motifs are based on it. In light of these observations, this study will concentrate on the iconographic aspect of the cherubim motif.

The iconographic basis for the cherubim motif is the identification of the Torah ark valance in the synagogue with the cover of the biblical Ark of the Covenant: 'You shall make a cover (Heb. *kapporet*) of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit wide... Place the cover on top of the Ark, after depositing inside the Ark the Covenant that I will give you' (Exodus 25:17, 21). This biblical description, however, is speaking of a golden *kapporet* (cover), while the synagogue *kapporet* (valance) is made of fabric. Another difference is due to the structure of the respective arks. While the Ark of the Covenant was shaped like a relatively flat box, opening at the top, the Torah ark is a vertical structure, with doors opening in front. Hence, the biblical *kapporet* was a solid cover, while the synagogue *kapporet* is a curtain with no real function. It would seem that only the location of the Torah ark valance, in the upper part of the ark, endowed it with some of the significance of the Torah ark as a substitute for the Ark of the Covenant, thus pairing it with the Ark cover.<sup>4</sup>

Synagogue-goers were quite aware of this identification, which is consistently expressed in the dedicatory inscriptions embroidered on Torah ark valances. One example may be seen in a Polish valance, made in 1780/81, with the following inscription in the center: ונתת את הכפרת על ארון העדות, 'Place the cover on the Ark of the Covenant'<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 2). Now, if the Torah ark valance was compared to the Biblical cover on the Ark of the Covenant, it should be natural



Fig. 3: Valance, Titkin (Tykocin), Poland, 1696/7; Israel Museum, no. 152/109.

to complete the comparison by providing the valance with a pair of cherubim, like those on the biblical counterpart: 'Make two cherubim of gold make them of beaten work at the two ends of the cover. Make one cherub at one end and the other cherub at the other end; of one piece with the cover shall you make the cherubim at its two ends' (*Exodus* 25:18-19). Indeed, since the appearance of the Torah ark valance at the end of the 17th century, till the end of the 18th century, the cherubim motif was indeed the central feature of the valance.

One example of this motif as it appears on the valance is the aforementioned example from Hochberg: a Torah crown flanked by two wings (Fig. 1). The relevant verse is embroidered at the two ends of the valance: והיו הכרובים פרשי כנפיהם למעלה, 'The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above' on the right, and סככים בכנפיהם על הכפרת על הכפרת, 'shielding the cover with their wings' on the left. The use of this verse here, close by the wings, seems to identify the wings with the cherubim. This description raises the question of whether the two wings are meant to be a visual representation of the cherubim.

Comparison of this valance with the Polish valance indicates that the designers had several possible representations of the cherubim, for the Polish item shows two lions on either side of the Torah crown in the center. Moreover, the Polish designers also added a pair of eagles at the ends of the valance, as well as another pair of rather small lions below the eagles. Faced with this multiplicity of different representations, we must examine the iconographic roots of the cherubim motif. In addition, we must address the question of why a Torah crown is shown in the center of the valance, between the cherubim for



Fig. 4: Valance, Tiktin (Tykocin), Poland, 1696/7; Israel Museum, no. 152/109 (detail).

the Biblical source does not describe anything between the cherubim.

At this point, it should be noted that the motif of the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant is quite rare in Jewish art; it appeared primarily in Spanish illuminated manuscripts of the Bible, generally together with the Temple implements. In these representations the cherubim were shown as a pair of human heads or upper torsos, each with two wings. Other shapes were a pair of birds or a pair of wings.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the designers worked under rabbinical guidance, so that their designs were grounded on a knowledge of Hebrew literature of various periods and genres.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, one should seek the iconographic roots of the representations of cherubim somewhere in the spiritual world of the Jewish community.<sup>8</sup>

One hint of the possible iconographic sources that we are seeking for the combined description of Torah crown and cherubim, may be derived from a Torah ark valance made in 1696/7 in Tiktin (Tykocin), Poland, the earliest surviving object of its kind (Fig. 3). In the center of this valance, within a rectangular field with an upward bulging upper side, we see two griffins, shown on either side of a stylized tree (Fig. 4). This is our only example in which there is no Torah crown between the cherubim - an important detail, particularly



Fig. 5: Valance, Prague (used in Turnov), 1755/6; State Jewish Museum, Prague, no. 57269.

since, as mentioned, this is the earliest known Torah ark valance and probably represents a vestige of an earlier stage in its evolution. Since the tree is shown growing out of the Tablets of the Law, which are described in the scallop just below, it clearly symbolizes the Torah. Indeed, the verse 'She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds on to her is happy' (*Proverbs 3:11*)<sup>9</sup> is traditionally understood as portraying the Torah, confirming our interpretation of the tree. Inserting this symbol of the Torah at this particular position solved an important problem for the designers of the valance, as the space between the two cherubim was the most sacred place in the Torah ark valance: 'There I will meet with you, and I will speak to you - from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Covenant.' (*Exodus 25:22*).<sup>10</sup> The symbolic depiction of the Torah thus filled a space that could not have been left empty or endowed with any other content. Was the tree used to symbolize the Torah at an early stage in the evolution of Torah ark valances? This question cannot be answered, as the evidence from the period is meager; nevertheless, the replacement of the tree by the crown as symbol of the Torah is not surprising, since, by the 17th-18th centuries, the Torah crown had become a common symbol on Torah arks made in different European communities.<sup>11</sup> As the valance tradition crystallized, the position of the Torah crown between the cherubim, above the Ark of the Covenant in the lower scallop, became an integral part of the overall design of these objects during the 18th century.<sup>12</sup>

Looking again at the Tiktin valance, one sees on either side of the central field, after the two sections of the dedicatory inscription, a lion within a roughly rectangular field which becomes slightly higher toward the center of the valance



Fig. 6: One of the two wings for the Torah ark, Prague, 18th century; Statxe Jewish Museum, Prague, no. 59.740 b.

(Fig. 3). An eagle is depicted above each of the farther ends of these fields, while the space at each end of the valance, is occupied by a schematic creature which clearly has five wings. The two words above these wings, in the upper right and left corners of the valance, form the phrase *כנפים / פרשי* 'spread / wings'. This brief inscription indicates that at least one pair of the four pairs of creatures shown must represent the cherubim. We recall that the Polish valance of 1780/81 considered above (Fig. 2) displayed a similar ambiguity as to the identity of the cherubim, with its two pairs of lions and one pair of eagles.

This vague conception of the form of the cherubim is readily understood, as the Biblical source itself gives no details beyond the fact that the cherubim are winged: 'The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover' (*Exodus* 25:20). In light of this ambiguity, exegetical literature sought a clearer visual image of the cherubim. We find that most commentators turned to the "Vision of the Heavenly Chariot" (*Merkavah*) in the Book of *Ezekiel*, in which the prophet sees four cherubs supporting the Chariot: 'Each one had four faces. One was a **cherub's** face, the second a **human** face, the third a **lion's** face, and the fourth an **eagle's** face. The **cherubs** ascended; those were the creatures that I had seen by the Chebar Canal' (*Ezekiel* 10:14-15).<sup>13</sup> This source, in which the cherub have faces of a lion, an eagle, a human being and a cherub,<sup>14</sup> not only does not solve our problem but in fact heightens the confusion: How were the designers to choose one of the four shapes offered by this interpretation?

Both Polish valances exemplify the confusion. In the earlier one (Fig. 3), the cherubs are depicted in four ways. In the center, flanking the tree, they appear as griffins, thus combining lion and eagle. In the two side fields the cherubim are shown as lions, while above they are depicted as eagles. The most problematic forms, visually speaking, are of course the human and the angel - both human forms whose description is constrained by the Second Commandment. This explains the shapes appearing at the two ends of the valance: the artist solved the problem of the human images by providing a purely schematic description, namely, a vertical rectangle with five wings.<sup>15</sup> The inscriptions above these two forms, the two words of the phrase 'spread wings,' leave no doubt as to their identification as cherubim. Yet another example of the difficulty in choosing one of the four images offered by Ezekiel's vision may be seen in the Polish valance of 1780/81 (Fig. 2), where the designers chose the lion and the eagle, for some reason duplicating the lions.

The implication from our findings up to now is that the iconographic sources that served the makers of Torah ark valances were literary. Support for this conclusion comes from the fact that the lion and the eagle, or their combination as the griffin, were quite popular images, as the images of lion and eagle were widely accepted in the exegetical literature. One of the most common interpretations was the explanation of the expressions *מעשה רקם* and *מעשה חשב* (*Exodus* 26:1, 31, 36), denoting the techniques used for the cherubim on the ark cover and for the cloth strips in the tabernacle and the screen for the entrance, respectively. It is stated in the Jerusalem Talmud that the lion, representing the cherub, is made in both techniques, while the eagle is mentioned only in

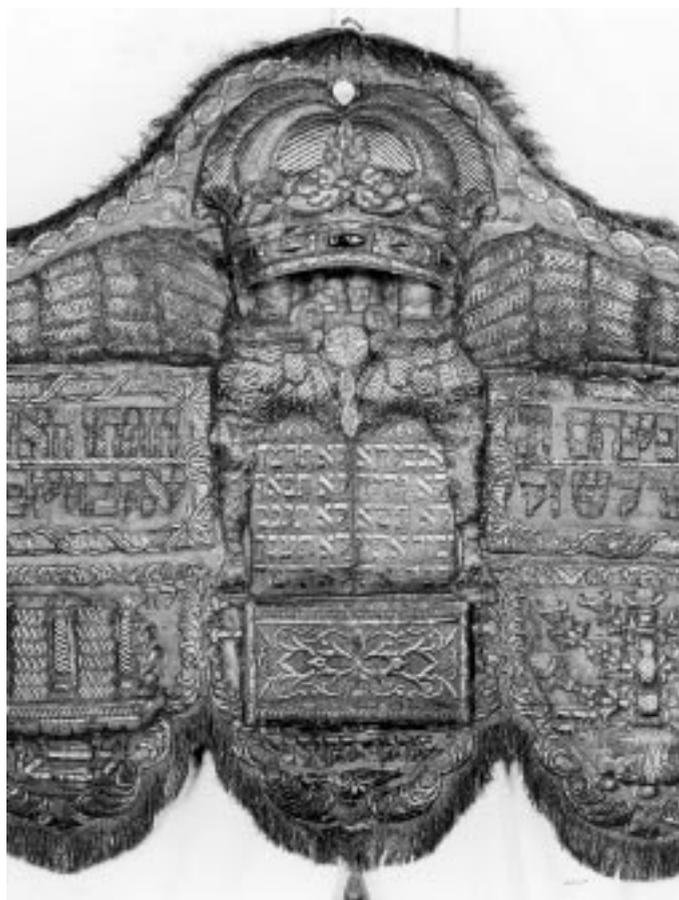


Fig. 7: Valance (detail), Prague 1785/6; State Jewish Museum, Prague, no. 59729.

connection with the technique of מעשה חשב: 'R. Judah and R. Nehemiah [disagreed]. One said: מעשה רוקם means a lion on one side and a lion on the other; מעשה חושב means a lion on one side and an empty space on the other. While the other said: מעשה רוקם means a lion on one side and empty space on the other.'<sup>16</sup> Rashi in his Torah commentary (*ad Exodus 26:1*) agrees with the second opinion: 'One face on one side and one face on the other, a lion on one side and an eagle on the other.' Jews were presumably quite familiar with Rashi's explanation, combining lion and eagle, and that may well be the grounds upon which the designers based their depiction of the cherubim as griffins.<sup>17</sup>

Based on available material - which is admittedly not representative of the entire evolution of the Torah ark valance - it would seem that the most common

representation of the cherubim in western and central Europe was the eagle. Moreover, southern Germany and Prague, whose workshops supplied most of the Bohemian communities, developed two characteristic and distinct models for the eagles. The common form in Germany was a pair of wings, like that appearing in the Hochberg valance (Fig. 1); this was a good solution for those Jews who disapproved of explicit figurative descriptions, as the body of the cherub was not described. In all the examples at our disposal, the wings are quite long. This, too, is a point that received much attention in the exegetical and midrashic literature. Thus, for example, we read in *Yalkut Shim'oni*: '... And the wings of the cherubim are twenty cubits long... they reach from one end of the world to the other.'<sup>18</sup> This emphasis on the wings and the exaggerated figure for their length is also typical of some valances from Prague, but in those cases the depiction was different.

The Torah ark valances from Prague clearly depict the cherubim as two eagles rising above the Tablets of the Law, as well as two free wings attached at the sides of the valance (Fig. 5). This free pair of wings, intended to place special emphasis on the wing element, the most salient property of cherubim in the Bible, became the dominant feature in the design of Torah ark valances in Prague. These were always quite large and excelled in their plastic execution, accomplished through relief embroidery or some other technique.<sup>19</sup> The freely 'floating' wings gave the valance a concrete appearance.<sup>20</sup> Not all valances were made from the start with a free pair of wings, and we have examples in which the 'missing element' was completed by attaching specially made wings to the ends of the ark, flanking the valance, with hooks (Fig. 6).<sup>21</sup>

Returning now to the pair of eagles in the center of the valance, one encounters another, no less interesting, local feature. The Torah crown, which receives special prominence in these valances by raising the upper edge of the valance, is positioned above the eagles, not between them as in other valances. Close examination of another Prague sample, dating from 1785/6 (Fig. 7), shows the embroidered body, wings and lower neck of the eagles. These features were also carefully executed in the upper part of the neck and the head, but the latter are hidden by the crown. Had this been the only such case, one might suspect some error of calculation in the design of the embroidered area. However, the eagles' heads were hidden within the crown by design, and this feature is a local characteristic of valance design. This phenomenon, too, can be traced to a literary source, midrashic in this case; thus, *Yalkut Shim'oni* describes the cherubim as 'hiding in crowns': 'Two cherubim, as against the two tablets, made like babes and hiding in the crowns.'<sup>22</sup>

The most surprising visual representation of cherubim in Torah ark valances



Fig. 8: Valance, Rousínov, Moravia, 1732/3; State Jewish Museum, Prague, no. 7975.

shows them in human form, as seen in a valance from Rousinov, Moravia, dated to 1732/3 (Fig. 8). Further examples of this phenomenon are known from southern Germany.<sup>23</sup> Although such instances of human imagery in the valances are rare, their mere existence indicates that artists were willing to cope with the prohibition of human images as laid down in the Second Commandment. The iconographic source here is again literary, and it, too, was readily available to Jewish readers of the time; it appears in Rashi's comments on the cherubim above the cover: 'Cherubim - he shall make figures of בריות [=human beings] in it (*ad Exodus 26:31*). Moreover, the idea could be found not only in Rashi's commentary, but also in Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* (III:45): '... In order to fortify belief in this fundamental principle, He, may He be exalted, has commanded that the image of two angels be made over the ark, so that the belief of the multitude in the existence of angels be consolidated...'. And if this were not sufficiently explicit, the designer could consult the commentary *Shem Tov* on this passage, where we read: 'The cherubim in the ark were formed as male and female, in the form of human beings with wings.'<sup>24</sup>

This analysis of depictions of the cherubim on Torah ark valances indicates that the iconographic source on which the artists based their designs was exegetical and midrashic literature. It was there that they found detailed descriptions which enabled them to shape their visual representations of the most hallowed aspect of the Divine. These literary genres promoted original creativity, free of the influences of Christian art; they were the major motivation behind one of the unique expressions of synagogue art.

## Notes

- 1 For example, R. Joel b. Samuel Sirkes, in his *responsa*, written in Poland in the late 16th-early 17th century, expresses the common approach of Judaism in general and in the period discussed here, 17th and 18th centuries, in particular; *Bayit Hadash*, 1697: no. 17.
- 2 Most important documentation work was done in south German synagogues by Theodor Harburger in 1926-1932 for the Central Organization of the Jewish Communities of Bavaria. The documentation, which includes photographs of Torah ark curtains and valances, is now in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem. See Harburger Collection, P/160/613, 15, 105, 462, and others. Photographs of a few Torah ark valances from Germany were published before World War II: see Posen 1932: figs. 6.1; 9.9; 9.10; Moses 1931: 72; Hallo 1933: fig. 7. Some German valances may be found today in museum collections, see Jewish Museum, New York, no. F-1255; Hebrew Union College, Skirball Museum, Los Angeles, no. 59.39; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 152/247. For Polish valances in pre-World War II publications see Balaban 1936: opp. p. 144.
- 3 On the Prague valances see Volavkova 1949: VII. For the collection, see Volavkova 1938: 27-41.
- 4 The differences between the *kapporet* in the synagogue (= the Torah ark valance) and the *kapporet* of the Bible (= the cover of the Ark) not only did not trouble synagogue-goers, but in fact legitimized the use of the former; as we know, it was forbidden to fashion identical substitutes for the Temple implements (Babylonian Talmud, Menahot 28b; Rosh ha-Shanah 24a-b). On the other hand, a change of shape made it permissible to fabricate a similar object, as in the case of the six-branched or eight branched candelabrum. Although we have found no written references to this matter, it was clearly permissible to make Torah ark curtains, as they were entirely different in shape from the Temple object that they were supposed to represent.
- 5 Not an exact quotation, but a contraction of *Exodus* 25:21.
- 6 On the representation of the Temple implements and the cherubim in Spanish Bibles, see Nordström 1968: 89-105. For the different shapes of the cherubim in these descriptions see *Perpignan Bible*, Perpignan, Spain, 1299, Paris, Bibliothèque National, hébr. 7, fol. 12v, see Gutmann 1978: 51-53, pl. 6 (human head with a pair of wings); *First Kennicott Bible*, La Coruña, 1476, Oxford, Bodl. Kenn.1, fol. 121r, see Narkiss 1982: I, 153; II, fig. 442 (birds); *Kings Bible*, Solsona, Spain, 1384, British Library, King's I, fol. 4r, see Narkiss 1982: I, 111-112; II, fig. 335 (pair of wings); *British Museum Miscellany*, Northern France, c. 1280, London, British Museum Library, Add. ms. 11639, fol. 522r; see Sed-Rajna 1995: 463, fig. 442 (human head with six wings). Later, in the 18th century, cherubim were pictured in illuminated manuscripts of the Haggadah and other books. The influence of Christian art is prominent in these depictions, the cherubim having the form of human heads with four or six wings. See the Passover Haggadah, Breslau, 1768; title page of *Sefer Yozerot*, Prague, 1719, in: Dolezelová, Putík and Sedinová 1994: 17. For Christian tradition, which depicted the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant as child-like putti, see Rosenau 1979: 109, fig. 93.
- 7 That rabbis were involved in the design of ritual objects in general and textile appurtenances in particular may be deduced from the many *responsa* dealing with these subjects in the *responsa* literature. For examples relevant to our specific topic see *Maharam* 1608:IV, no. 610 (making lions and identifying them as cherubim); *'Anaf 'Etz 'Avot* 1900: no. 4 (embroidered shapes of lion and eagle); *Sefer Ravyah* 1976: no.

- 1049 (cherubim, lions and other beasts); *Zevi Tif'eret* 1912: no. 36 (objection to embroidered lions).
- 8 The circumstances regarding artisans were different, in this case, from those pertaining to manuscript illuminators in the Middle Ages. The earliest Jewish manuscript illuminators studied their craft in Christian workshops and assimilated Christian iconography together with the elements and techniques of art. Embroidery, however, was learned within the Jewish community so that the practitioners derived their motives from the spiritual world of the community.
  - 9 This metaphor also gave rise to the appellation '*atzei hayyim*, 'trees of life', for the staves on which the Torah scroll is wound. The tree metaphor was also a regular motif on Torah mantels from Morocco. See Muller-Lancet and Champault 1986: figs. 59-61.
  - 10 The Ark of the Covenant, seen on the one hand as a container for the Tablets of the Law, was also considered the seat of the deity. Accordingly, Divine sanctity is concentrated above the ark, that is, above the wings of the cherubim, see Haran 1985:33.
  - 11 The Torah crown made its first appearance in medieval Jewish art as an object placed on the Torah scroll. See Ya'ari 1964: 23-25; Yaniv 1998: 28-29. Later, the crown also became a symbol of the Torah and became a regular motif on European Torah arks and Torah ark curtains. The earliest example of a Torah crown on an ark of the Torah appears on the ark of the synagogue of Mantova Sermide, Italy, 1543; see Nahon 1970: 50. The earliest instance of the Torah crown as a symbol on the Torah ark curtain is on the Perlstiker curtain from Prague, 1590-1592; see Yaniv 1998: 31.
  - 12 Towards the end of this period, an additional crown motif appeared alongside the Torah crown, based on *Avot* 4:13: 'There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of Priesthood, and the crown of Royalty.' The new three-crown motif, beginning on the right with the Torah crown, disturbed the regular pattern, in which the Torah crown was in the center; this finally led to the disappearance of the cherubim motif and relegated the depiction of the Ark of the Covenant to one of the side scallops. I shall deal with this matter in a future publication.
  - 13 See also: 'I looked, and lo, a stormy wind... a huge cloud and flashing fire... In the center of it were also the figure of four creatures. And this was their appearance: They had the figures of human beings' (*Ezekiel* 1:4-5); 'Each of them had a human face [at the front]; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right; each of the four had the face of an ox on the left; and each of the four had the face of an eagle [at the back]' (*ibid.*, v. 10). On the relationship between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant and the creatures of the *Merkavah*, see Haran 1958: 84-89; on the winged figure, see Landsberger 1947: 232-236. Christianity also identified the cherubim with the four creatures in Ezekiel's vision, and they appear as such since the Middle Ages. In the Eastern Church they were depicted as having four heads and four wings, moving on wheels of fire. The Western Church visualized the cherubim as six-winged humanoid creatures (according to *Isaiah* 6:2) or as four-headed creatures, see Maffei 1967: 650-657.
  - 14 This cherub, too, had to be explained: 'What is a cherub? Said R. Abbahu: "Like an infant [Aramaic: *ke-rabia*], for in Babylon an infant is called a *rabia*." Abayye said to him: "In that case, regarding the verse 'One was a cherub's face, the second a human face' - 'cherub' and 'human' denote the same thing?!" [The explanation is:] A large face and a small [child-like] face' (Bab. Talmud, *Sukkah* 5b). That is to say, the cherub in Ezekiel's vision was humanoid, but its face was that of an infant. Both Rashi and Maimonides relied on this source in their explanation of the cherubim; Rashi's

- comment on 'Make two cherubim' (*Exodus* 25:18) is: 'Their face was like that of an infant,' and Maimonides (*Guide of the Perplexed* III:1) states that 'cherub designates a human being of tender age.'
- 15 Perhaps the intention was to portray six wings, but for some reason only five were actually executed. This could be based on the description of the seraphim in *Isaiah* 6:2: 'Each of them had six wings.' See also Bab. Talmud *Hagigah* 13b.
  - 16 Jerusalem Talmud, *Shekalim* 8:3. As to the lion and the eagle as a representation of the cherubim, compare the depiction of lions and birds in the southern panel of the Beth Alpha synagogue mosaic. The lions stand by the Ark, while the birds, probably eagles, hover above it. Together, they presumably represent the cherubim; but Sukenik (1932: 22-26) objects to this identification. For a similar illustration, on the gold saucers from Rome (4th century), see Barag 1973: pls. 1, 2, 4, 10.
  - 17 East-European Torah arks of the 18th century frequently represent the cherubim as griffins, see Piechotkowie 1996: fig. 149. Lacking information about the design of early Torah ark valances in Poland, we cannot determine the earliest location of the griffins, whether on the arks themselves or on the valances.
  - 18 *Yalkut Shim'oni*, I Kings, para. 185. This collection of midrashim, probably compiled in the 13th century by R. Simeon the Darshan of Frankfurt, is the most popular of the many such collections. It became increasingly popular toward the end of the 15th century and later, particularly after its first printing in Salonika, 1521; Later editions were published in Venice, 1566; Cracow, 1596; Lublin, 1643; Frankfurt a/M, 1687. See also *Otzar ha-Midrashim*, ed. Eisenstein, p. 474, para. 2. See also below, n. 21.
  - 19 The wings were made of some rigid material such as metal or cardboard, over which was stretched fabric with raised embroidery in metal thread and sequins, see Jewish Museum, Prague, no. 17.188.
  - 20 For a photograph of a valance on a Prague Torah ark, see Parík 1986: 21 (photo 1905).
  - 21 In addition to the free pairs of wings, the Prague Jewish Museum also possesses a pair of free griffins, suspended for many years (from the beginning of the century) on either side of the Torah ark valance in the Altneuschul. The griffins are clearly visible in photographs taken before World War II; see, e.g., *ibid.*: 22 (photogr. 1900). In addition, there is a pair of square plaques with an embroidered pair of griffins, also meant for hanging, see Jewish Museum, Prague, no. 59926. In the 19th century, when new Torah arks were installed in the Pinkas Synagogue and the Hochschule in Prague, they were provided with free wings as a representation of the cherubim, see *ibid.*: 27-28 (photogr. 1910).
  - 22 See above, n. 18.
  - 23 One example, from Sulzbach, southern Germany, lays particular emphasis on the wings. Each of the humanoid cherubim has a pair of wings twice as long as its body. For an archival photograph, see Harburger, no. 462.
  - 24 This commentary, written by R. Joseph b. Shem Tov (or by his son?), was first printed in Venice, 1551, and since then became a regular feature in traditional editions of the *Guide*.

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# *Presentation and Representation in Escher's Lithographs: The Logic and Aesthetics of Pictorial Nonsense*

*Henry Unger*

*The Interdisciplinary Program, Tel Aviv University*

## **A** Carrollian prologue

In the second chapter of *Through the Looking Glass*, the heroine, a girl possessing moderate English common sense, becomes involved in a serious dispute with the Red Queen, a sharp-chinned, quarrelsome lady, who is also taking a walk in the Garden of Live Flowers. It all starts when Alice, who feels that she is trespassing, apologizes that she only wanted to see what the garden was like. "Is *this* what you call a garden?" challenges the Queen, adding that compared to some gardens *she* has seen, this one would be a wilderness.

The Queen's reasoning sounds rather unbecoming to Alice. Yet, at this early stage of their acquaintance, she does not dare to contradict the royal statement. She confines her reaction to a comment that what she actually had in mind was to reach the top of the hill opposite. "You call that a hill?" further provokes the Queen. "I could show you hills in comparison with which you'd call that a valley."

"Nonsense!" cries out Alice, at last out of patience, to which the Queen, most expectedly, retorts in sweet calmness: "I've heard nonsense compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary!"

Later on, in the fifth chapter, Alice meets the White Queen, a gentle character with none of her colleague's aggressiveness. One feature, however, is common to both queens. In matters of logic, Alice has as much trouble with the latter as with the former. At one stage of the conversation, after the Queen, middle-aged at most, declares that she is just over one hundred years old, Alice, exasperated, responds that she cannot take this seriously, because she cannot believe impossible things. "That is only because you have not practiced enough,"

states the Queen in a didactic tone. "At your age, child, I practiced for half an hour each day, and sometimes, by breakfast, I had already managed to believe no less than six impossible things!"

Are *we* capable of this?

### **Presentation versus Representation**

Let us observe *Waterfall* by Maurits Cornelis Escher (1961), a clearly impossible view, yet a very famous one, and one of his best known lithographs (Fig.1). Copies of Escher's lithographs, especially of this one, decorate numerous walls. Despite this fact, or, perhaps, because of it, Escher's position among current painters leaves much to be desired. Most art critics will obstinately turn down *a priori* any initiative to grant him a foothold in the Hall of meritorious artists. His opponents will argue that any attempt at comparison with the Surrealists Dali, Delvaux and Magritte, to whom his art is seemingly related, is bound to bring out the fact that Escher's pictures rely more on virtuosic graphics than on genuine art, and that his rhetoric derives primarily from circus-level skills in optical illusion.<sup>1</sup>

This article adopts a contrasting approach, backed by arguments that not only warrant, but actually demand a re-evaluation of Escher's status as an artist. As a preamble, I propose a distinction between the following two terms: *presentation*, defined by means of the immanent practices of the medium, i.e., on the basis of the qualities and dynamics of a pictorial text *per se*, as against *representation*, defined *semantically* through the interplay of relations that connect a given pictorial field to its related extra-diagetic model of reality. It is my contention that a proper aesthetic evaluation of Escher's art or of the intensity of its effectiveness, ought to focus on the interaction between these two realms in his works.<sup>2</sup>

By this method, I expect to prove that Escher's lithographs indeed offer the viewer as much of an artistic experience as accepted definitions of the term require, be the standards of aesthetic judgment strict as they may.

### ***Waterfall* and the Problematics of Pictorial Nonsense**

One thing is certain: the world portrayed in Escher's lithograph differs surprisingly from what our intuitive perception would suggest. I am sure that the White Queen would have eagerly hung *Waterfall* over her bed, in order to start her day with as good a training session in nonsense as any.

We shall therefore formulate our first question as follows: Would the Queen have been able to understand what she saw in *Waterfall*? Can we, who do not enjoy the epistemic freedoms that Carroll's creatures so conveniently do,



Fig. 1: *Waterfall*, 1961

perceive what *Waterfall* is all about? It appears that the reason we can not is because of the bizarre nature of *Waterfall*. In a proper waterfall, of course, the water flows downwards. In this one, it flows both down and up, ever returning to its starting point by the end of each cycle. *Ergo*: the water will keep flowing forever.

This realization violates three cardinal principles. The first is **empirical**: water cannot flow freely upwards. It is against the rules of nature. The second is **logical**: it is impossible for water to flow both upwards and downwards. Any action which contradicts itself is logically unacceptable.<sup>3</sup> The third has to do with the **Second Law of Thermodynamics**. Although this law originated as part of a particular theory, it actually expresses a universal principle that

controls our very thinking about a set of phenomena as a whole. In terms of this law, Escher's waterfall is unthinkable, and I shall attempt to explain why - below.

### **The Impossibility of *Perpetuum Mobile***

Let us draw closer. Water is flowing in a zigzag-shaped channel. Having reached the edge of the last leg, it falls directly onto a waterwheel. From there, it returns to the channel, and, miraculously, succeeds in repeating its course. Attach a turbine to the wheel, and here is enough electricity to supply the needs of an entire city without recourse to a single drop of fuel.

The waterfall is therefore not just a waterfall, but a machine in disguise. And what a machine it is! One that creates energy out of thin air. The possessor of such a machine would be hailed as the new Prometheus. No wonder, that when Faust begs his omnipotent partner to install a similar contraption for him, Mephisto declines flatly. Even *his* powers have limits, he explains. This is because Mephisto - smart devil! - knows quite well that such a machine would be bound to violate the aforementioned law, which postulates that, being constant, overall energy cannot increase, despite what the picture may imply. In fact, any power that produces energy, like the water at a waterfall, becomes completely spent as soon as it reaches its lowest point.

If we wish to cool a cup of tea, we wait a few minutes for its heat to diffuse into the surrounding air. When this process is completed, the tea will have reached room temperature. If it weren't for this law, we could expect that, by the same token, a cup of tea would become hot by itself, through the diffusion of heat from the surrounding air to the cup, leaving the room a little bit cooler, which is, of course, absurd. But Escher's waterfall claims to translate this very absurdity into a technological fact. By flowing down, the water creates energy. Because it constantly flows up again, its spent energy is restored *ad infinitum*. For this reason, Escher's machine has been surnamed *perpetuum mobile*.

London's nineteenth-century Athenaeum club offered a substantial reward and eternal fame to whoever could invent a device of this sort. In his book about **Paradoxes**, Augustus De Morgan, the Athenaeum's then chairman, provides illustrations of several proposals that were submitted, not without adding that the whole thing had been invented as a mere philosophical prank for what was, of course, absolute nonsense. How would De Morgan have reacted if he had been shown *Waterfall*? He would certainly have dismissed it as impossible and incapable of existence.

If so, how was Escher able to *draw* it on paper?

### **The Semantics of the Perceived**

*Ab esse ad posse!* says an ancient scholastic rule, meaning that 'possible' follows necessarily from 'existing'. If *Waterfall* exists - even as a picture - then it is possible. But what do we mean by 'exists' when we refer to a drawing, i.e., in terms of fictional reality?

To explain this, I shall use a phenomenological approach whose working hypothesis is that where visual fictions are concerned, 'existing' can be reduced to 'perceivable'. Hence, for Escher to create his waterfall, he needs only to *convince* the viewer that he can grasp it with his eyes. Nothing more is required.<sup>4</sup> The viewer's perceptions need to be thus guided to the point that his eyes are able to actually see a waterfall where the water freely and constantly makes its way back to its higher point of departure.

It should be clear that at this stage we are no longer discussing theory or logic. Leaving momentarily aside any reservations, let us concentrate on the one question that is immanent to the drawing itself, i.e., purely practical: is Escher capable, through the use of tools and manipulation of the medium, of persuading both eye and brain that what they perceive is indeed the "waterfall" as defined?

This emphasis on both the eye and the brain should illuminate the fact that the two, perception and cognition, though connected, do not necessarily act in alliance. We have to examine whether persuading each one of the two separately is sufficient; or, if not, whether and how Escher manages to make use of the one as a means of convincing the other. Moreover, since the viewer's application of his own logo-semantic insights to the picture cannot be avoided, he will certainly confront the problem with a mind already biased against the possibility of such an absurd waterfall. If, despite this major drawback, Escher's persuasion nonetheless prevails, his success should be accepted as a valid indicator to the effect that artistic rhetoric is indeed a powerful instrument for re-shaping cognition. Therefore, beyond its importance in this particular case, Escher's strategy promises to be a fascinating experiment in medium potentialities. Can he succeed in 'expanding' the limits of perception? Can he actually present his public with an impossible world?

### **Escherian Strategies**

To put it briefly: *is* the picture convincing?

What does 'convincing' mean? Given that the element of absurdity resides in the upward flow of the water, the question can be narrowed down to how does Escher manage to make us believe that the water can, and actually does, flow upwards.

The answer is clear in principle: Escher draws a channel with water that *appears* to flow upwards while in fact it flows downwards. Impossible, of course, in reality. But in a picture, all one needs is to coax the eye into believing that it is being drawn upwards even as it follows the water's down-flow. The objective can be easily defined in *optical* terms. Phenomenologically speaking, Escher has to separate the viewer's extra-pictorial cognition of the materials that occur in the picture from his perception of these very same materials as they dynamically appear to his eye. The brain knows what the real direction of the flow is. This imported cognition supplies the viewer with an initial definition of the water's direction. Escher does nothing to impair this primary datum. On the contrary, he provides a graded parapet on both sides of the channel, which adds perspective to the water's flow. What he needs to persuade us is that contrary to our initial feeling, the water *does* flow upwards. To this end, he makes use of **three techniques**, which alone will ultimately bear the responsibility for the success of the entire maneuver.

*First Technique: The Two Towers*

The channel winds between two towers. If we stretch a line between them, it becomes apparent that the distant one is the higher of the two.<sup>5</sup> It goes without saying that this realization challenges our perspectival expectations. Accustomed to using perspective in order to estimate distance versus size, we are made to interpret the unexpected size of the distant tower as a sign of its being even higher in relation to the one closer by. This feeling is constantly present as we follow the flow of the water in the channel. Even as the eye makes its way along the channel, it unconsciously *climbs* to the top of the distant tower.<sup>6</sup> The viewer is thus maneuvered into a status of contradictory perception: albeit descending with the water, his eye *ascends* with the tower!

*Second Technique: The Stairs*

At the front of the building we have three staircases. What for? Apart from their contribution to Escher's systematic deconstruction of the concepts of volume and height, they also serve to train the eye to climb up. We should reach the top floor in no time, and then come down again. But no! For at that very point, the back-stairs take over - the ones carved in the hillside. Behind the building looms a hill whose slope consists of stone terraces. The hill's presence creates a decisive effect. As the eye advances along the depth axis, it must cross the terraces, climbing over them, layer by higher layer. A feeling of *ascent* is thus created, even as the eye is descending. In other words, Escher puts together two systems of perceptions, endowed with contradictory optical

data. He causes the eye to scan two fields, which supply antithetical topographic conclusions.

The *modus operandi* of both techniques turns out to involve the application of one and the same strategy. In both cases, a double system of kinetic sensations is applied to the depth axis. In both, a conflict between perception and cognition is formed. In both the viewer's attention is drawn to an upward trajectory even as it is moving down with the flow. This result, in itself, could have settled the point. However, Escher's tactics assign to the towers and the stairs no more than a preparatory role. They are there merely to weaken the viewer's resistance to the bizarre phenomenon. The main effort is devoted to a third technique: the columns, which carry the three floors of the waterfall.

#### *Third Technique: The Columns*

One glance is sufficient to show that when I say 'three floors', I am deceiving my reader. The channel is, of course, horizontal. There are no levels. Therefore, there are no columns, nor can there exist any. If we follow the flow, we shall realize that the columns are impossible in all respects - architectural, empirical and geometrical. This is also true in reality, as it is in the semantic affinity between the pictorial phenomenon and the represented world. The columns have no subsistence in any possible world. All the same, they *do* feature in the drawing, as real as can be. How?

There are five groups of columns in *Waterfall*. The two upper groups protrude above the channel and are faultless. Because the viewer starts his journey here, the standard nature of the upper columns (which is the pivotal element of the technique) prompts him to grant similar credibility to the columns underneath, as well. In other words, Escher encourages the viewer to set up the columns from top to bottom, and not *vice versa*, which would have been, surely, the natural way. Given the fact that the upper columns appear to have both substance and volume, i.e., reality, they promptly take command over our perceptions. We treat them as a starting datum in accordance to which we tend to arrange the remaining elements of the structure. Thus, Escher causes the viewer to reverse his reasoning. Instead of accepting the fact that the structure is horizontal, and hence can have no columns, he takes the columns for granted, which makes him deduce a multi-leveled structure.

The overall strategy combines a classic *trompe l'oeil* with a few perceptual traps to make the viewer end up in an unavoidable, intentional failure in logic. At first he is misled by an impertinent illusion to believe in the existence of columns on the upper floor. Then, down one floor, he finds them again. He has been tricked into accepting that beneath the top columns, two additional groups

of columns support no less than two lower levels. At a third stage, he translates the knowledge that the columns exist into a 'fact': the waterfall is composed of three floors. The process is complete. The eye follows the cycle of the water-flow using two contradictory sets of logic. By the first, the water circulates on a flat plane, which is not hard to accept. By the second, the water rushes vertically down, a distance of the combined heights of two floors. The wheel leads its double life, engaged simultaneously in both sets of logic. Hit by the falling water from *above*, it propels it further into the *horizontal* section of its course.

At this stage we reach the peak of the divide between eye and brain. Through pure perception, the eye sees a horizontal structure without any columns. The brain, in contrast, which has adopted a particular *gestalt*, imposes its differing interpretation upon the eye. Once it has deduced 'supporting columns', the existence of floors follows as a matter of course, no matter how unfounded this may be in terms of perception or actual visual information.<sup>7</sup>

I am tempted to term this technique "**Cognitive Delusionism**". Escher relies on our disregard of what we actually see, on the grounds of what we *think* we see. He relies on the **interpretation** that the brain supplies to what the eyes have seen. And, indeed, it appears that, under certain circumstances, the brain can defeat the eye over its own findings.

### **A Wittgensteinian Elucidation of the Concept of Paradox**

Is it possible after all? Has Escher succeeded in creating a perpetual waterfall, in defiance of the laws of nature and against common sense? Undoubtedly! This, then, is where the terms "presentation" and "representationability" part. Escher presents our senses with a structure that is not a representation of an existing situation, nor, and this is the crucial point, one of a *possible* world - as defined since Leibniz through Wittgenstein to Kripke and Davidson.<sup>8</sup>

Since we have already identified the waterfall, in terms of its logo-semantic affinities, as a contradictoid structure that clashes not only with reality but even with its very own laws, we should conclude that Escher has miraculously performed a **visualization of a paradox** before our very eyes. To assess the importance of this achievement, both for its philosophical merit and for the purpose of re-evaluating Escher, I shall now turn to a succinct, neo-Wittgensteinian elucidation of the concept involved.

To do this, let us return to the piece of conversation quoted at the beginning of this article, from Lewis Carroll. As we recall, the Queen declares that the garden is a wilderness and the hill - no better than a valley. Of the two comparisons, the first is fairly clear. When one likens a garden to a wilderness,

one indicates that it has suffered from neglect. In other words, the Queen may have been using rhetorical exaggeration involving an aesthetic judgment. This judgment, quasi-oxymoronic in its articulation, is nevertheless innocent of logical errors. After neutralizing the figure of speech, we can reconstruct the semantic field wherein the phrase resumes its proper meaning. Can the same be said of the conceptual status in the second comparison?

*Prima facie*, the second statement - the hill is like a valley - can be similarly treated as a pseudo-oxymoron that turns out to be a contrasting hyperbole. Just as the first statement finds fault with the garden's elegance, so does the second decry the hill's height. Here, however, we are faced with a problem. The diagnosis that constitutes the comparison can be valid only if the spectrum of possible values enables transition from highest to lowest, without having its primary intelligibility impaired. Is this condition met?

Let us see. The gradation will be like this: we start with a high hill, go down one level to a hill no higher than a hillock, then another to the status of 'it is like a plain', and finally, at the bottom of the scale, we find 'it is like a valley'. Indeed, this is precisely what Alice's interlocutor does. But in reality, a semantic field cannot be constructed for the lowest two levels! For, though we may criticize the size of a hill by comparing it to a hillock, once we declare it to be a plain, the concept itself becomes categorically distorted. A hill is a convex body. A plain is, *per definitionem*, an area with no convexity. Therefore, when one says a hill is a plain, one combines two incompatible terms.

If comparing a hill to a plain is unacceptable, what are we to say of the Queen's actual phrase? Since a hill is convex by definition, whereas a valley is concave, associating these two is bound to generate a contradiction - an outright and pronounced clash. Alice was right to get angry and even more so to exclaim: "Nonsense!"

It is precisely in order to identify and eradicate such nonsensical patterns that Russell, Moore, Austin, Strawson, and other analytical philosophers, have drawn a distinction between linguistic and logical syntax. In order to construct a predication, i.e., a statement endowed with truth-value, it is not enough to join words according to the rules of language. It serves to remember here that Lewis Carroll was a renowned precursor, as well as one of the preachers of this approach, in the nineteenth century. He devoted dozens of pages in his writings (both in *Alice* and *Sylvie and Bruno*) to condemnation of the confusion that prevailed in linguistic situations, i.e., in the **pragmatics** of speech, between superficial grammar and in-depth, or logical, syntax. Although, the Queen's statement is a well-formed-formula, as far as grammar is concerned, an analysis of the inter-relations among the components of the semantic field on which

the statement should rely, reveals that it contains a categorical flaw. It is sheer nonsense by *Tractarian* definition: a linguistic deceit, a void pretending to be communication.<sup>9</sup>

In this respect, the essential difference between Carroll and Escher resides in the medium. Escher misleads his public by embroidering optical delusion, while Carroll does so by activating syntactical traps. Not only were we misled to think that standard syntax could, in itself, guarantee the correctness of a semantic field (Carroll's main technique in *Jabberwocky*), but we also had our linguistic senses blunted by having been rushed from one formula that was correct, to a similar one that, however, was meaningless. The Wittgensteinian diagnosis of this matter is clear and distinct: if a chain of words is based on contradiction, it signifies nothing. "A hill like a valley" is semantical pretence. The fact that the reader may think he has understood only indicates that he has been tricked. In fact, he has understood nothing, for there was nothing to understand. This is the core of the Wittgensteinian concept of nonsense. With the help of this method his successors dissolved quite a few paradoxes.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, when Alice declares that the Queen's words are nonsense, she proves to be a worthy disciple of Wittgenstein, inasmuch as the components of the Queen's sentence mutually cancel each other, and rob the predication of all content.<sup>11</sup>

How then would Alice react if she were asked for her opinion on the following three pictures?

### Visualizing Paradoxes

We shall deal here with three Escherian paradigms: the very famous *Day and Night* (1938), *Relativity* (1953), and *Belvedere* (1958).

A detailed analysis of these works would exceed our purpose, nor is it necessary. What we need is to establish a factor of nonsensicality for each picture. To what extent, if at all, are they acceptable to cognition? More pertinently, do they teach us anything or should they, rather, be unconditionally rejected for being meaningless?

#### *Cognitive Hesitation*

In *Day and Night* (Fig. 2), Escher undermines the most elementary component in our notion of reality. Even if the viewer manages to ignore the enigmatic symmetry of the picture's halves, he clearly undergoes ontological distress.<sup>12</sup> Escher makes it impossible for the viewer to even define the mimetic components of the picture! What does he see? White geese flying towards a land of darkness? Dark geese flying towards a realm of light? Perhaps just ploughed fields?

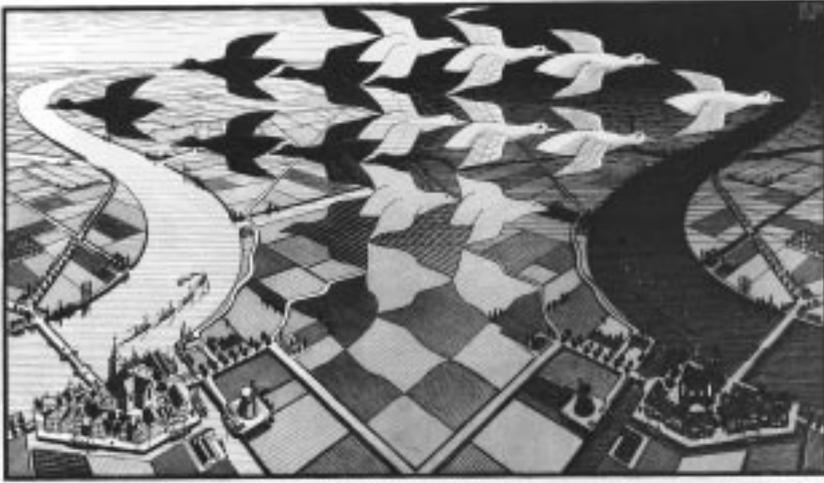


Fig. 2: *Day and Night*, 1938

This strategy plunges the viewer into a state of cognitive hesitation. Not only is he deprived of his usual ability to focus on the event and identify it among the facts of the system, but an even more basic element, his ability to classify the *concreta*, disintegrates methodologically as well. Escher administers a double ontological blow to the viewer by destroying **both** these elementary layers that characterize his epistemic environment. Under such conditions, the viewer can neither construct propositions of any truth-value, such as: "the geese are flying towards the right", nor is he permitted to characterize his world, be it at the level of objectual classification. Are these white geese? black ones? or, perhaps, mere patches of land being transformed by a deceiving eye into phantom creatures? Hence, the picture contains no definable entities. In their absence, any attempt to perform a semantic application on it through the use of concepts, is doomed to failure.<sup>13</sup> Escher's ontology is Protean, His metaphysics - Heraclitusian. If we are still left with something, it can only be some state of eternal metamorphosis.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Labyrinthization of the Concept of Direction*

In the second example, a lithograph bearing the absolute name *Relativity* (Fig. 3), a different factor of reality is impaired, namely the vectorial element. This time, Escher meddles with our sense of topological orientation, i.e., our tendency to locate a given point in relation to defined coordinates. In much the same way as the viewer was earlier deprived of the possibility of identifying the

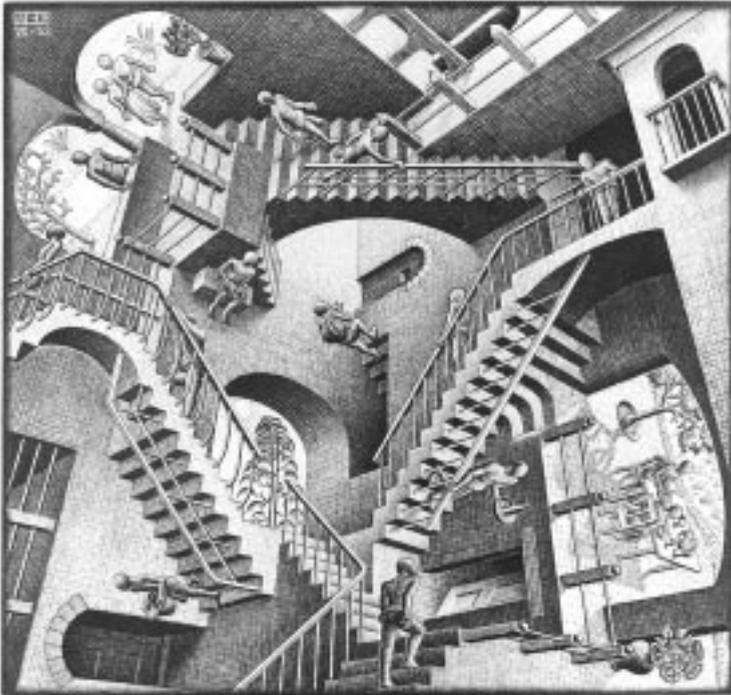


Fig. 3: *Relativity*, 1953

diagetic elements of the picture-world, he will now lose the ability to pinpoint his realm of observation. Where is the floor? Where is the ceiling? Which one of the staircases can lead the characters upwards?

With the help of these optical illusions he is so good at, Escher achieves a complete chaotization of spatial orientation. In this situation, it becomes impossible to characterize a homogeneous space. Should the viewer insist on following a particular flight of stairs, he will end up in a place totally unrelated to the intended direction at departure.

#### *Deconstructing the Concept of Space*

The third lithograph (closest chronologically to *Waterfall*) inflicts similar damage to the pair of terms "inside/outside". If in *Relativity* we were at a loss when trying to distinguish between up and down, or among all three dimensions of the pictorial field, in *Belvedere* (Fig. 4) we cannot even determine the *space* within which the characters move. Consider the ladder connecting the first and second floors. Two people are climbing the ladder: one has already reached the upper rungs while the other is just starting to climb. It is clear that the upper person is standing outside the contour of the lower floor. Why, then, does the ladder



Fig. 4: *Belvedere*, 1958

not tumble outwards? Alternatively, if the ladder is leaning inwards, towards the upper floor as seems to be the case when looking from below, how can the upper floor be aligned so perfectly above the lower one?

### **Conclusion: The Presentation Beyond the Representational**

There is no denying that the three lithographs possess a family resemblance. In all three Escher undermines patterns of thinking and basic notions that govern our perception. In *Day and Night* there are no solid entities. They dissolve into each other, with each form being functionalized at the expense of the other. In *Relativity*, the viewer's visual attention is drawn to a realm wherein each dimension is expressed in terms of all the others, making it impossible to follow one dimension throughout, as they constantly interchange. *Belvedere* offers a structure that, at first glance, seems to be very simple, but that turns out to be no less than a *Moebius cube* with an impossible ladder sticking out (or into) an

inconceivable space.

Our analysis has reached a clear verdict. In all three cases, Escher has constructed a **paradox** according to its *Tractarian* definition. The core of the paradox conceals a contradiction. It is a pseudo-semantic system whose elements strangle each other in a Laocoonian grip. This state of affairs generates a cognitive blank, inasmuch as the viewer is neither free to favor one element over another nor to take the package as a whole, this being excluded by the Law of Contradiction. In each of these systems the basic laws of homogeneity are being violated, the laws of consistency broken and the basic coordinates of thinking are disqualified semantically. Escher makes happen for his public an apparently inconceivable situation, one of systematic incoherence.<sup>15</sup>

While it is true that this result is achieved by using acrobatics in optical delusionism, what is wrong with this? Delusive graphics and spatial illusions are legitimate accessories of the visual medium, no less than color and composition. Escher is perfectly entitled to use graphic tools in order to take advantage of our perceptual laziness, or to base his visual manipulation on the fact that our sense perceptions are not immediately subjected to a cognitive grammar. In this way he designs a perceptual world that is not supported by cognitive patterns, or, to use my proposed terminology - *presentatia simpliciter*.<sup>16</sup> Leibnitz, Wittgenstein and their successors would have said that **Escher has pictured the impossible**.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Transcendental Art and the Liminality of Perception***

Attempting the very same endeavor, however, Lewis Carroll did *not* succeed. This asymmetry between Escher and Carroll reveals a decisive, phenomenological, difference between pictorial and verbal art.

There is a dichotomy between a conceptual paradox expressed by words or narrative, and a pictorial absurdity of the type demonstrated. Whereas the first is self-annihilating, since it forces the reader to construct - *per impossibile* - a contradictory system, the pictorial paradox affects our senses despite the fact that it can no more than be perceived. A pictorial paradox is possible for the senses to absorb although impossible for the mind to grasp.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, we must define this as a two-stage process: first, we receive a perception that constitutes a fact; then, it is rejected for being impossible, or at least problematic.

I conclude that Escher's pictures indeed present a thesis: they establish the fact that the mind is receptive to perceptions that lie beyond understanding. The borders of perception transcend the limits of cognition.<sup>19</sup>

In order to experience the Queen's statements, one must understand what is said, i.e., establish a coherent system for them. But, since the elements are

incompatible, this cannot be done. Here lies the dialectical contrast between *cogitare* and *percipi*. In Carroll's sentences there is nothing to perceive if one does not understand the sentence itself. Wittgenstein's diagnosis of this matter is definitive: in the absence of a semantic field, there can be no thought. Therefore, no cognition whatsoever is formed in the reader's mind - whether of an existing situation or of a non-existing but possible world. Given the fact that nonsensical thought does not exist, verbal nonsense amounts to nothing.

On the other hand, in a pictorial field perceptions can be formed independently of the validity and support of a semantic field. It is like the case of a judge who instructs the jury to forget a comment made by a shrewd attorney. The stenographer can delete the comment from the record, but not from the jury's memory. There is a moment of cognition-free perception. At this very moment nonsense is born: a waterfall that the mind rejects but the eye absorbs with delight.<sup>20</sup>

What can we learn from this about Escher's impact, value and status?

The conclusion I have attempted to establish is that Escher is by no means inferior to any one of his colleagues who have been entrusted with Art's treacherous mission of expanding the boundaries of knowledge by use of imagination and the senses. If Van Gogh could present paintings which stem from a divided soul, and Kafka, scenes of the soul's anxiety, Escher too pictures a liminal human state. Through masterful navigation, he urges the viewer towards the very limits of cognition. He may have even outreached his predecessors, in having been able to touch upon the liminality of thought itself.<sup>21</sup>

In verbal arts, like the narratives of Borges, Frisch and Heller, we can go only as far as the warning sign: Stop! Border ahead!; but in Escher's lithographs we can experience, be it for a brief moment, how this border is actually crossed.

Therefore, we ought perhaps to concede, in a Kantian neologism, that Escher presents his public with *Transcendental Art*.<sup>22</sup> Can this also be said of the Surrealists, such as Delvaux and Magritte, sometimes mentioned with him? Regarding the nonsensization of the viewing experience, does it, in itself, bestow transcendentality upon a work of art? Finally, does art of the type presented here imply a particular system of metaphysics?<sup>23</sup>

These questions, though cogent to the subject, unfortunately lie beyond the scope of this article. But one thing has been proven. In one of his most resonant conclusions Wittgenstein wrote: "We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot *say* either."

True. But perchance it can be **drawn**?

## Notes

- 1 Escher's inferior status in the Art Community is deplored by almost everyone who has a positive approach towards his work. Bruno Ernst tells us that during the seventies, Dutch galleries refrained from treating Escher's work seriously, Ernst 1978:15. He maintains that Escher was almost completely ignored, his work having aroused interest mainly among mathematicians and crystallographers. Escher himself, with whom Ernst spent about a year conducting interviews around 1970, did not seem impressed by this neglect (*ibid.*:16), or so he claimed.
- 2 Semantic theories of aesthetic judgement rely heavily on the concept of counterfactuals, as presented by Lewis (1973) and his followers. According to this approach, "the other worlds provide a frame of reference whereby we can characterize our world"; Lewis 1986: 22. However, since Escher's are *not* possible worlds, i.e., consistent systems of counterfactuals, in what way can we profit from his work?
- 3 Is there a possibility, notwithstanding, of producing a system that can be valid in contradictory worlds? If so, this may constitute the principal accomplishment of *paraconsistent* logic, which tolerates the formation of true contradictions, or *dialetheias*, See Priest 1979 and 1989.
- 4 This means that a conflict is generated between conceptual structures and what Merleau-Ponty labels "a carnal formula of the presence of things", *Eye and Mind*, 1964:60.
- 5 As for the height of the towers, consider the following interesting comment: "The two towers are the same height and yet the one on the right is a story lower than the one on the left"; Escher 1972: 17.
- 6 According to Ernst, the monumental extremities of the two towers are merely ornamental. This interpretation is utterly mistaken. The two tower-tops are instrumental for the purpose of achieving spatial confusion - an essential component of Escher's technique.
- 7 The outcome, in phenomenological terms, is that the object-of-viewing (which is cognitively processed), becomes disconnected from the picture that appears in the viewer's perception. This break eliminates the *intentionality* of both imagination and perception, Casey 1976; Block 1983. It also applies in the opposite direction: neither can we represent a perceivable external, i.e., a possible world, nor can we obtain a coherent visualization of an internal space by applying the categorical reasoning that perception demands. Nevertheless, the sense data are powerful enough to deceive us temporarily.
- 8 For the relevance of possible-worlds semantics to the validation of counterfactual cognitions, see Hintikka's conclusive article in Allen 1989: 52-81.
- 9 I am strongly opposed to Ashlin's conclusion that the impossible can be imagined. In nonsense, the receiver is instrumentally misled to believe (at least during a preliminary phase of a complex process) that he is actually viewing an impossible world. Had he been able to *imagine* such a world, there would have been no difference between this and the manner in which he pictures the flight of Icarus or Goriot's life. The world of nonsense must be dichotomically separated from other fictitious worlds (as discussed by Ashlin 1995; McHale 1987; Ryan 1984, and others), by the fact that here the receiver *knows* that what he perceives is non-perceptible. If this dialectic is to remain valid, it is essential that the receiver be aware of the invalidity of his perceptions.
- 10 The technique of reducing paradoxes to semantic vacua has been excellently applied by Max Black in a series of analyses that have shown them to be no more than

semiotic delusions - seemingly meaningful combinations of elements which, in fact, cancel each other, see especially Black 1954: 95-154; Black 1975: 72-84 and Black 1976: 179-208. Black summarizes his technique thus: "I have tried to show that the notion of an infinite series of acts is self-contradictory...But Achilles is not called upon to do the logically impossible; the illusion that he must do so is created by our failure to hold separate the finite number of real things that the runner has to accomplish ...We create the illusion of the infinite tasks", Black 1954: 108. Quine utilized these very methods for the same purpose.

- 11 In nonsensical perceptions, a cognizable object (which means the object of perception) cannot be constructed due to contradictory structures. This state of affairs in itself can prevent, according to Wittgenstein, the formation of what was termed after him, propositional attitudes - a condition for sensible thought, *Tractatus*: 3.1, 3.11, 3.12. A rare consensus on this subject (possibly stemming from a common Kantian origin), brings together the neo-positivistic *Tractatus* and phenomenology. See for example Brentano's famous definition: "The reference to something as an object is a distinguishing characteristic of all mental phenomena"; Brentano 1874 (1973).
- 12 It is obvious that in order to obtain nonsense we may not compromise on an ontology whose clash with the metaphysics of our world is partial, coincidental or temporary. What we need is a total clash. Samuel R. Levin (in Allen 1989: 260-266) states: "In 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' there occur a variety of preternatural events...All these events have it in common that they violate or infringe upon physical laws...according to any metaphysics defined by conditions in the actual world the fictional landscape of Garcia Marquez' novel is 'impossible'. The novel does not, however, represent a consistently 'impossible world.' " *Ibid.*: 261.
- 13 In this regard, I tend to seek the backing of the **Language of Thought Hypothesis**, esp. Fodor 1975; Rey 1995; Clark 1991, and Davies 1991. Since the LOTH presupposes, among other things, a representational theory of mind, not applied in Escher's world, my argument regarding the picturing of impossible worlds gains hereby empirical support.
- 14 The "optative" ontology reigning upon this enigmatic lithograph can be phrased in Parsons' terms as relying on "imperfect non-existent objects": "Many nonexistent objects will be incomplete. By calling an object "complete" I mean that for any nuclear property the object either has that property or it has its negation", Parsons 1980:19. His following statement is even more enlightening: "Consider the object whose sole nuclear properties are roundness and squareness. This is an impossible object because there could not be an existing object that has both these properties. Still, as Meinong pointed out, that doesn't prevent there from being an impossible object that has them", *ibid.*: 21. The scope of this essay prevents me from discussing the ontology of impossible objects. On this matter, see the correspondence between Russell and Meinong, Heijenoort 1967: 124-125, and also the whole of Parsons' second chapter, esp. 43-56.
- 15 Since a representational model of thought is presupposed in most cognitive theories, what really matters is whether or not we have any chance of even understanding the combination "nonsensical thinking". For a brief introduction, see Stillings 1995 and Thagard 1996.
- 16 "Obviously it ('Le blanc-seing' of Magritte) does not refer to actual conditions, to a real world - but is the world we see here possible or impossible? ...clearly it is possible *in the painting*, or to put it in another way: the artist has been able to show it on a canvas...the painting and only the painting makes that world possible." Lind, in Allen 1989: 312.

"In a photograph the physical presence of the things portrayed is a prerequisite for what is seen...But in Magritte's painting it is just the reverse: what is primary is the painting itself - without that the world that appears would not exist." *ibid.*: 312. "What *does* matter is that Magritte has combined his signs in such a way that they have made something impossible appear as possible, if only in the world of the painting," *ibid.*: 314.

This epitomizes the entire problem of nonsensical painting. What I call "presentation simpliciter" is actually Lind's "syntactic fiction". Regnier defines it as follows: "any painting is a fiction, based on a pure syntagmatic process, not necessarily referring to the real world... Painting is to be considered a pure fiction, functioning because of the rules of grammar," *ibid.*: 337.

17 I employ the term *pictoriality* in much the same way as Ronen (1994) uses "fictionality". Ronen claims rightly that a discussion of fictionality must not overlook questions of semantics and representation: being fictional refers, by definition, to the *relations* between fiction and "the real". Applying the term "possible worlds" to the study of literature, as demonstrated in her introduction, enables one to classify literary worlds according to diverse types of affinity between diagesis and the represented world. My contention is that in **pictorial nonsense**, this external support is made non-existent to varying degrees by the agency of contradictory structures. For a systematic typology of the subject, modal tools recently developed by Dolezel, Pavel, Margolin, Eco and others, are highly recommended.

18 In his introduction to *Nobel Symposium* (1965), Allen presents one of Rutgersward's paintings, with the following words: "He has designed something which doesn't exist, which is not even possible." Variants of this same problematic structure abound in Escher's lithographs, cf. *Stars*, 1948; *Cube with magic ribbons*, 1957; *Moebius strip*, 1961, etc.

At any rate, if *Waterfall* is intrinsically reference-less, what could its 'meaning' be? Here is where the flexibility of Fregeian terminology becomes most evident. Having separated reference (*Bedeutung*) from sense (*Sinn*), he is entitled to postulate that those propositions that deal with fictitious entities can be acknowledged as possessing sense, despite their being devoid of truth-value. One thing can be agreed upon: In a certain sense, what is impossible in objectual ontology is realizable in fictional diagesis. "Since the picture is there, the painting of it is evidently feasible or realizable in the actual world," *ibid.*:3.

However, I disagree with Allen's conclusion that "seeing" implies "imaginable": "... the shape created, although not feasible, is imaginable." In terms of imaginability, possible includes, consequently, both feasibility and non-feasibility, *ibid.*: 4. I claim that the imaginable is *narrower* than perception and depends on the cognizable.

19 According to my proposed analysis, we should conclude that Escher's pictorial world is utterly devoid of 'reference', either in Fregeian or even Meinongian designation, and is therefore independent of the type of ontology we adopt, whether radical - as in modal realism (Lewis 1973), or a moderate one (Rescher, Platinga and Stainaker). In my view Escher's world cannot even be termed a "hypothetical possible construct", as defined by Kripke 1972.

20 Discussing *The Roads of Destiny* by O. Henry and Robbe-Grillet's *La maison de rendez-vous*, Dolezel maintains that "the Leibnizian restriction is circumvented, but not canceled", Dolezel 1989: 239. My contention is that Escher's nonsense derives from this very same idea. His lithographs do not respect the Leibnizian condition for a non-contradictory world, but they *conceal* this 'flaw' by the assistance of pictorial strategies.

- 21 The use of semantically problematic fictions for artistic purposes is a much discussed topic in postmodern poetics, see, for example, McHale 1992: 61-114. Many techniques among those that McHale considers to be symptomatic of postmodernist narrative, occur *mutatis mutandis* in Escher's drawings as well. "Pynchon's readers have every right to feel conned, bullied, betrayed...We have been invited to undertake the kinds of pattern-making and pattern-interpreting operations which, in the modernist texts...would produce intelligible meaning; here, they produce at best a parody of intelligibility. We have been confronted with representations of mental processes of the kind which, in modernist texts, we could have relied upon in reconstructing external (fictive) reality. In Gravity's Rainbow, such representations are always liable to be qualified retroactively as dream, fantasy, or hallucination, while the reconstructions based upon them are always subject to contradiction or cancellation," *ibid.*: 81.
- 22 In Heideggerian terms, we may postulate that, by exposing the categorical liminality of conceptualization, Escher expresses *aletheia* or the "disclosure of Being", see Crowther 1993: 99 -101.
- 23 "...the worlds that mix together in texts may resemble the actual world, but they may be impossible or erratic as well. Works of fiction ... play with the impossible, and incessantly speak about the unspeakable." Pavel 1986: 62. [...] Such complexity can originate [...] in the vacillation of the narrative base itself between two different "actualities". In such texts the mere representation of a nonproblematic salient structure...gives way to a thematization of ontological complexities", *ibid.*:63. What, then, if any, can be the thematic use of disjunctivistic ontology? Pavel's conclusion is particularly enlightening in terms of the idiosyncratic character of Escher's world: "For several writers, incompleteness constitutes a major distinctive feature of fictional worlds. About complete worlds, one can decide whether for any proposition 'p' either 'p' or its negation 'non-p' is true in that world. [...] Such thematized, one could say enacted, incompleteness can be constructed as a reflection on both the nature of fiction and the nature of the world," *ibid.*: 107 - 8.

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