



IMAGES OF THE CRUCIFIXION IN
LATE ANTIQUITY
The testimony of engraved gems

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And they brought him to the place called Gol'gotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "E'lo-i, E'lo-i, la'ma sabach-tha'ni?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Eli'jah." And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Eli'jah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Mark 15: 22-39

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ABSTRACT

This study takes five gemstones, each engraved with an image of the Crucifixion and previously dated to the Late Antique period, as its focus. Traditionally it has been thought that Christian images of the Crucifixion emerged in the fifth century and that prior to that time, the subject was consciously rejected by artists. Utilising the largely ignored and invariably misused evidence of the gems, this study challenges both the conventional view of the early history of the image and the theory of rejection.

Although the gems have previously been cited to indicate the portrayal of the Crucifixion prior to the fifth century, confusion about their authenticity and art-historical validity has seen them marginalised or dismissed from most iconographic studies of the subject in Late Antiquity. Yet clearly the question of the avoidance of the Crucifixion cannot be addressed until a systematic examination of the gems' iconographic as well as compositional, physical and epigraphic evidence, is carried out. This study undertakes such an examination. It demonstrates the way in which critical information regarding the evolution of the Crucifixion image in Late Antiquity has been seriously obstructed in previous studies through the dismissal, misapplication and/or misinterpretation of the gems. Focusing on iconography, it presents a revised chronology for the gems. It suggests that only three are Late Antique, with the fourth gem being early Byzantine. The Late Antique date customarily assigned to the fifth gem is rejected and a Middle Byzantine date proposed.

The core investigation of the gems is prefaced by a short review of the material and literary evidence customarily cited in iconographic studies for the representation of the Crucifixion between c. AD 200 and c. 600. The extent to which the gems augment and transform this evidence is shown to be significant. Drawing on the testimony of the gems this study proposes that at least two design models of the representation of Jesus on the cross were circulating prior to the fifth century but proved unpopular: the earliest model is "magical" and is characterised by its realism; the second, later model is Christian and is characterised by its symbolism. The focus away from the subject in art prior to the fifth century is shown to be witnessed in the small number of surviving gems and in the compositional formats and iconography adopted on them. On the strength of such discoveries the study concludes that the prevailing assumptions regarding the rejection of Crucifixion imagery in Late Antiquity need to be reconsidered.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan or photocopying.

Felicity Harley
June 29 2001

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INTRODUCTION

Lying on her deathbed, a Cappadocian nun named Macrina wore a small iron cross and an iron ring, both suspended around her neck on a thin chain and hidden beneath her robes. The ring bore the symbol of the cross and was hollowed out in the centre: in the hollow was secreted a tiny piece of wood, wood from the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

Macrina died in AD 380 at the age of fifty-four. Her wearing of a relic of the cross is recorded in the eulogy composed by her younger brother Saint Gregory of Nyssa.¹ Despite its antiquity, the anecdote has a disarming familiarity; for whilst few Christians now own relics from Jesus' Crucifixion, metal crosses bearing his dead or dying body are common as items of jewellery. We recognise in Macrina's story both the immutable centrality of the Crucifixion to the Christian faith, from fourth century Cappadocia to the present day, as well as the potent desire to make physical the spiritual connection with God and His son, through Jesus' act of self-sacrifice. Yet the centrality in Christian art and culture of the *image* of Jesus' brutal and public execution outside Jerusalem around AD 33, witnessed in its role today as a universally recognised symbol of spiritual confidence, is a later phenomenon. Although arising out of the same stimulus that moved Macrina to keep the relic secretly next to her chest, the urge to produce explicit images of the Crucifixion does not manifest itself until after her lifetime.

It is the formative history of the Crucifixion image, from around the third until the early seventh century, that is the focus of this thesis. These chronological parameters are set according to the material evidence that survives for the development of the image. They begin in Rome less than two hundred years after the Crucifixion with a remarkable piece of ancient graffito executed around AD

¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita s. Macrinae*; trans. V. W. Callahan, FC 58, pp. 184-185. On Macrina's life see Brown (1988), pp. 277-279.

200 on the Palatine Hill. The graffito is accompanied by a crude drawing of a man hailing a crucified figure, the figure having the head of a donkey [*Pl. Ia*]. After this pictorial reference to the Christian belief in a crucified deity, the subject of Jesus' crucifixion does not seem to appear in Christian art until the fifth century. From that century there survive two images. These are traditionally cited as the earliest surviving Christian images of the Crucifixion in a narrative context; that is, each representation of the Crucifixion is viewed as part of a series of episodes from Scripture, not as an individual subject for isolated contemplation. The two images are well-known to art-historians and are pictured together on *Plate 5*. Both are carved reliefs, one in ivory and the other in cedar, and were probably executed in Rome in the first half of the fifth century; both portray Jesus alive, nailed to the cross but standing firmly against rather than hanging from it. In essence, both images accentuate his transcendence over physical pain, thereby making explicit the focus of the early Christian Church on the Crucifixion as a means of celebrating Jesus' triumph over death, a triumph subsequently fulfilled in the Resurrection. The nascent history of the Crucifixion image as it is understood here closes just over a century later in the eastern part of the Roman Empire when the pictorial type of the triumphal Jesus enters a new phase in its development, beginning its rise as the pivotal image of Christianity. The stretch of some five hundred years thus covered in this thesis falls predominantly within the epoch designated as Late Antique, those centuries between around AD 200 to about 750 in which the Mediterranean world underwent profound social and cultural change.²

It is important to define at the outset what is meant in this study by an "image" of the Crucifixion. Essentially, the word image is used to refer to a pictorial representation of Jesus' crucifixion in which he hangs on his cross in the presence of those characters and/or subsidiary events mentioned in the four canonical Gospel accounts of the Passion. All four accounts, the earliest being created by

² The boundaries of the historical period tend to shift slightly. Peter Brown (1989), sets them at AD 150-750, covering the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180) up to the post-Justinianic period. See also Brown (1998), p. 1. For the discussion of Late Antiquity as a distinct period between 250 and 800: Bowersock, Brown & Grabar (1999), introduction pp. vii-xiii.

Mark sometime around AD 70,³ begin with the conspiracy against Jesus [Mt. 26:1-5; Mk 14:1-2; Lk. 22:1-2] and extend to the finding of the empty tomb [Mt. 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk. 24:1-12],⁴ thereby encompassing his death. An image of the Crucifixion is thus distinct from a crucifix. Strictly speaking a crucifix is a cross bearing the fully modelled body of Jesus which functions as an isolated or independent instrument of devotion.⁵ Hence the cross Macrina wore is not a crucifix, as it has been mistakenly described.⁶ Crucifixes are unknown in Late Antiquity and are rare in Byzantine art, their development in the sense of bearing a three dimensional figure coming much later.⁷

Since Christian artistic expression can be seen to begin in Rome around AD 200 with the painted decoration of the catacombs, the two fifth century images seem to document a remarkably slow appearance of the Crucifixion as a subject for visual representation. This slowness has proven notoriously difficult to explain. Mostly, the two reliefs are seen to come at the end of a period during which images of Jesus crucified were deliberately avoided. This deliberacy appears particularly pointed in the fourth century when pictorialised Passion narratives, or even single episodes from the narrative, appear on sarcophagi. Although providing an ideal context for the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion, the subject remained absent. In place of the Crucifixion, fourth century artists are seen to use several alternatives: antitypes or typological parallels from the Old Testament to allude to the event, such as the Sacrifice of Isaac on the Junius Bassus sarcophagus;⁸ symbolic

³ Green (1988), p. 160; Green's monograph, *The Death of Jesus*, provides a detailed study of the Passion narrative.

⁴ Throckmorton (1967), pp. 163-188.

⁵ This distinction is stipulated by Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1 p. 512, and Maskell (1905), p. 246. Plain pre-fifth century crosses are still mistakenly termed crucifixes: eg. Drijvers (1992), p. 90, calls Macrina's cross a crucifix; there is no indication from Gregory's description that this cross carried a figural representation of Jesus. Similarly Taylor (1993), pp. 122-123, uses the word cross and crucifix interchangeably when discussing the literary evidence for the erection of a commemorative cross on Golgotha: yet there is no indication that such a cross, whether erected by Constantine or subsequent individuals, bore a figural representation of Jesus.

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⁷ One of the finest early examples is the Gero cross in Cologne Cathedral, c. 960-965: Schiller (1972), fig. 455.

⁸ Malbon (1990), pp 44-47, fig. 1 & diag. 8.1, showing compositional links.

references such as the triumphal cross, seen at the centre of the Vatican sarcophagus pictured on *Plate 2b*; or secondary events which confirmed the historical veracity of the Crucifixion, such as Christ appearing before Pilate, seen on the same sarcophagus in the far right niche.

Key social, political, theological, christological and art-historical issues attending the depiction of the death of God's son have been cited to illustrate a culture of anxiety that forced Christians to consciously reject images of Jesus' crucifixion in the first Christian centuries, at a time when Christians actively discussed and recalled the event in their worship and teaching. Despite the persistent presentation of this theory of "rejection" in scholarship over the past century, there has been no decisive resolution to the question of the absence of Crucifixion images prior to the sixth century. Whilst this thesis will not pretend to achieve a resolution, its primary aim is to provide a study that might begin to do so, and that might certainly provide the critical foundations for further investigation.

A principal difficulty in sustaining the theory of rejection is knowing what to do with a body of material evidence which suggests that at least one, possibly two models for a Crucifixion image were circulating in the Roman Empire prior to the fifth century. This evidence comes in the form of gemstones on which are engraved images of Jesus crucified. Five gems have previously been cited to illustrate the early formulation of Crucifixion imagery; yet despite the efforts of such scholars as Philippe Derchain, the evidence has yet to be used to good effect: three gems are presently in the British Museum; one is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; whilst the whereabouts of the fifth gem is unknown, its design is recorded in an impression of the original stone, made in the nineteenth century and preserved in a photograph. All of the gems have come to into the Museums via private collectors and they are listed in the catalogue in *Appendix 1*.

The survival of the gems is the primary reason why the two fifth century Crucifixion images are customarily cited as being the earliest pictorialisations in a *narrative* context; this description allows for the possibility, suggested but not yet widely believed to be established by the gems, that the image appeared on its own prior to the fifth century. Sadly, the comprehensive lack of uniformity with regard

to the dating of the gemstones, their acceptance as genuine artefacts from the Late Antique period, and their inclusion in art historical studies as valid objects of study, have seen them discredited by most scholars of early Christianity. At best, they have been regarded as peripheral evidence. At worst, they have been ignored. Their marginal position in most twentieth century studies of early Crucifixion iconography is seen in the most recent discussion of the rarity of images in the first centuries of Christian art by Robin Jensen. She states that: "Apart from two intaglio gems, possibly dating from the fourth century, and a controversial second-century graffito found in Rome, the earliest known images of Jesus crucified date to the early fifth century, and are extremely rare until the seventh."⁹ Jensen's inference seems to be that the gems constitute inadmissible evidence and are not worth citing. In addition to this slight, there is a third gem which pre-dates this pair and which she does not mention.

Whether Jensen's omission of the third gem is intentional or otherwise is not important and is not intended as a criticism. Rather, the omission, in addition to her offhand reference to the gems, is symptomatic of a larger problem: the fact that at the end of the twentieth century there was still no systematic study of the Crucifixion gems from which scholars could draw. Of itself this absence exposes some of the difficulties associated with the Crucifixion gems themselves. More broadly, it betrays the general reluctance to see engraved gems *per se* as a valid form of artistic expression and raises the issue of their neglect in the study of early Christian art. For our purposes, the absence of such a study also highlights the dubious position of the whole argument relating to the late appearance of the Crucifixion in early Christian art. For it is clear that no solutions to this problem can be satisfactorily proposed until certain questions relating to the Crucifixion gems are addressed.

The Study

In general terms, this study was undertaken to address these questions, of date, authenticity and artistic validity, and thus to bring the previously neglected engraved gems into the foreground of an iconographic study of Crucifixion images

⁹ Jensen (1995), p. 22.

in Late Antiquity. In order to achieve this end, a detailed study of each gem previously used to indicate the pre-fifth century appearance of the Crucifixion in Christian art has been carried out. Such a study provides the foundation for the conclusions that are drafted here: that that images of the Crucifixion were circulating prior to the fifth century but that in competition with other more popular subjects based on Jesus' earthly ministry, the subject was not popular and not widely reproduced. This counters the traditional view that the subject was consciously avoided and therefore rejected. To begin to effect the integration of the gems into a wider iconographic study, it is necessary to review the methods previously used to address the question of the slow appearance of the Crucifixion in art. These are outlined in Chapter I. Following this review is a survey of the past scholarship concerning the five gems themselves. The review exposes several important barriers to the reception of the gems within most art historical outlines of the early history of the Crucifixion image. One barrier relates to the problems of disparity between the five gems; a second relates to the broader question of the validity of engraved gems as an art form. This second barrier is associated with the wider problem of defining what constitutes Christian art.

The second chapter presents a chronologically organised review of the art and literary evidence that survives for the representation of the Crucifixion from c. AD 200 - c. 600. This is intended to orient the reader with the evidence and to demonstrate the chronological development of Crucifixion iconography as it is customarily presented, beginning with the Roman graffito, the fourth century sarcophagi, the two Italian images from the fifth century, and concluding with sixth century images.¹⁰ This traditional presentation makes it possible to outline the developmental model proposed by Friedrich Gerke for the early history of the Crucifixion image: that two types existed in the early Church for the representation of Jesus' Passion. In the first type, episodes from the narrative are treated symbolically, with the victorious cross highlighted as the pinnacle of the Passion on fourth century sarcophagi. In the second type narrative replaces symbolism, with the narrative cycles remaining focused on the theme of triumph but illustrating in stationary fashion that the path to victory involves some

¹⁰ for such an outline see Jensen (1995), p. 22.

suffering. Gerke thus argues that the Crucifixion can only form the centre of narrative cycles after the fifth century.¹¹ The review of the visual evidence undertaken in Chapter II of this thesis provides an essential platform from which to view the iconographic evidence of the gems; for the gems will be seen to add to and transform Gerke's developmental model.

Chapter III forms the core of the thesis, containing a detailed examination of the five gems and their iconography. In order for the iconographic, thematic and compositional development of Crucifixion imagery to be assessed systematically the examination proceeds chronologically, with comparisons drawn between each gem and the evidence previously set forth in Chapter II. In this way, a traditional art historical approach has been followed in that a number of works are identified, categorised, compared with each other and disposed into a linear chronological sequence. For ease of analysis, given that the gems cover a broad time period and the iconographic changes that occur and are illustrated by the gems are significant, the third chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1 groups the three earliest gems under the heading Late Antique: the first gem, the one omitted by Jensen, is "magical" in conception and dates from between the second and fourth centuries AD; the second and third gems are dated to the late fourth/early fifth century and are shown to preserve a rare variation of a composition used widely in early Christian art for the depiction of the veneration of Jesus or the triumphant cross by the Apostles. Part 2 presents two Byzantine gems: the first corresponds iconographically and compositionally to Crucifixion images produced in the early Byzantine period, often in conjunction with the pilgrim trade to the Holy Land; the second gem presents some complex epigraphic and iconographic problems. However, in direct contrast to previous classifications of the gem as Late Antique, the gem will be shown here to be dependant on Middle Byzantine iconographic and compositional models. The three amulets that appear at the end of the catalogue in *Appendix 1* are grouped together in part three of Chapter III. Two of these are spurious and their citation in previous studies has complicated the question of the origins and appearance of Crucifixion iconography prior to the

¹¹ Gerke (1948), ch. 3.

fifth century. Problems relating to their iconography, and thus their authenticity, are outlined here in order that these complications can begin to be unravelled.

Linear arrangements have a practical value as a way of organising complex bodies of data and in the context of this thesis there are evident advantages in such a sequence. For example, there remains some confusion as to how many Crucifixion gems survive from Late Antiquity. The arrangement allows for the evidence to be set out clearly and for the information that the gems yield to be specified and analysed in turn. This thesis aims to lay to rest some of the interpretative errors and misplaced assumptions that have previously arisen in scholarship with regard to the gems and been perpetuated in subsequent studies. Since several of the gems have also been incorrectly dated, the systematic evaluation that is enabled in a chronological arrangement allows for those errors to be assessed and rectified in turn. It also enables the most clear presentation of the new chronology proposed in this thesis. Moreover, the visible iconographic changes which occur from century to century, and which remain a profitable area for scholarly inquiry, are best highlighted in such an arrangement: for the gems fill in several gaps in the development of Crucifixion iconography as it has previously been understood. Hence the linear arrangement remains an appropriate one in this context for the contribution of the gems to the iconographic development of the Crucifixion to be illustrated.

From the iconographic study and redating of the extant Crucifixion gems this thesis is able to propose that at least two design models for the representation of Jesus on the cross were circulating prior to the fifth century but that they were not taken up with any enthusiasm. In conjunction with literary evidence regarding the use of the name of the crucified Jesus to ward off evil, both models reveal that in the early centuries Jesus was revered by Christians and “non-Christians” because of his death, not in spite of it. The earliest model is “magical”, that is, arising in a broader spiritual milieu than the confines of the Christian Church proper. This model is characterised by its realism. The second and later model is Christian and is characterised by its symbolism. Significantly, the second model presents a phase of iconographic development preparatory to that documented in the earliest appearances of the subject in fifth century narrative art. Both models show Jesus

naked on the cross, contrary to later depictions of him clothed first in the loincloth and subsequently in a full-length robe. By presenting an earlier phase of iconographic development, the gems dated to the Late Antique period thus contribute vital evidence to our understanding of the changing perception of nudity prior to the sixth century, and the reasons behind the robing of the crucified Jesus in art of the sixth and seventh centuries. By happy coincidence, the two Byzantine gems discussed in Chapter III augment this understanding: according to the late sixth/seventh century date proposed here for its production, the first gem may preserve one of the earliest re-appearances of the bare-chested crucified Jesus; the second, shown to be dependant on thirteenth century Byzantine models, attests to the increasing emphasis on his nudity on the cross by that date.

On the strength of such discoveries, the gems are shown to make a fundamental contribution to the study of Crucifixion iconography as it emerges and is developed in the East and West in the Late Antique period. They indicate that the prevailing assumptions regarding the rejection of Crucifixion imagery in Christian art prior to the fifth and sixth centuries need to be reconsidered.



THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

Crucifixion Iconography and Engraved Gems

At the turn of the twentieth century, art-historical monographs detailing the evolution of Crucifixion iconography in Christian art were united in their observation that, prior to the fifth century, artists appeared to avoid pictorialising the brutal execution of Jesus on a cross. The only pre-Constantinian image that came close to interpreting the event visually was the ostensibly blasphemous graffito excavated on the Palatine hill, Rome, in 1856 [*Pl. Ia*].¹² The drawing was scratched onto the plaster wall of the so-called *Paedagogium*, probably a school for the servants of the Imperial Palaces. The work is presumed to be pagan. It portrays a man named Alexamenos gesturing towards a tau cross on which is crucified a figure that although human, has the head of a donkey. Below this scene there appears the explanatory Greek inscription, ΑΛΕ ΖΑΜΕΝΟC CεΒΕΤΕ ΘΕΟΝ, “Alexamenos worships his God”.¹³ Although no fixed date can be given for the execution of the graffito, it is generally assigned to the early third century.¹⁴

For the first Christian representations of the Crucifixion, scholars had to look to fifth century Roman art: an ivory relief from the Maskell collection in the British Museum, and the carved panel from the wooden doors of the Church of Santa

¹² Garrucci *Deux monuments des premiers siècles de l'Eglise expliqués* (Rome, 1862), cited by Nordenfalk (1968), p. 130 n. 59. Subsequently: Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6, pp. 135-40, tav. 483. Leclercq records the date of discovery in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2 col. 3051, & on the graffito cols. 3050-3052. The graffito is now in the Antiquarium of the Palatine. On the graffito see further in Chapter II.

¹³ For this translation: Horsley (1987), nr 34 p. 137; Hengel (1995), p. 361; Tristan (1996), pp. 565-566. The inscription has caused translation problems, with differing emphases on the possessive or imperative, eg: Snyder (1985), p. 28, “Alexamenos, worship god”; Lajos (1914), pp. 63-64 “Alexemanos, worship your god”; and Hengel (1977), p. 19, “Alexamenos worships god”.

¹⁴ No later than the reign of Septimus Severus (d. 211). Toynbee (1970), p. 97. Hanfmann (1979), p. 206, rejects Leclercq’s ascription to the Hadrianic/Antonine periods as too early: “Ane”, in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 1.2, col. 2044. It is also ascribed a second century date, eg: Grossi “Cross, Crucifix”, in Berardino (ed.) (1992), v. 1 p. 210; Jensen (1995), p. 22.

Sabina on the Aventine, Rome [Pl.5].¹⁵ Both images feature representations of a living victorious Christ wearing a loincloth and form part of a series of scenes. The Maskell ivory Crucifixion is one in a narrative sequence of four panels which depict Jesus' triumphant passage from arrest to Resurrection via seven New Testament scenes [Pl.4b]. The Santa Sabina wooden panel is one in an original series of twenty-eight figurative panels which compare the miracles of Moses with those of Jesus.¹⁶ These two images have attained an extraordinary distinction because they are the sole surviving narrative pictorialisations of the Crucifixion from the one-hundred years of the fifth century, and remarkably, from the early Christian period *per se*. Apart from any iconographic or particular stylistic features, it is their singularity of subject that has been most heavily discussed: this promotion stretches from the nineteenth century, at a time when a burgeoning fascination with artistic representations of Christ crucified was inspiring various monographs devoted to the development of Crucifixion iconography,¹⁷ and into the twentieth century, when critical studies were undertaken by such scholars as Louis Bréhier, Johannes Reil, Henri Leclercq, Guillaume de Jerphanion, A. Grillmeier, L. H. Grondijs, Paul Thoby, Klaus Wessel and Gertrud Schiller.¹⁸

In addition to these three material figurations, the graffito, the ivory and the door-panel, five gemstones engraved with miniature pictorialisations of Jesus on the cross have been cited as evidence for the representation of the Crucifixion in Late Antiquity. The testimony of the gemstones to the circulation of images in this period showing Jesus on the cross should have resolved some of the issues otherwise raised by the rarity of the subject in art prior to the sixth century. However, the small number and largely ineffectual use of the gems in

¹⁵ Venturi (1901-1908), p. 390.

¹⁶ Grabar (1969), pp. 142-143.

¹⁷ For instance: the methodical examination of the Cross and Crucifix in art by Grimouard Saint-Laurent, in a series of articles under the heading "Iconographie de la Croix et du Crucifix" (1869). Further 19th century studies are included in the bibliography provided by Bréhier (1908), p. 7, & Thoby (1956), p. 233.

¹⁸ Bréhier's *Les Origins du Crucifix Dans l'Art Religieux* (1908), remains an instructive outline of the development of Crucifixion iconography. Reil (1904) & (1930); Leclercq "Croix et Crucifix" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, cols. 3045-3131; Jerphanion (1923); Grillmeier (1956); Grondijs (1957); Thoby (1959); Wessel (1960a), (1960b), (1966); & Schiller (1972). A recent and particularly extensive bibliography, incorporating literature on Crucifixion iconography of the early period, is provided by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska in her tome on the survival of Late Antique

iconographic studies has meant that much of the information they preserve regarding the reception of and experimentation with the subject prior to the mid-fifth century has been neglected, obscured, misused or misunderstood. Part B of this chapter will set out some of the reasons why this has occurred. Part A sets out the theories that, largely because of the inability to tap into the evidence provided by the engraved gems, have grown up to explain the apparent absence of the Crucifixion in Christian art prior to the sixth century.

The seeming reticence to portray the Crucifixion before the sixth century has proven notoriously difficult to explain.¹⁹ In many respects this difficulty is of scholarship's own creation, as E. J. Tinsley recognised in the 1970s. Within his essay "The Coming of a Dead and Naked Christ", Tinsley observed that the Christian fixation on the Crucifixion, particularly in western religious culture, had stimulated a widespread assumption amongst specialist and interested onlookers alike that from the outset, the image of Christ's death had been central to Christianity pictorially as it was theologically. And yet, "(i)conographically speaking", he reflected, "it takes nearly five centuries before a body of Christ is placed on the cross at all".²⁰ Compounding this fact was the unexpected guise in which the crucified Jesus first appeared: on the Maskell ivory he is shown to be alive, his near-naked body stretched out on the cross with the strength and ease not simply of a mortal athlete, but one of divine distinction [*Pl.5a*].

These two key assumptions, of import and appearance, have a large and evocative base; after all, whilst the image of Jesus on his cross illustrates the central episode of Christianity, it was for centuries the defining image of western civilisation. In addition, the image has been consistently and pointedly identified, particularly since the thirteenth century, with the portrayal of Jesus' human suffering. For through the subject artists have been able to explore the extremes of human experience. Significantly, both the "import" and "appearance" assumptions draw vital credence from the tenor of early Christian literature. The literary tradition, which does not shy away from the unspeakable violence of the Crucifixion but

Crucifixion iconography in Ethiopian art: Balicka-Witakowska (1997), p. 145-172. See also Sepiere (1994), bibliography pp. 237-262, plus *Catalogues* pp. 263 ff.

¹⁹ As Shepherd remarks, (1980) p. 112.

carefully records the death and elucidates its theological implications, is substantially responsible for the elevated position of the Crucifixion in Christian thought and history. It leads us to believe that the Crucifixion would be an ideal subject for representation.²¹ For example, the soteriological significance of Jesus' crucifixion is explicated by Paul as early as the first century. In focusing his efforts on preaching Christ crucified, Paul lifted the Crucifixion out of its historical context and interpreted it as the final step in a divine plan for salvation.²² Moreover, from the numerous references in Pauline literature to the fact and significance of Jesus' death it is evident that the primitive Church reflected on that death.²³ We then find in the slightly later Gospels a detailed preoccupation with the unfolding of the Passion narrative. In Luke's case this interest is embellished with the small but emotive description of the multitudes who, having witnessed the events at the cross, returned home "beating their breasts" [Lk. 23.48]. It is also interesting to observe that the Gospels devote more space to the recounting of the Passion than to any other event in Jesus' life, with the narrative pace slowing at its commencement to procure a tangible dramatic tension.²⁴ In fact they preserve the fullest accounts of a crucifixion in the ancient world.²⁵ After the first century early Christian writers, including Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Melito of Sardis, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian, emphasised the significance of the Crucifixion and its sacrificial import.

Beyond its eucharistic and baptismal significance, and its salvific import in dogmatic and sacramental treatises,²⁶ the importance of the Crucifixion in the Christian life is seen to be underlined in the incorporation of the cross into daily

²⁰ Tinsley (1972), p. 26.

²¹ As C. Smith (1896/7), p. 206, noted.

²² as is illustrated at 1 Corinthians, 2. 6-8. Brandon (1965), pp. 165-9.

²³ eg. Rom. 3.25-26; 4.25; 8.32-34; 1 Cor 7; 15.3-5; 2 Cor 18-21; Gal 1.3-4; 2.20-21; 3.13-14; I Thess 9-10; I Tim 2.6. Cited by Green (1988), p. 166 n. 22.

²⁴ Stevenson (1988), p. 56. On the significance of Jesus' death as witnessed in the narration of the Passion see Green (1988).

²⁵ Hengel (1977), p. 25, and *passim*. For non-biblical sources on crucifixion see also Weber (1979), pp. 5-12.

²⁶ Jensen (1994), p. 25. For the significance of the death in early Christian thinking see Pelikan (1971), pp. 141-155.

activities. The shape of the cross was signed across the body with the hand²⁷ and inscribed on the walls of houses.²⁸ It was also used in the liturgical context of baptism, the sign being traced on the foreheads of candidates to mark them as God's own. Yet in the fourth century Cyril of Jerusalem took the use of the sign one step further, admonishing Christians not to be ashamed of confessing Christ crucified and to use the sign on *all* occasions, including eating, drinking, going to bed.²⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan also suggests that by the second century the saving power of the suffering and death of Christ was celebrated more explicitly in liturgy than formulated in theology;³⁰ this has the implication that reflection on the Crucifixion in the early Church was in no way the preserve of the educated and literate ecclesiastical elite. Ultimately, in their summary confessions about Jesus Christ as the incarnate deity, the Apostles' Creed and that of Nicaea notoriously jump straight from his birth to the fact of his suffering under Pontius Pilate, in so doing, echoing and extending the Gospel writers' emphasis on his path of suffering and his Crucifixion.³¹

Leaving aside the issue of the unexpected guise in which Jesus was portrayed on the cross in the fifth century, namely alive,³² we can focus on the intensity of the modern presumption of early artistic import for the Crucifixion. Around this single premise, and fortified by the literary evidence, the framework for investigation into the problem of its late appearance within early Christian pictorial cycles was carefully constructed. It is this framework that has since

²⁷ There are many references to this act in the literature: Tertullian *Adversus Marcionem* 3.22; *De corona* 3; Minucius Felix *Octavius* 9; Lactantius *Institutiones divinae* 4.27. It is also mentioned in the church order, the *Apostolic Tradition* 37.1-4, probably written by Hippolytus in the first third of the third century; see Chadwick (1972), p. 47 n. 1 & p. 48. Julian the Apostate complained that Christians made the sign of the cross and inscribed it on the walls of their houses: Cyril of Alexandria *Contra Julianum* 6. John Chrysostom recommends that making the sign on the face with the finger would prevent demons coming near: *In Matthaicum Homilia* LIV,4.

²⁸ Julian the Apostate complained that Christians made the sign of the cross and inscribed it on the walls of their houses: Cyril of Alexandria *Contra Julianum* 6. John Chrysostom recommends that the sign be used on walls and windows: *In Matthaicum Homilia* LIV,4. See the discussion of the use of the cross in domestic buildings and daily life in Dauterman Maguire et. al. (1989), pp. 18-22.

²⁹ Cyril is cited by Daniélou (1956), pp. 61-62, who discusses the Christian use of the cross as a seal; on this see also Dölger (1911), pp. 171ff and Lampe (1967), passim.

³⁰ Pelikan (1971), p. 146-147.

³¹ noted by Jensen (1995), p. 23 & Pelikan (1996), p. 18.

³² The "live Christ" iconography is seen as an informed response to christological concerns relating to the death of Christ which emerged as a central issue after the fourth century.

informed most references to the Crucifixion's "absence" and has in turn contributed to the marginalisation of the gemstones in iconographic studies.

Generally speaking, drawn out of a vigorous curiosity to reflect on the growth of the Crucifixion to prominent status within the canon of Christian imagery, scholars have been primarily concerned to locate the subject's exact entry point into narrative Christian art. In itself, this is not problematic. Examining the genesis of something, whether it be an historical movement or an art form, is a natural and valid process of discovery. It is particularly alluring in an extreme case such as this, where we are dealing with one of the most pervasive images in western art. However, when the convergence of attention on the "beginnings" of the image was accompanied by the rather weighty baggage of the "*a priori* import" presumption, two fundamental problems were quickly exposed. The first is related to the rarity of Crucifixion images prior to the late sixth century, when the subject came to play a conspicuous role in miniature formats:³³ for in the process of seeking examples, the unearthing of several pre-seventh century pictorial narratives from which the Crucifixion, although thematically suitable, had nevertheless been excluded,³⁴ rapidly fed the notion that the phenomenal scarcity of Crucifixion imagery was due to a careful and deliberate *avoidance*. The second problem, created by the expectation of an immediate reception into the visual parlance of the early Church and exposed by the discovery of apparent avoidance, was the enormous disparity that subsequently appeared to exist between the material remains of early Christianity and the literary record, which placed such emphasis on the import of the cross.

Essentially, attempts to explain the first problem, that of avoidance, became an effort to solve the second; in other words, to narrow what Samuel G. F. Brandon termed the "hiatus" between the artistic evidence and written word.³⁵ Methodologically, there are potential problems associated with the investigation

³³ The Crucifixion appears within cycles of New Testament christological scenes on ampullae and jewellery of the early Byzantine period: for the objects see briefly Kitzinger (1988), pp. 58-63.

³⁴ The observation of the absence is a natural one: eg. Marucchi (1905), v. 1 p. 320-321, Bréhier (1918), p. 81. The apparent deliberacy of omission in certain contexts, the most famous being the Brescia casket, later fourth century, and the mosaic programme at S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, sixth century, is outlined by Jerphanion (1923), pp. 42-43; see also Grondijs (1957), p. 461.

³⁵ Brandon (1975), p. 171.

of this disparity between the literary and artistic records in early Christianity, and ideally, the key is to strike a balance between the two: of the blatant importance of the Crucifixion illustrated in the former, and ambivalence or neglect suggested in the second.³⁶ In attempting to resolve the hiatus, theologians and historians of the art, culture and thought of early Christianity have proposed various solutions with varying degrees of success. What will be clear from a general survey of these solutions is that the need to account for the absence and later rarity of material evidence has become paramount rather than preparatory to most examinations of the question. The result procured by this misplacement of emphasis, with its adjunct conclusion that because there are so few surviving images of the subject it must have been avoided, has been the creation of a broad-based theory of rejection. Whilst this theory, in its various presentations, attempts to balance the literary and artistic evidence, it invariably achieves a distorted view of that evidence, highlighting one aspect to offset another. Amongst other factors, it has directly contributed to the aspersions of doubt cast on the evidence of engraved gems within the study of the emergence of Crucifixion iconography in Late Antiquity. Since the evidence of engraved gems forms the focus of this thesis, it is necessary to outline the rejection theory in brief.

A. METHODS OF APPROACH

I. Creating a Theory of Rejection

In their attempts to address the question of the late introduction of the Crucifixion into early Christian art, and thereby to resolve the disparity between the written word and the material remains of early Christianity, scholars can be seen to invoke specific factors. These are interpreted as inducing or even necessitating the categorical rejection of the subject. Although receiving slight modification each time it is presented, with variations in the degree of emphasis placed upon one or other point and with crossovers between differing points invariably taking place, the principal elements may be separated into five strands and the upshot of their proposals summarised as follows.

³⁶ Jensen (1995), p. 23.

Firstly, social and political factors prevented the pictorialisation of the horror of the Crucifixion. Secondly, artists were too shy to depict such a profound mystery, sometimes on the pretext of idolatry. Thirdly, theological pitfalls induced an embargo on the representation of the subject and ultimately impeded its portrayal in narrative art. Fourthly, art historical problems attendant to the depiction of the death acted as a retardant to the visual expression of the subject. Finally, the Crucifixion is not actually absent, but is habitually presented in narrative images or symbols which function as typological and allegorical allusions or as oblique references to the event. The latter hypothesis seeks to maintain the modern desire to discover a foundational level of importance ascribed to the Crucifixion in art, and so actively looks to find and thus promote the thematic presence of the event in the formative centuries of Christian art.

The parameters of this study do not afford the space for an effective analysis of the five strands. Hence it is important to stress at the outset that the following survey is intended not as a critique of each strand, but a general outline of the five, as far as they can be distinguished. Since it is necessary to furnish the scholarly background against which to set the traditional methods of receiving and treating the evidence of engraved gems in studies of Crucifixion iconography, it remains necessary to take a brief look at each strand. The following survey proceeds from the excellent and much needed overview provided by Robin Jensen.³⁷

1. Social and Political Impediments

Scholars holding to the first strand argue from the platform that social and political factors contributed to a marked reluctance to depict the Crucifixion. The predominating concern of this theory is the historical proximity of early generations of Christians to Jesus' brutal crucifixion around AD 33.³⁸ Proponents argue that being so close to the event, Christians would naturally hesitate to relive its horror. Upon this central tenet, a litany of accessory factors can be seen to have been layered by scholars to produce an expansive hypothesis of avoidance. Firstly,

³⁷ Jensen (1994), pp. 22-28. A short synopsis of the reasons preventing the representation of the Crucifixion also appeared in Thoby (1959), p. 18.

³⁸ Jensen (1995) p. 23; and see her references n. 4 p. 24. On the date of the Crucifixion, Maier (1968).

any inhibitions relating to historical proximity must arise directly from the fact of the extreme brutality and humiliation of Crucifixion as a form of public execution, and its repugnant association with the most dangerous criminals and the lower classes.³⁹ Other factors, cited by proponents of this theory as preventing the depiction of the Crucifixion, include: the lowly legal status of Christians; their violent and harsh treatment in times of threatened and actual persecution; and their subsequent precarious social condition prior to the Peace of the Church. The reality that crucifixion was still being practised in Constantinian times is thus seen to compound the early Christians' vulnerable position. Proceeding from this background, the classic argument of fear can be proposed by proponents with conviction. This argument runs as follows: a degree of social and political stigma was attached to being a follower of a reputedly incarnate, yet paradoxically crucified deity, and that in fear of stigmatisation and its potentially brutal repercussions, Christians were deterred from producing representations of the Crucifixion that suggested or detailed the suffering and humiliation of Jesus.⁴⁰ There is the final consideration that in competition with other religions for new converts, the visual and public advertisement of the fact that they worshipped a God whose only Son was executed as an obscure criminal would have been counterproductive for Christianity as a minority sect.⁴¹ Thus on this model, a foundational stratum of social and political factors, compounding the historical proximity, is regarded as proving comprehensively prohibitive to the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion in the early Church.⁴²

Unequivocal support for, and the ultimate certification of, this theory is preserved in literary and material evidence. Aside from the Palatine graffito,⁴³ the testimony of pagan writers confirms that in the early period, the Christian worship of a

³⁹ This has been well documented, notably by Hengel (1977), *passim*, but see his summary pp. 86-90. Brutality is often cited as an inhibiting factor in summary histories of early Christian art: eg. see recently Borchgrave (1999), p. 12.

⁴⁰ Murray & Murray (1996), p. 126; Shepherd (1980), p. 112. See also Marucchi (1905), v. 1, p. 321.

⁴¹ Smith & Cheetham (1875) v. 1, pp. 512-513.

⁴² Thus Maskell (1905), p. 250, can list prejudice, timidity, reverence, suffering and derision as reasons behind the subject's absence from art.

⁴³ See Murray & Murray (1996), p. 126, for the classic use of the Palatine Graffito as evidence in the presentation of the theory of rejection.

crucified man was open to misinterpretation and derision by outsiders.⁴⁴ In his *True Doctrine* of around AD 170, the Greek philosopher Celsus skilfully ridicules the Christian disposition towards the veneration of the cross as the instrument of the Passion.⁴⁵ Slightly later, the Crucifixion and the Christian worship of a crucified man forms the prime objection of another pagan, Caecilius, to Christianity.⁴⁶ Martin Hengel comments that Octavius' inability to address this point exposes the predicament of early Christians with regard to the scandal of the cross, a predicament which saw many Christians succumb to docetist theologies.⁴⁷

So, whilst not necessarily a source of dishonour, the Crucifixion could prove a source of embarrassment for some Christians in the pre-Constantinian period, with many vulnerable to the misunderstanding of their neighbours. Negative attitudes towards crucifixion as a form of punishment were pervasive and deeply ingrained in ancient culture; references to the cross as the instrument of death and to crucifixion constituted abusive and vulgar taunts amongst slaves and prostitutes from the third century BC.⁴⁸ In addition to social stigma, the scandalous concept of a crucified Son of God was deeply offensive to philosophical and religious sensibilities in antiquity.⁴⁹ Rather than abating, this offence is seen to have increased, attendant to Christianity's own expansion under intermittent toleration in the first three centuries AD. A caricature from the first half of the fourth century, crudely scratched onto a Roman corbel brick (measuring 30.0 x 46.0 cms) before firing, may provide an interesting monument to the endurance of this negative reaction.⁵⁰ The brick, excavated from a Roman Fortress hill in Oroszvár,

⁴⁴ For the pagan literature, including Tacitus and the Younger Pliny, see Hengel (1977), ch. 1 "The 'folly' of the crucified Son of God", pp. 1-10, especially pp. 2-4. Concerning derision see Labriolle (1942), pp. 194-199 & Toynbee (1970), p. 97. Concerning pagan criticism of Christianity from the early second century to the late fourth century: Wilken (1984).

⁴⁵ As recorded by Origen in his *Contra Celsum* 6.34, written about eighty years after Celsus' book; the date of Celsus' work is given by Wilken (1984), p. 94.

⁴⁶ As recorded in Minucius Felix *Octavius* 9.4, possibly written in the early third century.

⁴⁷ Hengel (1977), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁸ Hengel (1977), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁹ For the offense of the cross in the ancient world see Hengel (1977), ch. 3. The author cites the graffito p. 19. Hengel describes the concept of a crucified Son of God as "... *an offence without analogy*" (author's italics): Hengel (1995) p. 363 & pp. 359-363.

⁵⁰ Lajos, (1914), pp. 63-64 & p. 71, fig. 1. Sági (1968), pp. 391-400, abb. 5. Although mentioned by Hengel (1977), p. 20, little reference of the brick has been made in subsequent scholarship.

Hungary, preserves a crudely outlined figure dragging a latin cross, his tongue hanging out and his legs bent in the effort.

Derogatory allusions to the Christian belief in a crucified saviour were not the preserve of pagans: a Jew is held responsible for the caricature of Jesus clothed in a toga and carrying a book, but shown with the ears of an ass and a hooved foot, erected in Carthage around AD 197.⁵¹ This image carried the accompanying inscription, DEUS CHRISTIANORUM ONOKOITHΣ.⁵² Morton Smith translates this as “The god of the Christians (is) a donkey who beds (with his worshippers)”.⁵³ These instances of mockery, in word and image, witnesses to the acerbic nature and outward profession of anti-Christian sentiment across many levels of society, through at least until the Constantinian period. The impassioned plea of the fourth century bishop Cyril of Jerusalem that Christians be not ashamed of the cross can thus be read as an indication that many still were, even after the acceptance of Christianity as an official religion.⁵⁴

None of the factors touched upon within the wide boundaries of this recursive theory can be seriously doubted as a cause of reluctance when it came to the realistic pictorialisation of Jesus on the cross in the early Church. Yet the theory is used more generally to suggest a *complete* rejection of *any* image or visual reference to Jesus on the cross prior to the fifth century. The ultimate extension of this usage is the belief that the lack of realism in the incipient Crucifixion iconography of the fifth century is born of the early reticence and the very real experience of the nature of suffering through martyrdom and persecution in the first three centuries AD.⁵⁵ Of course we now know that martyrdom was sporadic and local rather than comprehensive across the Empire.

⁵¹ Tertullian describes the person who erected the representation as *suae religionis desertor, solo detrimento cutis Iudaeus. Ad Nationes*, i. 14. CCL v. I pt. 1 (1954), line 29-30.

⁵² Tertullian *Apologeticum* 16.12.

⁵³ Morton Smith (1978), p. 62 & corresponding notes p. 183. In their edition for the LCL [nr 250 (London, 1984)] Glover and Rendall translate this as “The God of the Christians, ass-begotten”, noting [p. 84 n. 1] that the original word ONOKOITHΣ is uncertain and may have been corrupt Greek. See I. Opelt “Esel”, *RAC* VI (1966) [cited by Hanfmann (1979), p. 206, n. 9], and Sulzberger (1925), p. 389.

⁵⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 13.3. Noted by Grigg (1974), p. 220.

⁵⁵ as argued by Maskell (1905), p. 91.

2. *Mystery and Idolatry*

Connected to the concerns raised by, and related to, the historical proximity of Christians to the Crucifixion is the notion that the avoidance of images showing Jesus on his cross can be seen as a manifestation of the intense sacrality and profundity of the event as it was understood by the faithful. On this second hypothesis, artists are seen to have eschewed the subject as if shielded by “some sacred interdict”,⁵⁶ the solemn tragedy thereby remaining a theme of devout and prayerful meditation rather than portraiture in art.⁵⁷

In this context, the issue of avoidance is not simply a question of whether or not the incarnate deity could be represented on the cross, but whether it was possible to do so without profaning the very mystery that the Christians were in awe of.⁵⁸ As Jensen points out, this theory (which André Grabar dismissed as a “gratuitous affirmation” in light of literature from the period, which is consistently preoccupied with the Crucifixion),⁵⁹ remains fundamentally linked to the broader question of idolatry and the role of images in the early Church.⁶⁰ It is generally believed that the early absence of the central Christian mysteries in art, including the Crucifixion and Resurrection, is due to a “shyness”, in agreement with the official “hostile” attitude of the Church as it is represented in literature towards religious images and figural representations.⁶¹ In consideration of this official stance, the emergence of religious imagery is located in deviant lay circles where expressions of personal piety can be seen to have emerged in conflict with the traditionally austere view of art maintained in the upper levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.⁶²

Despite the systematic dismantling of the old adage that the early Church was iconophobic, notably by Sr. Mary Charles Murray⁶³ - who in addition to placing

⁵⁶ Bevan (1940), p. 101.

⁵⁷ Withrow (1895), pp. 273-280.

⁵⁸ Jensen (1995), p. 24.

⁵⁹ Grabar (1969), p. 132.

⁶⁰ Jensen (1995), p. 24.

⁶¹ Regarding the “hostility theory”, the most helpful comments remain those of Murray (1977), p. 304 & (1981), p. 13.

⁶² For references to the main literature, by von Dobschütz, Koch and Elliger, see Grigg (1976), p. 428 n. 1. Upheld by Bevan, (1950) the theory was ultimately canonised by Kitzinger (1954).

⁶³ Murray (1977), pp. 303-345 & (1981), ch.1 pp. 13ff. Also on the Church and the visual arts, Menozzi (1991); Bigham (1992), and Finney (1994). Finney is reviewed by Murray (1997).

the literary evidence on which the “hostility” theory was constructed into its rightful context concurrently countered that no art could exist until the Christian community was materially identifiable⁶⁴ - it remains alarmingly entrenched in scholarly thought.⁶⁵ Reappearing in shorter histories or introductions to the study of early Christianity and its art, it thus reasserts itself as one cause of the delayed appearance of the Crucifixion in Christian art.⁶⁶

3. Christological Concerns

Problems relating to the definition of Jesus, as human and divine, have also been cited as obstructing both the initial experimentation with, and subsequent appearance of, a Christian image of the Crucifixion. On the whole, this strand of argument pertains to the strangeness of Crucifixion iconography as it appears in the fifth century, with Jesus shown as alive. However, growing christological concerns are also cited as impeding the ultimate emergence of Crucifixion iconography.

Concentrating on the first part of the equation, the initial “absence”, Jensen demonstrates that two distinct options can be discerned in the presentation of this theory: the first denies Christ’s humanity; the second emphasises it.⁶⁷ Both highlight doctrine over contemporary social and political issues as possible retarding factors in the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion prior to the fifth century.

On the first option, Docetic or Gnostic denials of the humanity of Jesus, and of his suffering, are seen to have prompted artists to eschew illustrations of the birth, infancy or death of Christ. Ernst Renan, the progenitor of the theory that Christian art originated in heretical lay Christianity,⁶⁸ noted the absence of New Testament narratives in the earliest Christian art, and particularly of the Passion. In view of the absence of iconography illustrating Christ crucified, Renan argued that if art originated in heretical Christian groups whose christologies were Doceticic, there

⁶⁴ Murray (1982), p. 171.

⁶⁵ Although the rejection of the theory has been absorbed [see John Dillenberger (1987), p. 3] the old view is still reasserted [eg. Koch (1996), p. 87; Garnett & Rosser (2000), p. 11.]

⁶⁶ eg. Smith (1896/7), pp. 205-206.

⁶⁷ For the distinction between the two, Jensen (1995), pp. 24-25.

⁶⁸ Renan (1891), pp. 539ff. The theory was traced to Renan by Murray (1977), p. 305 & (1981), p.14; and Finney (1978), pp. 404-405.

would be no need for a Jesus iconography, a fact seemingly borne out in the general absence of New Testament narratives from extant primitive Christian art. The portrayal of a dying, crucified Jesus would serve to highlight his human nature, which the Docetists, Apollinarians and Monophysites were intent on denying, obscuring or minimising. J D. Breckenridge subscribed to the theory that the origins of Christian art can be located in deviationist or heretical circles of Christianity, in opposition to a pure or “orthodox” Christianity upheld by those opponents of art, the clergy. He subsequently attributed the gradual broadening of the repertoire in the later third century, after an initially slow reception of art into the early Church, to an “enfeeblement” of the ecclesiastical hierarchy’s ability to suppress wayward tendencies amongst the laity, particularly following the Decianic and succeeding persecutions.⁶⁹ On this matrix, early Christian art reflects popular faith rather than that of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Hence, the “hiatus” between the material and literary remains of the Church *vis à vis* the import of the Crucifixion might be explained. If “orthodox” Christian art was in turn influenced by such Gnostic art, it too would show an absence of New Testament narratives explicating the divinity of Jesus in events on earth. Jensen thus notes that the application of this model implies that art expressed heterodox rather than orthodox beliefs.⁷⁰

The second option in the presentation of this theory argues that art did emphasise the humanity of Jesus over his divinity, focusing on his earthly ministry as a human rather than the son of God. At the root of this formula Jensen discerns an adoptionist christology.⁷¹ Since adoptionism, exemplified by the Ebionites, Paul of Samosata, Theodore of Mopsuestia and the so-called Antiochene School, held that Jesus was a man on whom divine qualities were conferred, an adherence to its tenets may explain the presence of baptismal imagery in early Christian art and the absence of Crucifixion and Resurrection imagery.⁷² Yet again, in dealing with the basic incompatibility between art images and contemporary theological treatises, the iconographic evidence is shown to deviate from orthodox theology.

⁶⁹ Breckenridge (1978), pp. 367-368.

⁷⁰ Jensen (1995), p. 24.

⁷¹ Jensen (1995), pp. 24-25.

⁷² See briefly on Adoptionism: Baillie (1961), pp. 129-132; Shepherd (1980), p. 105.

Subsequently Jensen argues that this theory is methodologically defective, giving undue weight to the artistic evidence and thus asserting that early Christians were uninterested in the atoning aspects of suffering and vicarious death.⁷³

Beyond arguments of the origin of Christian art and the appearance of Crucifixion images, it is obvious that the theological definition of the death of Jesus played a critical role in the process of pictorialising the Crucifixion. Since the definition remained incomplete in the fifth century, when the Maskell and Sabina reliefs were produced, the representation of Jesus alive on the Cross can be seen as a conscious measure in avoiding the christological problems regarding the state of Christ's two natures at the point of his death. If the illustration of the historical events at the Cross necessitated the representation of Jesus at some moment during his death, then it would seem easier to avoid touching the subject at all.⁷⁴ Anna Kartsonis underlines the validity of this thesis by noting the absence of any written or visual evidence to suggest that images of the dead Christ were produced in the early period. Hence she concludes that the early Christian inhibition towards the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion narrative should be considered within the wider theme of the artistic rejection of the theme of the death of Jesus during the early period, due to christological concerns.⁷⁵ A natural development of this theory brings us to the second part of the equation noted earlier: the manner in which Jesus was first portrayed. It is cogently argued that the liveliness of Jesus on the cross in the fifth century also resulted from a pre-occupation with christological concerns, a subject of discussion beyond the confines of this thesis.⁷⁶

4. Art Historical Obstacles

In addition to potential social, political as well as christological factors, artistic problems attendant to the depiction of the Crucifixion are also cited as retarding the pictorialisation of the subject. On a specific level, these included the lack of

⁷³ Jensen (1995), p. 23.

⁷⁴ Kartsonis (1986), p. 38.

⁷⁵ Kartsonis (1986), pp. 33-35 regarding the "alive" iconography; & pp. 35-39 for a concise summation of the Theology of the Death of Christ. See further: Reil (1904), ch. 1 "Der Kreuzestod Christi in der religiösen Gesamtanschauung der alchristlichen Welt", pp. 1-35; Grillmeier (1956), and Shepherd (1980), pp. 101-120.

⁷⁶ see Kartsonis (1986), Reil (1904), Grillmeier (1956), and Shepherd (1980) as in the note above.

iconographic precedents.⁷⁷ On a more general level, the avoidance of the subject may be seen as part of a thematic avoidance of death in general Christian artistic expression, as Kartsonis notes, and the focus instead on divine deliverance.⁷⁸

Early Christian art was firmly rooted in a cult of death: the marking of death, the commemoration of the deceased's earthly existence and their passing into the afterlife.⁷⁹ The funeral connection was manifest in the frequent use of images reinforcing a thematic emphasis on eternal salvation and the afterlife; the actual death, the process of dying and images of dying figures from the Old and New Testaments, were not included.⁸⁰ Grabar attributes this to the predominance of the theme of Christ's victory over death.⁸¹ Hence the early Christian pictorial cycles on sarcophagi and catacombs of the third and fourth centuries show scenes of Christ's power and beneficence, not death or suffering, with the systematic avoidance of Biblical episodes that recalled the death of a biblical character. Most of the images represent salvation, preservation and especially deliverance from the danger of death, offering paradigms of salvation and the hope of resurrection for Christians, reminders that God succours those who trust in Him. Hence the popularity of Old Testament subjects such as the Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace, Jonah, Daniel, Noah, Susannah, the Sacrifice of Isaac, Moses Striking the Rock and Adam and Eve.⁸² The great exception to this rule is the popularity of the New Testament story of the Death of Lazarus [Jn 11]. We know from the Johannine narrative of this event that Jesus was deeply moved by his friend's death, and even wept [Jn 11.35]. Yet in art, the episode was recounted as an instance of divine deliverance, the clinching detail to the story being the miracle that occurred *after* death.⁸³ Hence the visual emphasis was placed on the restoration of Lazarus' life rather than his death, or Jesus' personal despondency. This directly corresponds to the emphasis on the Resurrection in early Passion imagery, as the Maskell panels

⁷⁷ Grabar (1969), pp. 14-15. Grabar's suggestion that a lack of iconographic precedents inhibited the pictorialisation of Christ's Crucifixion is countered by Toynbee (1970), p. 97: "for many other biblical scenes in early Christian art no models in the pagan repertory existed."

⁷⁸ Kartsonis (1986), p. 38.

⁷⁹ See Elsner (1998b), chapter 6: "Art and Death".

⁸⁰ Middleton (1892), p. 54; Grabar (1969), pp. 14-15.

⁸¹ Grabar (1969), p. 15.

⁸² Buser (1980), pp. 4-6 & 15: the earliest Christian art is seldom narrative, but symbolic and condensed in character.

⁸³ Grabar (1969), pp. 14-15.

illustrate in their presentation of the Resurrection as the culmination of the path to the cross [Pl.4b].

5. The “Quasi-avoidance” Solution

Finally, there is the proposition that the subject of the Crucifixion was not absent from early Christian art but pervaded it in the form of Old Testament subjects and symbols. Since it does not advocate a thematic absence *per se*, this seems to solve the nagging problem of literature’s preoccupation with, and art’s avoidance of, the subject of the Crucifixion. However, there are certain dangers linked with this particular thesis, and it is worth examining these in more detail than has been attempted for the previous four theories.

Emulating the practice of Patristic literature, which made pointed typological connections between Old and New Testament episodes, proponents of this fifth theory take literature rather than art as a starting point. They navigate their way through early Christian imagery in the pursuit of “less direct” references to the Crucifixion that will underscore the literary emphasis. They reject the notion that narrative images in early Christian art function merely to illustrate a given textual passage, arguing instead that images such as that of Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac, may refer typologically or allegorically to the Crucifixion, as would seem to be the case on the Junius Bassus sarcophagus.⁸⁴ Whilst the Sacrifice of Isaac emerged in Christian art after 313⁸⁵ as one of the most important and dramatic Old Testament stories presented as a pre-figuration of Christ’s Passion, notably on fourth century Passion sarcophagi,⁸⁶ other Old Testament figures occupying a prominent place in fourth century piety and interpreted as early types for the Passion included Job in Distress⁸⁷ and Moses Raising the Serpent.⁸⁸ The iconographic type of the *agnus dei* could evoke the sacrifice of

⁸⁴ The context of the Abraham/Isaac scene on this sarcophagus is suggestive of a typological interpretation: Malbon (1990), pp. 45-47.

⁸⁵ van Woerden (1961), p. 242.

⁸⁶ On the story as the Jewish prototype of the death of Christ: Schiller (1972), p. 4; Malbon (1990), pp. 44-47. For the iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac, the early studies of A. M. Smith (1922), & van Woerden (1961), remain seminal. See also Gutmann (1984), pp. 115-122, and Snyder (1985), pp. 50-52.

⁸⁷ A brief study of the iconography of Job in the early Christian period appeared in Terrien (1996), chs. 3 & 4. Also: von der Osten (1953), pp. 153-158.

⁸⁸ The connection between Moses lifting up the Serpent and the Crucifixion was made in the New Testament: Jn3:14.

Christ,⁸⁹ and likewise the *orant*, Tertullian having made a connection between the pose struck by Christians in prayer and that of Christ on the cross.⁹⁰ Customarily reserved for Old Testament figures such as Susanna, Noah, the Three Hebrews, the Virgin and martyrs,⁹¹ as well as for early images of Abraham and Isaac,⁹² the *orant* attitude, and its connection with the Crucifixion, was particularly germane when the type was utilised for the depiction of Moses, Barnabus having interpreted the story from Exodus 17:8-12, in which Moses held his arms aloft upon a hill to subdue Amalek's forces, as a foreshadowing of the cross.⁹³ Such Old Testament prototypes of the Crucifixion, illustrating the pre-ordaining of the cross and therefore of Jesus' suffering, helped Christians to understand his otherwise confounding death. In time the figure of Daniel, in the attitude of the *orant* and invariably flanked by two lions, developed as an abridged representation of the story of Daniel in the Lions' Den. It became an eminently popular subject in early Christian art and appeared in various media.⁹⁴ Although the faith Daniel demonstrated in the lions' den was upheld by the early Christians as a paradigm of salvation, this *orant* type was also interpreted as a prefiguration of the crucified Christ.⁹⁵ Such an interpretation of the naked *orant* standing between two animals as a Daniel/Jesus type appears to be particularly apt in the case of a Byzantine pendant in the Royal Ontario Museum where the iconographic type appears on the obverse face [Pl.1b]; on the reverse face, a *crux ansata* seems to seal the interpretation of the amulet as a direct reference to the cross and Passion of Christ [Pl.1c].⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1 p. 513, cite Martigny's reference to the lamb as a visual substitute for the Crucifixion in the early times of persecution.

⁹⁰ Tertullian *De oratione* 14. Similarly Minucius Felix *Octavius* 29.8. Millet (1916), p. 396 n. 2. On the figure of the *orant* in early Christian art: Snyder (1985), pp. 19-20 with bibliography. See also Grabar (1969), p. 74-75; Schiller (1972), p. 90; Milburn (1988), p. 109.

⁹¹ Vickers (1974), p. 20.

⁹² According to Jensen the earliest image of Abraham and Isaac, which depicts them as *orants*, appears in the Catacomb of Callistus: Jensen (1995), p. 27.

⁹³ *The Epistle of Barnabus* 12. Trans. Staniforth (1968), pp. 173-4. For the figure as a prefiguration of the Crucifixion in art: Schiller (1972), p. 90; Milburn (1988), p. 109.

⁹⁴ For examples of the subject in early Christian art see, Leclercq "Daniel" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 4.1 (1920), col. 221-248.

⁹⁵ Kraus (1882-1886), v. 1, p. 345.

⁹⁶ Ontario, Royal Ontario Museum, Greek and Roman Department: Acc. no. 949 x 161.22; dark red stone with pink inclusions (possibly porphyry?). Purchased by C. T. Currelly, one of the founding fathers of the ROM, in Egypt, where he worked with Flinders Petrie. The pendant is currently on display in the Byzantine Gallery. Published in Bonner (1950), p. 222, pl. xviii nr 332.

Less direct references to the Crucifixion can also be found in ambiguous signs and reverential symbols: following the pattern set by such early Christian authors as Justin Martyr and Minucius Felix, simple objects such as anchors, ploughs, axes, ship masts, and so on, can be interpreted as covert references to the cross and thus Passion of Christ.⁹⁷ Hence, the early motif of a fish or dolphin placed at an angle across the stem of an anchor or trident, is still interpreted in scholarship as an allusion to the Crucifixion.⁹⁸ Bolstered by the accretion of such visual evidence, proponents of this theory argue for a comprehensive revision of the classic reading of early Christian art as devoid of Crucifixion imagery.⁹⁹

The artful use of Old Testament subjects in certain pre-Constantinian circumstances to comment on the Crucifixion without having to tackle the christological issues that would otherwise attend a literal rendering of the event, is celebrated.¹⁰⁰ However, the potential for such narrative images, as well as signs, symbols or iconographic types, to carry *several* levels of meaning rather than one primary meaning must be emphasised.

A strong objection to the literary-based approach was identified over a century ago by the eminent French scholar Edmond Le Blant (1818-1897), whose research in Christian archaeology remains fundamental. According to Robert Gaston,¹⁰¹ Le Blant was probably the first archaeologist to identify the difficulties involved in interpreting the iconographic themes of early Christian sarcophagi in the light of specific contemporary texts. Gaston noted that one of Le Blant's most valuable insights was recognising that there was a lack of complete uniformity amongst the early fathers with regard to the allegorical significance accorded to a given figure from the Old Testament. Hence, it was not only hazardous, but methodologically unsound to interpret works of art exclusively on the basis of individual texts.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Justin Martyr, 1 *Apologia* 55.3-8; Minucius Felix *Octavius* 29.6.

⁹⁸ For example, a red jasper in the British Museum: Dalton (1901), p. 2 nr 4. For this and other examples of the motif: Leclercq "Gemmes", in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1 (1924), col. 832 nr 5018 & nrs. 5019-5021. For the scholarship: Martigney (1877), p. 226; Kraus (1882-1886), v. 2.2 p. 243; Marucchi (1905), p. 321; Jéglot (1934), p. 12; and more recently, Bréhant (1995), fig. 2.

⁹⁹ Jensen (1995), pp. 25-27, a recent exponent of this theory.

¹⁰⁰ eg. Grabar (1969), p. 146.

¹⁰¹ Gaston (1969), p. 51.

¹⁰² Gaston (1969), p. 51, citing Le Blant, *Étude sur les sarcophages chrétiens antiques de la ville d'Arles* (Paris, 1878), introduction.

Furthermore, although textual sources can be used to arrive at one understanding of the potential significance of an image, there can be, as Murray has warned, “a large measure of doubt as to the possibility of its being the correct one, unless it is always borne in mind that the literary sources themselves have a context.”¹⁰³ Subsequently, many images and cycles of the third and fourth centuries, such as Daniel, Jonah and Abraham/Isaac, cannot be deemed an illustration of one text, but may carry several layers of meaning. Moreover, these meanings may be general rather than specific, so that rather than representing particular events, they may have been intended to suggest them only.¹⁰⁴ Hence, in the instance of those images with plausible roles as symbolic, metaphoric, typological or allegorical references to the Crucifixion, it is extremely unlikely that they can be read exclusively as an antitype of the Passion of Christ in *every* pictorial context.

Images also have their own theological milieu; hence a subject such as the Sacrifice of Isaac, significant to both Jewish and Christian viewers, can have multiple meanings or evocations according to the religious inclination of the viewer and regardless of the religious persuasion of the person who made or commissioned the image.¹⁰⁵ For example, on seeing a Jewish-made image of the sacrifice, a Christian can still read a Christian slant into the image. It is therefore dangerous to interpret in each appearance of the Sacrifice of Isaac an intended typological association with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, although this was one of the possible interpretations, made as early as the second century.¹⁰⁶ Brandon also highlighted the risk of giving precedence to literature over the testimony of iconography when determining the ideas and concerns of the early Christians.¹⁰⁷ He pointed out that the early Christians were not as familiar with the content of New Testamental and Patristic literature as modern readers are; and that the iconographic record of the faith would hold more currency for the ordinary believer and indeed make more impact than the written word.¹⁰⁸ Hence ordinary

¹⁰³ Murray (1981), pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁴ Grabar (1969), p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Elsner (1998a) p. 741.

¹⁰⁶ The typological connection is made in *Epistula Barnabae* 7.3, dated sometime between AD 70-200, and in Melito of Sardes' *Homily on the Passion*, about AD 190.

¹⁰⁷ Brandon (1975), p. 171.

¹⁰⁸ see Brandon's concluding paragraph, (1975), p. 172.

Christians would not necessarily make a connection between a current theological musing on the Sacrifice of Isaac and an image of the Biblical story.

Further to the literary and theological background against which an image is interpreted is its material context, as an isolated image, placed within a decorative scheme or juxtaposed with another narrative image or symbol - such as the union of the figure of Daniel with the *crux ansata* on the Ontario pendant [Pl. 1b & c]. Yet a representation of Daniel in the lions' den in a Christian catacomb might portray the Resurrection, the Eucharist, the prayer for the dead, the Crucifixion, or fortitude in martyrdom, so that Charles Morey could express concern at the very diversity of possible interpretations.¹⁰⁹ Aside from the similarly multivalent significance of the Sacrifice of Isaac, Stevenson rejected the interpretation of the subject as a symbolic representation of the Passion in favour of a more general symbolism, arguing instead that it be interpreted simply as an expression of deliverance or salvation, pertinent in such funerary contexts as the catacombs as Elizabeth Malbon noted.¹¹⁰

Crypto crosses (anchors, masts, tridents, ploughs, axes etc) and tau crosses are also interpreted as veiled references to the Crucifixion. Nevertheless there are some problems with such interpretations. Firstly, those crosses appearing in pre-Constantinian contexts and on Jewish ossuaries¹¹¹ are notoriously difficult to interpret. Moreover their use is not widespread.¹¹² Secondly, it is evident that such crosses were not originally used by Christians as allusions to the Crucifixion but had wider functions, namely as a sign of God's ownership of the individual or object bearing the symbol, and as an apotropaic device. It is possible that both roles stemmed from the use of the cross-sign in ancient cultures, and particularly the Jewish usage of the Hebrew letter *Taw* (written in ancient script as either + or x, and also understood to mean "sign") as acknowledgment of divine ownership

¹⁰⁹ Morey (1942), p. 61.

¹¹⁰ J. Stevenson (1978), p. 68; Malbon (1990), p. 180 n. 43.

¹¹¹ Snyder's concise outline of the appearance of the sign of the cross in Christian art, with reference to the past scholarship and its validity, is particularly helpful: Snyder (1985), p. 27-29, with bibliography. See also Finney "Cross" (1999), pp. 303-305.

¹¹² An example of an interpretative problem is raised by Horsley in the case of a cross appearing on an ostensibly Jewish epitaph at Ephesos: (1992), p. 126.

and as a protective seal of divine power.¹¹³ The likelihood thus emerges that the act of tracing a cruciform seal across the forehead of catechumens in Christian baptism was not originally instituted as an allusion to Christ's Passion, even though the Christian was seen to die with Christ through the rite and be reborn in the victory of the cross; rather, Jean Daniélou describes this use "as a signification of Christ's divine glory", a marking of the candidate as God's own and a sanctification of the person.¹¹⁴ This issue of glory is separate from the interpretation of the Crucifixion as an instance of divine glory. As noted earlier, in addition to religious rituals Christians prefaced many of their daily activities with the sign, a usage which underlines its protective function. This function is made clear in the *Apostolic Tradition* 42, attributed to Hippolytus, where the sign is described as a protective breastplate, and is seen in the later use of the cross in this capacity in domestic art, housing and even public buildings particularly in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries.¹¹⁵ The cross-sign appeared in visual contexts in conjunction with other symbols that were given Christian interpretations, and often with Christian inscriptions. Engraved gems from the third century illustrate this usage: a carnelian in Berlin¹¹⁶ is engraved with a tau cross and other early Christian symbols, including a bird with olive branch, a lamb, a dolphin/fish and a Christian inscription; a blue chalcedony in the British Museum features a fish engraved above a tau cross with a Greek inscription below.¹¹⁷ In both cases, there is no explicit connection between the use of the tau and the Crucifixion. A clear association of the cross with the instrument of the Passion was spelt out by the fourth century. By this date we find Cyril of Jerusalem asserting, for example, that when devils see the cross they are reminded of the crucified.¹¹⁸ Now here, an obvious and tangible connection has been made in the minds of Christians

¹¹³ On the critical scholarship, by F. J. Dölger and E. Dinkler, see Llewelyn (1998), p. 166-167, and accompanying notes, particularly nrs 39 & 43. See also Daniélou (1964), pp. 154-155, & p. 330.

¹¹⁴ Daniélou (1964), p. 145, describes it in this way. On the initial use of the cross as a reference to Jesus' name see: Moore (1974), p. 105; Daniélou (1956), pp. 66-67. See also Snyder (1985), pp. 27-28; Bevan (1940), p. 98; and on the early use of the cross, Shepherd (1980), p. 112.

¹¹⁵ As documented by Dauterman Maguire et. al. (1989), pp. 18-22.

¹¹⁶ Leclercq (1907), vol. 2, pp. 373-374, fig. 278.

¹¹⁷ London, British Museum: 1986, 5-1.160: 1.30 x .97 x .44 cms. This gem was brought to my attention by Jeffrey Spier. As far as I am aware, it is unpublished. The (positive) inscription reads across two lines: εΙC OYC / CW THP.

¹¹⁸ *Catecheses* 13.36.

between the cross-sign and the Crucifixion. Despite this connection being a later development, the persistent misconception that the cross was first used to evoke the shape of the instrument of the Passion,¹¹⁹ has created the misleading impression that the inaugural use of the cross-sign prefaced the ultimate use of the crucifix, the cross incorporating the body of Christ.

Graydon Snyder's correlation between the use of the cross and the development of Jesus iconography is most helpful in this regard: having discussed the use of crypto-crosses and crypto-symbols [crosses in images and letters] in the pre-Constantinian period, he comments:

“... none signifies suffering, death, or self-immolation. All stress victory, peace, and security in the face of adversity. The Jesus iconography follows the same pattern. There is no place in the third century for a crucified Christ, or a symbol of divine death.”¹²⁰

The fact also remains that such images as the Sacrifice of Isaac do not always constitute explicit pictorialisations of the Crucifixion:¹²¹ if alternatives for the subject were sought in veiled symbols or complex allegories with sophisticated theological implications usually unknown to the ordinary worshipper, it still leads us to ask why Christians went to such great lengths to find thematically abstruse alternatives, which could have many levels of potential meaning, rather than simply outlining the event itself.

In summary, when considering the treatment of the Crucifixion at the hands of artists in the Late Antique period, all five factors outlined above need to be taken into consideration. To a large degree, each one can be seen to account for a reluctance to depict the Crucifixion in any guise, symbolic or realistic. As Robert Grigg argued, we cannot seriously doubt that Christians hesitated to have the Crucifixion portrayed in a realistic fashion, despite the evidence showing their need to believe in the reality of the suffering of Christ.¹²² Yet it must be re-stated

¹¹⁹Kartsonis (1994a), p. 153; Jensen (1995), p. 24; & E. Langmuir in Finaldi (ed.) (2000), p. 10, all appear to misconceive in this way.

¹²⁰ Snyder (1985), p. 29.

¹²¹ the most obvious examples are those instances in which the subject appears in Jewish contexts, such as on the Beth 'alpha synagogue pavement and in the Dura Europos synagogue: on the subject and its meaning in Christianity and Judaism, see the comments of Hachlili (1988), pp. 288-292.

¹²² Grigg (1974), p. 220.

that all the explanations for the absence proceed from the basic premise that the Crucifixion, being both universally accepted and recognised as a definitive Christian image, *should* have enjoyed immediate reception into the visual arts.

From a close examination, as will be undertaken in Chapter III, it is evident that the survival of the subject on three gems datable to the Late Antique period firmly contradicts the rejection theory. The gems indicate not only that a pictorialisation of the subject was attempted around the third century, but that a composition, surviving on two gems, was established and circulated in Christian circles. In the very rarity of their survival, the three gems seem to suggest that the subject was uncommon not so much through a conscious avoidance, and thereby omission, but conceivably through lack of favour. If, on taking the evidence presented by the gems into account, the focus of Christians can be shown to be directed elsewhere, a new possibility emerges. Namely, that the Crucifixion *was* pictorialised, but that the subject itself, and possibly design formulated for its representation, proved unpopular and was not developed. It may simply be a case of the subject being overlooked as designers and patrons focused on more popular subjects and symbolic motifs. This theory has not been tested, mainly because an examination of the gems requisite for its proposal has not been undertaken. It is such an examination that this thesis aims to achieve, thus paving the way for further conclusions to be drawn at a later date. What such an examination can initially achieve is the first step towards this end: the discarding of the assumption of pre-eminence. When the emphasis of the question is placed on *why* the Crucifixion appeared more readily after the fifth century and not before, the problem of avoidance and that of the resultant disparity between the artistic and literary evidence is obviated.

II. An Alternative View: neglect

Superficially, the increasing appearance of the Crucifixion in art after the fifth century would seem to prompt the belief that the fourth century banning of crucifixion as a form of execution removed some of the danger of derision and serious blasphemy conceivably involved in depicting the event prior to that

time.¹²³ Just as social, political and theological factors may account for a reluctance to depict the Crucifixion, particularly prior to the Peace of the Church, it is also true that by the fifth century, when it seems that the subject was present but still rare, many of the early “inhibiting” factors were of expired or waning relevance. Apart from the cessation of crucifixion as a form of execution during the Constantinian period, these include: the termination of widespread persecution after the Peace of the Church; the widening of the distance between new generations of Christians and an increasingly distant past; and the development of christology which saw the rise of the need to assert the full human suffering and death of Christ, highlighting His divine ability to overcome it. Furthermore, a substantial reduction in any shame and fear attached to the event would have occurred following the end of paganism in public cult worship and the adoption of Christianity as the official religion in the fourth century. In addition, there is the evidence put forth by Grigg and Kurt Weitzmann which indicates that by the sixth century, several iconographic types had been developed for the Crucifixion and were circulating amongst artists.¹²⁴ Hence as Moore remarked, it may in fact be tendentious to ask why the appearance of the Crucifixion image was delayed;¹²⁵ rather, one should look beyond those factors seen to *impede* the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion, all of which are meritorious in their own right, and seek instead to understand what factors subsequent to earlier impediments were operating to *facilitate* the portrayal of the subject at a date later than expected in the history of Christian art.

The general thrust of this alternative approach, which like the rejection theories is slightly modified according to its re-presentation, may be explained briefly as follows. Early efforts to illustrate the Crucifixion were impeded not simply by social and political factors, but also by the influence of contemporary theology which placed emphasis on the victory and divine deliverance of Jesus subsequent

¹²³ See the thoughts of Shepherd (1980), pp.112-113. The ban is not mentioned by Eusebius but is noted by Sextus Aurelius Victor c. 360 and Sozomen: cited by Drake (1985), p. 18 n. 59. Dinkler-von Schubert goes so far as to question whether there was a formal abolishment by Constantine: (1992), pp. 135-146.

¹²⁴ Grigg (1974), p. 221; Weitzmann (1974), pp. 40-41. This is discussed further in Chapter III, Part 2, section A, “Jesus”.

¹²⁵ Moore (1974), pp. 106-107.

to his Crucifixion. In this way, just as contemporary soteriological emphases on the enormity of human sin and the immensity of Jesus' sacrifice on behalf of mankind inspired the agonised figure of Christ crucified in the Middle-Byzantine period,¹²⁶ early artistic attempts to pictorialise the Crucifixion were realised beyond the sphere of suffering (as openly explored in early literature), and squarely within that of victory. As a result, the church did not actually require images of the event in addition to the gospel assertions of the historical reality of the Crucifixion and theological appreciation of the fact of Christ's suffering. This lack of requirement, which according to Moore, "puts into perspective all other possible reasons for its virtual absence in early Christian art",¹²⁷ does not of course imply any lack of importance attached to the Crucifixion, both at the grass roots of the faith and at the elitist levels of the early Church. In fact the accent on victory is borne out in the material evidence and can be seen to be made in direct response to the social and political milieu of early Christianity. As Snyder pointed out, the very real dangers of persecution, harassment, prejudice, class hatred, and illegal treatment created an environment that procured for the early Christians a natural propensity to stress the themes of deliverance and victory over death and resurrection.¹²⁸ So we find thematic emphasis vibrantly portrayed in the decorative programmes of the catacombs; the theme of death has no place amongst the paradigms of divine deliverance that so dominate those programmes- the healing of the paralytic, the raising of Lazarus, and the *Haemorrhissa*, the episode of Christ healing the Woman with the Issue of Blood, being amongst the most popular episodes for representation in that funerary context.¹²⁹ The emphasis will also be seen in the iconography adopted on two fourth/fifth century engraved gems, the Nott and Constanza stones.

Seen in this light, rather than impeding the representation of the Crucifixion these factors can be interpreted as working towards the procurement of different priorities. Whilst not rendering them irrelevant, these new priorities effectively outweighed the earlier concerns of the primitive Church. Hence in the Jesus

¹²⁶ Brandon (1975), pp. 169-70.

¹²⁷ Moore (1974), p. 107.

¹²⁸ Snyder (1985), p. 14.

¹²⁹ Brandon (1975), pp. 169-70.

iconography of the early period there are no pictorial motifs for death or Resurrection. This is paralleled in the pre-Constantinian use of the cross as a symbol of victory, peace and security in the face of adversity.¹³⁰ The triumphal reading is further demonstrated in the ceremonial nature of early symbolic references to the Crucifixion, seen on Passion sarcophagi in the period after the Peace of the Church in place of an explicit Crucifixion scene,¹³¹ in the lack of any motifs of death or paradigms of suffering, and in the victorious iconography of narrative scenes as they appeared in the fifth century.¹³² Thus Jocelyn Toynbee attributes the scarcity of Crucifixion scenes after the Peace of the Church to a reticence about the physical torments of the Passion, a reticence brought into sharp relief with the rise of the interpretation of the cross as a fount of victory, as the *crux invicta* motif on the carved reliefs of Passion sarcophagi attests. So the early representations were achieving more than a mere pictorialisation of the Gospel narrative. As the Nott and Constanza gems show, and as the Maskell ivory explicitly conveys in the presentation of Jesus as the consummate Herculean victor stretched out on the cross, they were affirming the indomitability of his divinity.

With the apparent absence of the Crucifixion viewed not as an avoidance but as a lack of requirement, the ultimate growth of Crucifixion iconography can thus be regarded as a development dependant on contingent factors. In other words, Christians were not concerned to portray the Crucifixion prior to the fourth century, but that leading up to and during that century, liturgical, theological, social as well as ecclesiastical factors were acting to *impel* its pictorialisation through more narrative-based imagery as opposed to overtly symbolic references or typological evocations. Although it has not been noted previously, this allows both for the formulation of iconography on the Nott and Constanza gems and in its rarity, the apparent unpopularity of that iconography.

¹³⁰ Snyder (1985), p. 29.

¹³¹ See Deichmann (1967), nrs. 49, 57-59, 61, 106, 151, 164, 171, 174; cited in Shepherd (1980), p. 119 n. 98. This iconography is discussed further in Chapter III, Part I, section B.

¹³² Toynbee (1970), pp. 97-98.

Primary amongst the influences seen to have encouraged the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion beyond the fourth and fifth centuries was the pronounced focus of devotional attention on Christ's death and Passion in the Jerusalemic Paschal liturgies celebrated on Golgotha in the fourth century, where especial emphasis was placed on his cross and suffering and when the process of historicising the Passion is seen to have begun.¹³³ The impact of liturgical change and focus impacted not just on communal worship, but also on the practice of personal piety.¹³⁴ Concluding that it was what she termed the "sacramentalization" of the narrative image of the Crucifixion that transformed it into the symbol *par excellence* of Christianity by the seventh century, Kartsonis thus attributed its rise as an emblematic image around the end of the sixth century to the concurrent maturation of this previously emergent interest "in the pictorial documentation of the historicity of Christ's life and its soteriological power for Christians."¹³⁵ Hence we can turn to Schiller, who cited a series of intimately related factors which can be seen to have procured visual representations of the Crucifixion after the fourth century:¹³⁶ the building of Constantine's Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem;¹³⁷ the alleged discovery of the True Cross;¹³⁸ the introduction of feasts related to the cross;¹³⁹ the veneration of the holy sites;¹⁴⁰ and from the mid fourth century, but particularly from the sixth century, the dissemination and veneration

¹³³ Schiller (1972), p. 3. On the question of the fourth century historicisation of the liturgy see Taft (1984), ch. 2. On the Jerusalem liturgy: Hunt (1984), pp. 107-127; Cardman (1984); J. Smith (1987), ch. 4; and K. Stevenson (1988). Regarding the impact of Constantinian building on the liturgy: Shepherd (1967).

¹³⁴ On the experiential nature of pilgrimage and its impact on the representation of sacred events, including the Crucifixion: Vikan (1990b), p. 97. The mystical as well as physical participation in biblical events that visits to the Holy sites afforded for the pilgrim is what Victor Turner described as "exteriorized contemplation": Ousterhout (1990), p. 98.

¹³⁵ Kartsonis (1994a), p. 158.

¹³⁶ For the following points: Schiller (1972), p. 89. See also Moore (1974), p. 108.

¹³⁷ On the Holy Sepulchre: Walker (1990), pp. 235-281; Gibson & Taylor (1994), with bibliography pp. 93-97. Regarding Constantine's intention to honour the cross and not the tomb by erecting the basilica: Drijvers (1992), p. 85, & Taylor (1993), pp. 122 & 137. But see now Hunt (1997), pp. 413-414, who argues that Constantine may have intended to honour both. On Constantine's building programme at Jerusalem: Hunt (1984), ch 1, & (1997); Armstrong (1967).

¹³⁸ on the supposed discovery of the True Cross: Wilkinson (1981), pp. 240-241; Drake (1985); Walker (1990), pp. 126-128; Borgehammer (1991); Drijvers (1992); & the comments in Hunt (1997), pp. 414-416.

¹³⁹ The Jerusalem Church introduced a ceremony for the formal veneration of the relics of the True Cross: Hunt (1984), p. 39; Drijvers (1992), p. 89.

¹⁴⁰ On the concept of "holy place" Markus's article (1994) remains seminal. On Christian attitudes towards Jerusalem and the Holy Places in the fourth century see Walker (1989), but particularly (1990). On the evolution of holy places: Taylor (1993), pp. 295-332.

of relics of the cross.¹⁴¹ To this list we can add the increase and subsequent impact of Christian Holy Land pilgrimage in the fourth century,¹⁴² which attended the rise in the concept of a place as holy. Furthermore, Robert Markus¹⁴³ demonstrated that although pivotal in shaping the liturgy of the wider Church,¹⁴⁴ the example of Jerusalem and the liturgical practices of the Christian Church there were not alone in encouraging devotion to sacred places in the fourth century. The growing devotion to martyrs also played a key role in infusing the concept of “place” with a new significance, *meeting* rather than encouraging a need to “make present” the Church’s past.

The martyr connection is important here; for aside from influencing the concept of physical sites frequented by Jesus as holy, the emergence of graphic images detailing the deaths of martyrs in the fourth century may also be seen to have exerted a decisive influence on Christian art. Given the dearth of imagery detailing the deaths of any Biblical characters in the early period, according to the surviving evidence it is interesting to note that the appearance of imagery detailing the often violent deaths of martyrs coincides with the increasing momentum during the fourth century towards the pictorialisation of the ultimate and indeed the model of all Christian martyrdoms: that of Christ. This momentum is illustrated in the survival of the Nott and Constanza gems. Whilst this is not the place to explore such a connection, it deserves some mention.

The stories of the sufferings of saints reenacted the acute pain experienced by the martyr prior to death, bringing into the present the pain experienced in the past. From literary records it appears that pictorial representations of their deaths did

¹⁴¹ Frolow (1961) remains an essential source on the subject. See also Frolow (1958). The testimony of Cyril of Jerusalem to the whole world being filled with pieces of the cross by the mid-fourth century is well known: *Catecheses* 4.10; 10.19; 13.4. See Walker (1990), pp. 126-127; Hunt (1984), p. 39; Taylor (1993), p. 137. Note also Drijvers (1992), ch. 2 “The Cross in the Fourth Century”.

¹⁴² On pilgrimage and the role of holy places see Wilkinson (1977) & Hunt (1984). On Holy Land pilgrimage see also: Sivan (1988a) & (1988b); Elm (1989); Mango (1995); Maraval (1995); Hahn (1997); and the essays in Ousterhout (ed.) (1990), including Kenneth Holm’s “Hadrian and St Helena: Imperial Travels and the Origins of Christian Holy Land Pilgrimage”, pp. 66-81, which contains a revision of the accepted opinions on the subject.

¹⁴³ Markus (1994), pp. 257-271.

¹⁴⁴ Markus (1994), pp. 266-267. So significant was the activity in Jerusalem and other Palestinian holy places that Weitzmann, an advocate of the theory that the early Church was hostile to the

likewise. The following fourth century examples can be cited: St Gregory of Nyssa's description of a painted cycle of images in the Martyrium of St Theodore, including a graphic portrayal of Theodore being burnt to death on a pyre;¹⁴⁵ the homily *In Barlaam martyrem*, believed to have been delivered at Antioch in the martyrion of St Barlaam by St Basil of Caesarea which encourages painters to highlight the "mutilated appearance" of the martyr;¹⁴⁶ Asterius of Amaseia's description of a painting in a church of the virgin St Euphemia's torture and martyrdom,¹⁴⁷ which included being dragged by soldiers, seized by the head, her teeth cut out, tortured with hammers and drills. Prudentius' description of a painted image of St Cassian, in a tomb at Imola in north Italy, being pricked to death by the styluses of his pagan students of literature is slightly less gruesome but no less graphic.¹⁴⁸ There is also the possibility that when visiting Rome around 402,¹⁴⁹ Prudentius saw a fresco depicting the martyrdom of St Hippolytus; he mentions this fresco, unfortunately without detail, in his verse epistle on the Passion of Hippolytus, written to Bishop Valerian from Rome.¹⁵⁰

On a general level, these passages attest to the introduction of pictorial imagery into martyria and churches of Palestine and elsewhere by the late fourth century. Hence the radical transformation of monumental church decoration that had begun to flourish only at the end of the fourth century, as documented by Herbert Kessler,¹⁵¹ involved not simply the adornment of basilicas with comprehensive cycles of Old and New Testament imagery, but the coincident increase of graphic images in tombs and martyria detailing martyrdoms. The introduction of such images was thus part of a wider shift, the seeds of which were scattered across the Empire rather than concentrated in one area. This dissemination is evident not only in the origin of the literary testimonies, extending from Antioch to northern

representational arts, cited it as the primary stimulus to the creation of Christian images: Weitzmann (1974), pp. 33ff.

¹⁴⁵ *De s. Theodori*. PG 46, 737; trans. Mango (1986), pp. 36-37.

¹⁴⁶ Basil, *Homilia XVII, In Barlaam martyrem*, PG 31, 489. The homily is sometimes attributed to St John Chrysostom: Mango (1986), p. 37 n. 68.

¹⁴⁷ *Homilia II*; trans. Mango (1986), pp. 37-39.

¹⁴⁸ Hymn 9; trans. Eagles (1962), p. 183. See the comments of Macklin Smith (1966), p. 66.

¹⁴⁹ On Prudentius' trip to Rome, Macklin Smith (1966), pp. 64-72.

¹⁵⁰ *Peristephanon* 11- lines 123-124; trans. Eagles (1962), p. 250.

¹⁵¹ Kessler (1985), pp. 17-31, specifies the date as the end of the fourth/beginning of the fifth century.

Italy. It is also evident in the broad nature of the changes that can be seen to have brought this general interest in art about. Murray cites a range of conditions that collectively can be seen to have cultivated an atmosphere increasingly conducive to the artistic presentation of religious truths: the stimulus of imperial patronage, which after the Edict of Milan saw the construction of new basilicas and martyria; the change in clerical culture, with an increasing number of educated ordinands; the finalising of the biblical canon; an interest in the historicity of Scripture, evident particularly in connection with the holy sites; doctrinal resolutions; and the entrée of the Christian faith into the public arena, which facilitated intellectual interest “in the formal presentation of truth by means of discourse and art.”¹⁵²

On a more specific level, the examples from literature cited above illustrate the public exposure of Christians in the fourth century, in churches and martyria, to confronting graphic images of the death of martyrs. They also suggest that some writers were not averse to such images: Asterius is captivated by the quality of the image of Euphemia’s martyrdom, poignantly commenting on the clarity with which the artist paints the drops of blood running from her lips;¹⁵³ the emotional response elicited from Prudentius by the image of St Cassian’s death is just as sincere and intensely physical, the writer weeping, clasping the martyr’s tomb and kissing the altar.¹⁵⁴ And of course there is the case of Basil who not only rejoices in such depictions, but openly encourages them. Such positive engagement with explicit images of brutality and death, images that are enthusiastically recalled for the reader, indicate that at least some Christians were becoming more open to detailed representations of human suffering in art. This may indicate that by the fifth century, with the growing practice of representing the deaths of martyrs in art and venerating relics of their life and death across the Empire, Christians were more able, in conjunction with the changes in Jerusalem noted above, to visually contemplate Jesus’ Crucifixion.

¹⁵² Murray (1993), p. 495. See also Kessler (1985), p. 17.

¹⁵³ Mango (1986), p. 39.

¹⁵⁴ Macklin Smith (1976), p. 66, discusses the sincerity of Prudentius’ reaction in the tomb of Cassian. On the sincerity of emotional responses to art as recorded in the literature see James & Webb (1991), pp. 1-17.

Beyond the fourth century, the theological stimulus of the Monophysite controversy and outcomes of the christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, can also be noted as aiding the development around that time of visual representations of Jesus on the cross.¹⁵⁵ During the fifth century in the East, the ongoing struggle against Monophysitism, and the attendant remnants of Doceticism, necessitated the Church's theological emphasis of the reality of Christ's suffering and death and even his presence on the cross. Carlo Cecchelli thus concluded that the realism of the Crucifixion needed to be underlined, prompting in the sixth century the artistic production of realistic and images witnessed in the Rabbula illumination [*Pl. 7a*], the first of the more complex images.¹⁵⁶

To summarise: in the explanation of the late introduction of the Crucifixion scene into Christian art, and its unexpected guise, two main schools of thought can now be identified. Firstly, the majority, traditionalist view, which asks why the Crucifixion was delayed and adduces key social, political, theological and even art historical issues as retarding artistic experimentation with the subject in the early Church. Secondly the alternative minority view which asks why the subject appeared in the first place. While not rejecting the validity of the concerns of the former group, or denying the lack of import assigned to the suffering and death of Christ by Christian writers, this view proposes that certain forces were needed to provide fertile conditions for the visual representation of the Crucifixion, and until then the subject remained neglected; this neglect arose out of a basic lack of requirement by the Church prior to a series of changes in its fortune and experience, which rendered as void the earlier inhibiting factors and simultaneously encouraged a new conception of the event. Site-specific attitudes to the cross at Jerusalem are thus seen to filter into the wider Church from the fourth century, and thereby to impact on the collective Christian celebration of the Passion and suffering of the crucified Christ. The rare survival of several miniature representations of the Crucifixion on engraved gems will be seen to support this thesis. As possibly the earliest surviving efforts to translate the

¹⁵⁵ Moore (1974), p. 108.

¹⁵⁶ Cecchelli in Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 35 & p. 69. See further discussion in Chapter II.

subject into a visual language, two will be shown to verify literary intimations that positive perceptions of the Crucifixion existed beyond the purely rhetorical and theological domains of early Christianity, but were not expressed widely. As yet, neither school of thought has successfully utilised the testimony of engraved gems and a fuller study of the evidence remains to be commenced.

B. THE CRUCIFIXION GEMS: a survey of past scholarship

There can be little to no progression of the question of the appearance of Crucifixion iconography in Late Antique art until the evidence provided by engraved gems is thoroughly examined. The gems have the potential to make a unique and pivotal contribution to the question, and even to falsify the theory of outright rejection so elaborately constructed and so keenly maintained for over a century. Nevertheless they have received poor treatment in scholarship on the whole.

An examination of the evidence must begin with a clarification of the exact number of gems pertinent to the period; yet even this basic question is not straightforward. Although the number of gems inscribed with pictorialisations of the Crucifixion and variously used to posit the early existence of Crucifixion imagery is five [*Appendix 1*], only three of these will be seen to be from the Late Antique period, the fourth being early Byzantine and the fifth gem probably a later specimen. This number does not include the well-known but possibly spurious cylinder seal bearing an image of Orpheus crucified, which is discussed with other problematic gems in Part 3 of Chapter III. In comparison with the numerous appearances on engraved gems of such popular motifs as the Good Shepherd, one of the most common and widespread portrayals of Christ in earliest Christian art, the total of three seems ridiculously small.¹⁵⁷ However, in the light of the

¹⁵⁷ The number of gems surviving with representations of the Good Shepherd engraved on their bezel is high. In his article "Gemmes", Leclercq cites twenty-two gems: Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1 (1924), cols. 832-835. The motif also appeared in conjunction with other early Christian symbols and subjects on gems, cols. 837-840. This number directly contrasts the total of three gems listed by Leclercq in the same article as having representations of Christ crucified: cols. 816-818, nrs. 4943-4945 [the Constanza, Nott & Gaza gems]; under the "Crucifixion" category he also cites a sardonyx published by Furtwängler [(1900), v. 1 pl. LXVII, nr 4] which is a later, possibly

conspicuous scarcity of explicit Crucifixion imagery prior to the late sixth century, the total is of great significance. This number allows us to infer that despite an absence of pictorial renderings surviving in other contemporary media, pictorialisations of the Crucifixion were not unknown, at least in miniature format, possibly as early as 200 AD and certainly by the fourth century.

The collective existence of the five-fold group did not become known until the second half of the 20th century, since when there have been various obstacles to their effectual reception into iconographic studies of the Crucifixion in Christian art. Detailed analysis of the gems and their iconography can be seen to have begun with Cecil Smith in 1896/7, when from amongst a private collection of engraved gems dating from the second and third centuries, the Englishman spied a carnelian, allegedly from Constanza, bearing a representation of Jesus crucified on his cross in the presence of the twelve Apostles [*Pl.10d*].¹⁵⁸ On being shown the gem by Smith, Augustus Wollaston Franks, the renowned English collector and Keeper of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography in the British Museum, purchased the gem and presented it to the Museum in 1895.¹⁵⁹ In the inaugural publication of this now well-known artefact,¹⁶⁰ Smith noted the extraordinary similarities between the Constanza gem and a cognate stone described and published in 1880 by Raffaele Garrucci [*Pl.10b*]:¹⁶¹ they feature alarmingly analogous representations of the Crucifixion, accompanied by Greek versions of Jesus' name, and the designs inscribed on small oval stones of transverse orientation. The gems are so alike that Jerphanion presumed an identical place of production for them.¹⁶²

sixth/seventh century, Byzantine gem and does not feature the body of Christ on the cross. In his earlier article "Croix et Crucifix", Leclercq listed four Crucifixion gems (the Constanza, Nott, Gaza & Lewis): Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2 (1914), nrs. 3356, 3357 & 3358 (cols. 3049-3050), & nr 3374 (col. 3066).

¹⁵⁸ C. Smith (1896/7), pp. 201-206.

¹⁵⁹ C. Smith (1896/7), p. 201. On Franks see the essays in Caygill & Cherry (1997).

¹⁶⁰ It is the only gem specified by Schiller (1972), pp. 89-90, fig. 321; Kartsonis (1994a), p. 183 n. 10; & Finney "Cross" (1999), p. 304.

¹⁶¹ Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6, p. 124, nr 15, pl. 479.

¹⁶² Jerphanion (1923), pp. 40-41.

A third Crucifixion gem had also been published by this time: a red jasper from Gaza, first described in 1867 by Le Blant [*Pl.15a-d*].¹⁶³ Oddly enough, although the jasper was purchased by the British Museum in the same year, where it was noted by Franz Kraus,¹⁶⁴ Smith was unable to locate the Gaza jasper in the Museum.¹⁶⁵ The gem was seen to date from before the third century.¹⁶⁶ As this thesis will outline, it exhibits iconographic features consistent with the Middle Byzantine period and is therefore highly unlikely to date from before the thirteenth century.

Smith's short study of the Constanza gem was unique, initiating as it did iconographic comparisons between the Constanza and Nott gems and the other known representations of the Crucifixion in early Christian art: the Maskell ivory, Santa Sabina panel, and the Monza ampullae.¹⁶⁷ On the basis of his analysis, Smith concluded that the Constanza gem represented the earliest surviving representation of the Crucifixion, an opinion that is still widely held.¹⁶⁸ He proposed a date no later than the third century.¹⁶⁹ Its early date was particularly notable in comparison with a fourth gem: a green jasper purchased by the Reverend Samuel Savage Lewis and published by Charles W. King in 1881 [*Pl.12c*].¹⁷⁰ Although noted by King and subsequently John H. Middleton as one of the earliest representations of the Crucifixion, its presentation of the cross scene and of Jesus crucified was clearly a more highly evolved pictorial type than the Constanza or Nott stones, thus generally precluding it from discussions of early iconography.¹⁷¹ This left a triad, comprising the Constanza, Nott and Gaza gems,

¹⁶³ Originally from the collection of M. Gréville J. Chester, Wakefield, Chabouillet. It would seem that the gem was first published in the *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de France* (1867), v. 30 p. 111ff, where it was described and discussed by Le Blant and A. de Longperier. For the reference, which I have not been able to consult: Reil (1904), p. 106 n. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Kraus (1882-1886), v. 2.2, p. 241.

¹⁶⁵ Smith (1896/7), p. 203, who cites Kraus' reference.

¹⁶⁶ Leclercq (1907), v. 1, p. 369.

¹⁶⁷ For the ampullae see Grabar (1958) and further in Chapter II.

¹⁶⁸ eg. Finney "Cross" (1999), pp. 303-305.

¹⁶⁹ Smith (1896/7), p. 206.

¹⁷⁰ King (1881), pp. 1-4.

¹⁷¹ Middleton (1892), p. 84. Given its more developed iconography, Leclercq included the gem with representations of the Crucifixion from the fourth-sixth centuries: "Croix et Crucifix", in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2 (1914), col. 3066.

that could be cited as evidence for the early appearance of the Crucifixion in Christian art.

Thus, four of the five gems had been published by the end of the 19th century: the Nott, Constanza, Lewis and Gaza gems. Following Smith's lead, the four were gradually introduced into wider examinations of Crucifixion iconography around the turn of the 20th century,¹⁷² including the critical studies by Reil and Leclercq.¹⁷³ Despite the fact that Reil accepted the gems as genuine as early as 1904, there was some serious reluctance to grant uniform acceptance to this body of evidence.¹⁷⁴ Some scholars clearly remained sceptical, dismissing the representations engraved on the gems as inconsequential to the study of Christian iconography proper.¹⁷⁵ Hence, disappointingly, we find that not all studies of Christian iconography dating after Reil's record the existence or even challenge the authenticity of the gems, but begin their précis of Crucifixion iconography with the Maskell and Sabina reliefs [Pl.5] as the earliest surviving Christian examples.¹⁷⁶ This reluctance continued in the twentieth century, although the practice of prefacing wider studies on the Crucifixion in art with a discussion of the triad, mentioning their existence and possible dates, persisted.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Generally they are not mentioned in studies pre-dating the 1890's, such as that by Richard St John Tyrwhitt's article "Crucifix" in Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1 pp. 512-518; or Martigny (1877), pp. 225-231.

¹⁷³ Reil (1904), pp. 57-58 [Nott, Constanza, Lewis] & p. 106 n. 2 [Gaza]; Reil (1930), p. 35 [Berlin, Lewis, Constanza, Nott, Gaza]; Leclercq "Croix et Crucifix" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, cols. 3048-3050 [Constanza, Nott, Gaza] & col. 3066 [Lewis]. Bréhier (1908), p. 29 mentions the Gaza jasper. The Constanza, Nott and Gaza gems are also mentioned by Jerphanion (1923), pp. 40-41 and Jéglot (1934), ch. 2, pp. 12-15, who discusses the origins of the Crucifix and early interpretations.

¹⁷⁴ The early article "Kreuzigung" by Franz Kraus for his *Real-Encyclopädie der christlichen Altertümer* (1882-1886), v. 2 p. 241, includes reference to the Gaza and Nott gems. However his later discussion of early Crucifixion iconography in *Geschichte der christlichen Kunst*, v. 1 (1896), pp. 171ff, contains no such reference.

¹⁷⁵ Such as Jéglot (1934), p. 15: having cited the Constanza carnelian and the Gaza jasper, juxtaposing the former with a line drawing of the Nott carnelian, Jéglot states: "Mais la première esquisse sérieuse est à la porte en bois de cyprès de Sainte Sabine à Rome...".

¹⁷⁶ For instance: no mention is made in the earlier studies of Christian art by Venturi (1901-1908), v. 1, pp. 390-393; Marucchi (1905), pp. 320-321. See also the more specialised study of the Crucifix in history and art by Hoppenot (1906), which still omits reference to the gems, pp. 65-69. Nevertheless: Bréhier (1918), p.85. See also Dölger's study of Christian iconography, in which he includes a detailed discussion of the Constanza gem, with reference to the Nott: (1928), pp. 322-326.

¹⁷⁷ eg. Thoby (1959), pp. 18-19.

In 1964, the publication of research by Philippe Derchain, most notably his article “Die älteste Darstellung des Gekreuzigten auf einer magischen Gemme des 3 (?) Jahrhunderts”, introduced a fifth gem to the corpus [Pl.9].¹⁷⁸ Surfacing in the private collection of Roger Pereire in Paris, the Late Antique gem was without peer, exhibiting iconographic features that were unprecedented and in marked contrast to the other known representations of Jesus on His cross from across all art historical periods. Derchain’s third century dating effectively, and thus radically, nominated the Pereire gem as bearing the earliest representation of the Crucifixion in existence. His article became seminal in the study of Crucifixion iconography as it appeared on engraved gems: it brought the five gems together for the first time and subjected them, as a loose body of evidence, to an unprecedented level of iconographic analysis. Moreover, in focusing his attention onto a gem that exhibited a syncretism of magical, Christian and Jewish features, Derchain endowed a level of scholarly consequence to an artefact that in other circumstances might have been overlooked.

Derchain’s consideration of “non”-Christian or magical influences operative in the production of the Pereire jasper might possibly have forced a stalemate in the study of the role of the engraved gems in the evolution of Crucifixion imagery; for although the jasper was subsequently included in broader iconographical studies, including Wessel’s monograph of 1966, *Die Kreuzigung*,¹⁷⁹ it is disappointing to find that very few scholars took up the questions raised by Derchain and applied them to the wider examination of the emergence of Crucifixion iconography in Late Antiquity. The notable exception was a short but important article by Peter Maser, which provided a good summary of the previous literature.¹⁸⁰ Thus, whilst five gems engraved with miniature pictorialisations of the Crucifixion had been published by the late 1960s, Derchain’s article remains the last word on the subject. No studies beyond Maser’s have seriously attempted to build on the Derchain’s research; therefore his article of 1964 remains the principal reference

¹⁷⁸ Derchain (1964), pp. 109-113. See also Delatte & Derchain (1964), pp. 284-5, & p. 287 nr 408.

¹⁷⁹ Wessel (1966), p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Maser (1976), pp. 257-275.

to the Crucifixion gems.¹⁸¹ Notwithstanding Derchain's coherent work, this situation does not denote a tacit approval by scholars at large of his dating or his views. Instead, it underlines the problems relating to the study of the evidence that have impeded further research and a satisfactory incorporation of the evidence within a wider examination of Crucifixion iconography. Essentially three interrelated difficulties can be seen to have produced this regrettable impasse: firstly, the question of the artistic merit of engraved gems and their contribution to the study of early Christian iconography; secondly, problems relating to the Crucifixion gems themselves; thirdly, problems associated with classifying material evidence from Late Antiquity and defining what constitutes Christian art.

I. Engraved Gems

Generally speaking, scholarship has shown a marked reluctance to introduce engraved gems into the wider study of early Christianity and its material culture; and despite the efforts of such influential scholars as Franz Dölger and Theodor Klauser, engraved gems remain largely ignored.¹⁸² Although the evidence of engraved gems has been introduced into the main textual narrative of several recent studies of early Christian art,¹⁸³ many important gems remain unpublished and are consequently unknown to most scholars and students of early Christian iconography. A fine example of the resultant gap in scholarship is the predicament of Robert Milburn, who in 1988 included an informative, and at that time rare, section on engraved gems in his book *Early Christian Art and Architecture* but was unable to list a single text devoted to the subject in his bibliography.¹⁸⁴ This lacuna may soon be remedied by Jeffrey Spier, who is presently compiling a catalogue of Late Antique gems. Importantly, his catalogue will include a section on magic gems and early Christianity, since many Christian gems exhibit magic

¹⁸¹ Derchain (1964), pp.109-113: as cited for example by: Finney (1994), p. 141 n. 51; Schiller (1972), p.89 n. 3; Kartsonis (1994a), p. 183 n. 10.

¹⁸² Dölger (1928) used glyptic material in his study of Christian iconography. Klauser (1961).

¹⁸³ Finney (1994), pp. 111-115 & p. 237, and Elsner (1998a), p. 228 & pp. 232-233. A gem "sympathiser", Finney should be noted for his role in attempting to increase our understanding: see his studies, "Images on Finger Rings and Early Christian Art" (1987), and more recently, "Abraham and Isaac Iconography on Late-Antique Amulets and Seals: The western Evidence" (1995). He is presently working on a *Catalogue of Late Antique and Early Byzantine Intaglios in the British Museum*.

¹⁸⁴ Milburn (1988), pp. 279-281.

inscriptions and magic gems can exhibit Christian inscriptions.¹⁸⁵ Until Spier's research is published however, the illustrated and referenced list of gems compiled by Leclercq and published in 1924 within the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* remains the most helpful resource for the study of early Christian gems.¹⁸⁶

Whatever we may think about the role of gem-cutters in the formulation and subsequent evolution of Christian iconography - as instigators of iconographic models or as receptors and thus disseminators of Biblical compositions - engraved gems furnish a rich body of iconographical data and are deserving of closer examination than they have received to date.¹⁸⁷ Engraved gemstones constituted one of the most prevalent minor art forms in the Mediterranean world during the first three centuries AD, experiencing a popularity decline later in the fifth and sixth centuries. Engraved with monograms or images, they were worn in seal-rings by individuals from all levels of society,¹⁸⁸ functioning for the average person in various potential capacities:¹⁸⁹ as a security device for the marking and sealing of personal property,¹⁹⁰ an authenticating device, being complementary to a signature,¹⁹¹ and as a decorative item for personal adornment. In its latter aesthetic capacity, an engraved gem could also act as an amuletic device, for spiritual protection.¹⁹² Whilst valuable stones engraved with finely modelled

¹⁸⁵ I am grateful to Jeffrey Spier for discussing his research with me and for sharing the outline of his catalogue.

¹⁸⁶ Leclercq "Gemmes", in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, cols. 794-864, as noted by Spier (1997), p. 39; Spier's 1997 article provides an invaluable survey of the study of early Christian gems, with an assessment of the scholarship. The main literature on magic gems includes: Bonner (1950) & (1951); Delatte & Derchain (1964); Philipp (1986); Zwierlien-Diehl (ed.) (1992); and now see Simone Michel, *Magische Gemmen im Britishen Museum*, ed Peter and Hilde Zazoff, 2 volumes (London, 2000) [which I have been unable to consult].

¹⁸⁷ Klauser (1961), p. 139, notoriously posited ring gems as the home of the Biblical compositions of early Christian sepulchral art. Finney (1987), p 181 n. 2, whilst agreeing with the creative input of *gemmarum scalptores* in the formulation of early iconographic models, contends that they are but one of several points of origin.

¹⁸⁸ On the integral role of sealing implements in Greco-Roman society and into the Byzantine Period: Vikan & Nesbitt (1980), p. 10. Interestingly Bonner (1950), p. 28, noted that, with respect to the Jewish prohibition of images and figural designs, an exception seems to have been made for seals due to the necessity for seal rings in commercial life.

¹⁸⁹ the following functions are outlined by Vikan (1987), p. 32.

¹⁹⁰ Clement noted the necessity of seals for the protection of household goods: *Paedagogus* 3.57.1, lines 32, 33. Seals could physically mark property as diverse as slaves, cattle and wine bottles: Lampe (1967), pp. 9-12.

¹⁹¹ For the distinction between security and authentication, Vikan & Nesbitt (1980), pp. 10-11.

¹⁹² For the often blurred distinction between seals and amulets, Finney (1995), pp. 154-157.

designs were available to those of sufficient means, both the rich and poor could obtain and wear gemstones of a prophylactic nature; for no matter how inferior their craftsmanship, such gems were prized as much for their amuletic designs as for any intrinsic material value. Hence the seal was a meaningful, if not essential, object for the wearer in the commercial-temporal as well as the personal-spiritual realms.

It is likely that the first generations of Christians participated in the contemporary Roman practice of wearing seal-rings, purchasing from the pre-existing secular-pagan repertoire prior to the third century.¹⁹³ That they were doing so by the beginning of the third century is apparent from the well-known exhortation, made to the baptised around 200 AD by Clement of Alexandria, concerning appropriate pictorial devices for use in finger-rings as seals.¹⁹⁴ Alarmed at the circulation by this time of motifs and fashions that he considered to be inappropriate and unsavoury, such as the engraving of one's lover on a seal, Clement advised Christians not only on what designs to select, but also on how to wear finger-rings. The repertoire from which he adjured the baptised to choose is well documented: the dove, fish, ship in sail, musical lyre and anchor, all of which were popular motifs on early Christian engraved gems.¹⁹⁵ Yet despite his admonitions towards simplicity, by the close of the third century Christians had begun to create their own designs, devising specifically Christian motifs, scriptural scenes and inscriptions.¹⁹⁶ Development of the latter followed the practice of other religious groups to indicate passwords and divine names by the initial letters of their words.¹⁹⁷ Even King Solomon was believed to have owned a seal, containing the ineffable Name of God, which contributed to his ability to expel demons.¹⁹⁸ So at a time when men were becoming increasingly preoccupied with evil and the subjugation of unseen demonic forces, Christians devised shortened and encoded

¹⁹³ Finney (1987), p. 181 n. 2.

¹⁹⁴ *Paedagogos* III. For the dating of the treatise, Finney (1987), p. 181 n. 1. See also Finney's comments on the treatise (1994), pp. 111-115.

¹⁹⁵ for examples see Leclercq's "Gemmes" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, cols. 794-864.

¹⁹⁶ Spier (1997), p. 33. See also discussion in Vikan & Nesbitt (1980), p. 17.

¹⁹⁷ The Name of God in the Old Testament for example, was represented by the tetragram JHWH; see Bonner, (1950), pp. 29-30. *Iao* was also used, Greeks of the Hellenistic period believing that the divine Name was to be pronounced in this way: Bonner (1950), p. 30.

¹⁹⁸ Morton Smith (1978), p. 79. Seven signs were believed to have made up the seal of Solomon: Dawkins (1944), pp. 145-50.

monograms of Jesus' name which appeared on seal-stones and amulets; such divine names held potent prophylactic power, and the inherently covert nature of monogrammatic abbreviations significantly enhanced their potency.¹⁹⁹ By the fourth century, in conjunction with a similar expansion in the realm of painting, sculpture, mosaic and the minor arts, a more openly Christian repertoire of inscriptions, scenes and motifs was cultivated for the decoration of seals, and it is conceivable that the emergence of Crucifixion scenes, in combination with monogrammatic abbreviations of Jesus' name, occurred during this period of development.²⁰⁰

Persisting doubts as to whether gems are a viable art form for the transmission of iconography in Late Antiquity have contributed to the neglect of engraved gems, but there are other obstacles to their effective study. Spier has specifically noted the following: the scarcity of gems from the early Christian period and the subsequent difficulties in compiling a "representative selection"; the historically precarious position of Christian archaeology as a scholarly discipline (distinct from scholarship pertaining to classical Greece and Rome); and other complications associated with the vicissitudes of survival for tiny objects (witness the loss of the Nott gem) and of fluctuating interest in them as an art form since the Middle Ages.²⁰¹ Difficulties associated with dating the gems have also obstructed effective study: without a representative selection, as Spier notes, dating on the basis of style is difficult. Moreover, the lack of information that in other circumstances enables refined dating - including provenance/archaeological context and thus associated datable material - means that it is unlikely that anything but a general dating scheme will be possible.²⁰² This difficulty is not specific to the pictorialisation of New Testamental subjects such as the Crucifixion: as Paul Corby Finney remarked, it extends to the study of those motifs subjected to Christian interpretation which he calls "generic", such as the

¹⁹⁹ See Alföldi (1998), pp. 22-23. Alföldi regards Constantine's use of the *chi-rho* within the labarum for example, as a talisman of similar magical potency as his wearing of nails from Jesus' cross in his diadem and in the snaffle of his horse. See also note 7, p. 126 (with references) where the author discusses the use of monograms and letters - being abbreviations of the divine Name- as a means of averting evil.

²⁰⁰ As Finney suggests (1994), p. 111.

²⁰¹ Spier (1997), pp. 33-34.

²⁰² Finney (1987), p. 181 n. 2.

Good Shepherd, which is ubiquitous in Christian art until the first half of the fifth century.²⁰³

Subsequently, whilst the reluctance to include the five gems within broad studies of Crucifixion iconography is regrettable, it must be placed against this general backdrop of neglect. However, the Crucifixion gems themselves present their own particular difficulties relating specifically to their rarity in addition to their iconographic and physical disparity; and these have also impeded effective study of the gems.

II. The Crucifixion Gems: some problems of disparity

In the case of “generic” images such as the shepherd or fish, motifs taken up by the Church and overlaid with Christian interpretation, a large number of extant examples on engraved gems as well as other media has enabled a thorough stylistic analysis of individual images, even if it has not completely solved problems of dating. For instance: the comparison of pervasive images such as the Shepherd on gems and other artefacts has at the very least enabled some rough iconographic contextualisation for individual gems. In the case of the Crucifixion however, such comparison is seriously restricted and fraught with difficulty. Obviously, there is the very dearth of examples for comparison in Christian art prior to the 6th century. Yet in addition to this fact, substantial iconographic differences exist between most of the Crucifixion gems and the two surviving representations of the scene from the fifth century: the ivory relief and the Sabina panel [Pl.5]. Capping off this disparity across media, fundamental iconographic differences exist between the five gems themselves, with a striking diversity of treatment in the depiction of Jesus as well as in the identity and presentation of attendant figures in the scene.

If the gems can be assigned to specific art historical periods, such iconographic diversity should come as no surprise. For although the miniature seal format is a notoriously limiting one for the elaboration of iconographic details, the variety of modes of presentation preserved by the gems will be seen in Chapter III to testify

²⁰³ Finney (1987), p. 186. On the disappearance of the Good Shepherd from Christian art in the East and West in the first half of the fifth century see Ramsey (1983), pp. 375-378.

to their collective manufacture over a broad time span. Owing to their commonality in presenting an otherwise neglected subject in early Christian art, the gems have tended to be classed together to form a “group”, with factors relating to their individual authenticity and their significance within iconographic studies of early Crucifixion iconography often left aside. On closer examination it will become obvious that they do not form a coherent body of evidence; fundamental points of difference simply disallow their collective categorisation. Being iconographically, epigraphically and usually physically disparate, they cannot be dated within a single art-historical epoch or be seen to have been produced within one particular socio-religious milieu. It is the purpose of this study to dismantle the unnatural grouping that the gems have previously been seen to form, and to consider specific factors relating to their individual classification and date.

The tendency to treat the gems as a single artistic entity has restricted their potential and crucial contribution to broader iconographic studies. For example, prior to the publication of the Pereire gem, the antiquity and rarity of the triad formed by the Constanza, Nott and Gaza gems saw them published collectively by Henri Leclercq under the classificatory heading “*Gemmes Chrétiennes*”.²⁰⁴ More commonly their rarity and the presence of disparate elements was explained away with the suggestion that Gnostic-Christian or heretical sects were responsible for their production.²⁰⁵ As one of the four proposed origins of Christian art,²⁰⁶ the Gnostic solution proved extremely successful in the treatment of the gems. As has been documented elsewhere, Gnosticism is essentially a collective term used to cover a wide range of religious and philosophical protest movements that developed in the Hellenistic world primarily amongst Christian and Jewish circles in the second century and flourished up to the fifth century. The term *gnosis* in this sense refers to the knowledge or insight revealed often by Jesus or Paul to teachers

²⁰⁴ Leclercq, “*Croix et Crucifix*” in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3048.

²⁰⁵ see for example Grondijs who, aware of the difficulties in furnishing dates, attributes them to “*une secte gnostique*”: (1957), p. 460, & on dating (1953), p. 273.

²⁰⁶ Historical Gnosticism is one of four theories of origin proposed for the production of early Christian art, the remaining three being Greco-Roman antecedents, Jewish prototypes and Joseph Wilpert’s assertion that Christian art was unique. For the identification of the four and their respective proponents see Finney (1978), pp. 391-395, & 395ff and (1980). On the scholarly

such as Basilides, Valentius and Carpocrates who claimed to preserve the true knowledge of Christ.²⁰⁷ The collectivity of the term has proven convenient for many scholars faced with dealing with the gems; having a kind of panacean effect, the term seems to smooth over the sins of “unorthodoxy” (in iconography and epigraphy) that the gems otherwise seem to commit. Hence foremost amongst the powers of this term was its capacity to neatly disqualify the gems from discussions of “orthodox” iconography. This classification thereby enabled the specification of what would otherwise be dubious evidence²⁰⁸ and accounted for the rarity of their appearance, but without requiring that the usual demands for qualifying statements concerning the date and stylistic features be met. Thus, after mentioning and describing the gems as “trop incertains”, Guillaume de Jerphanion introduced the Maskell ivory and the Santa Sabina panel as follows: “Voici, par contre, deux œuvres d’art aux traits parfaitement nets.”²⁰⁹

The propensity to invoke Gnosticising elements in fact continued the seventeenth century practice of labelling all engraved gems that served as magical amulets as “Basilidian” or “Gnostic.”²¹⁰ Perhaps the clearest indication of the success of the Gnostic label as a swift and tidy means of dealing with the difficulties presented by the evidence can be seen in the treatment of the Gaza gem. Undoubtedly the most problematic of the five, this red jasper was initially denoted as a product of adherents to the Gnostic sect of Basilides on account of its lettering and the realism of its iconography. Although rejected as long ago as 1907, this classification continues to have currency and is now applied freely to other members of the corpus.²¹¹ The application of the generic label “Gnostic” to the gems is quite untenable in view of current trends to dispose of the term altogether;

preoccupation with origin issues and problems attendant to a definition of the word “origin”: Murray (1981), pp. 4-5.

²⁰⁷ Although the literature is vast, on Gnosticism see Layton (ed.) (1980 & 1981) & Williams (1996). The concise essays by Rudolph (1991), & Elaine Pagels in Bowersock et. al. (eds.) (1999), pp.471-472, are helpful.

²⁰⁸ Hence witness Boulanger (1925), pp. 146 & 147, n. 1, citing Leclercq, Bréhier, & Reil.

²⁰⁹ Jerphanion (1923), pp. 40-41.

²¹⁰ Spier (1997), p. 35.

²¹¹ For the Basilidean interpretation, initially presented in connection with the gem by Le Blant, see Bréhier (1908), p. 29 n. 2. Leclercq was unconvinced by the attribution: see (1907), v. 1 p. 370; & “Croix et Crucifix”, in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, (1914), col. 3049. Nevertheless see Bréhant (1995), fig. 2 with accompanying caption, and Tristan (1996), pp. 564-5.

moreover, there is no immediate evidence to suggest that any of the gems come from a particular Gnostic sect, Basilidian, Valentinian or otherwise.²¹²

Even though the gems can be seen to belong to various periods of production, as this study will reveal, an even simpler method of coping with their disparity has been to ignore them. This has occurred in various studies of Crucifixion iconography since the late 19th century.²¹³ Less than a decade after the appearance of Derchain's pivotal research on the gems, in his article reflecting on the slow appearance of Crucifixion iconography E. J. Tinsley either remained unaware of the gems' existence or chose not to mention them at all.²¹⁴ As a rebuff within his unfortunately caustic riposte to Tinsley, Peter Moore asserted the existence of "several" gems. Yet in failing to cite or even specify the number of extant gems or to include any details regarding their imagery, Moore's passing mention of "several" gems did nothing to advance their cause within the wider study of Crucifixion iconography. From his casual mention of the evidence, we remain in doubt as to what exactly that evidence is. This is regrettable. Moore does achieve his chief aim, which seems to have been to indicate a pre-fifth century propensity to illustrate the Crucifixion.²¹⁵ Yet this is only one facet of the wealth of information that a closer study of the gems can yield in the study of the appearance of Crucifixion iconography. Although Moore's method is unsatisfactory, it remains in use. The most recent example occurs in Jensen's otherwise excellent article, wherein she provides a passing reference to the existence of "two" gems, providing few references.²¹⁶

As noted above, the general and unacceptable indifference to the content and nature of the gem evidence is indicative of a more widespread preoccupation with that evidence's ability to illustrate an unspecified desire to portray the Crucifixion at an early date; and it thereby champions the widely held conviction that images of the Crucifixion did circulate prior to the fifth century but were rejected. But

²¹² On the avoidance of the term see Williams (1996).

²¹³ Sepiere (1994), p. 87, commences her discussion of Crucifixion iconography in the fifth century with the ivory and Sabina panel.

²¹⁴ Tinsley (1972), *passim*.

²¹⁵ Moore (1974), p. 107, seems to know of at least three gems, "dating from the second, third and fourth centuries..." but provides no references.

²¹⁶ Jensen (1995), p. 22.

even then, the potential of the evidence to contribute to a greater understanding of the early history of the image is denied by the indifference shown. Moreover, the inference that some if not all of the gems support a pre-fifth century appearance of the subject is particularly dangerous. Whilst it is certainly the case that the Pereire, Constanza and Nott gems can be used to indicate such an appearance, the Lewis and Gaza jaspers cannot, being much later in date. The passing reference to an unspecified number of gems, with little recourse to discussion of the possible provenance of the stones, date, or iconographic features, has also resulted in the state of ambiguity that now exists with regard to the number of extant gems and the extent to which they display any artistic, iconographic or theological veracity concordant with the dates suggested for their production. For example, as will be demonstrated in Chapter III, a fourth century or earlier date for the Gaza gem is completely at odds with the iconographic motifs utilised in its composition. Consequently the ambiguity perpetuates falsehoods about the gems themselves, as well as lending an air of unreliability to the body of evidence as a whole: if one scholar cites two gems whilst another cites “some”, neither scholar specifying any literature to support their choice of numbers, it is difficult for the reader to understand why a variation in the total occurs unless the evidence is taken as somehow unreliable or dubious. Which brings us to another problem relating to the previous use of the gems in iconographic studies.

Despite more recent attempts at clarity,²¹⁷ the ambiguous status of the evidence and the selectivity of many scholars in electing to mention, according to their needs but without justification of their choice, only one or several of the five-fold number, has also resulted in the unrestricted manipulation and exploitation of that evidence to illustrate specific academic theories. Morton Smith, highlighting magical facets of early Christianity, can thus cite both the syncretistic Pereire gem and the Gaza gem as amongst the earliest representations of the Crucifixion, as

²¹⁷ Finney (1994), p. 141 n. 51, cites six gems, all of which he would date to the fourth century. Kartsonis is more helpful: (1994a), p. 183 n. 10.

well as including the highly dubious Montagna bone amulet.²¹⁸ Conversely, Frédérick Tristan lists all but the Pereire gem in his study of early Christian images.²¹⁹ Schiller openly justified the exclusion of the gems from her seminal survey of Crucifixion iconography by registering her belief that they were amuletic devices, produced in heretical Christian circles, and therefore with no connection to the Crucifixion images of the fifth and sixth centuries.²²⁰ Certainly the magical²²¹ and amuletic²²² interpretations of the gems are well placed. However, whether such characteristics qualify the random or total exclusion of the gems from within the parameters placed around “orthodox” Christian art is a point of serious contention.

Thus the question of classification continues to dog the gems and in so doing, occasions doubts regarding the validity of their iconography in the study of art to surface. Despite a high point of enthusiasm in the evidence in the early twentieth century, with their pivotal acceptance by Reil and Leclercq, plus a later peak of interest with Derchain, not all scholars since have shown an eagerness to embrace them as plausible evidence for the existence of Crucifixion iconography prior to the accepted fifth century date, as persistent omissions from iconographical studies attest.

In point of fact, four pictorial traditions can be discerned from the group of five gems. Of this total, only three can be dated with any credibility to the Late Antique period: the Pereire, Constanza and Nott gems. The first pictorial tradition is presented by the Pereire gem, which is clearly amuletic, characterised by physical and epigraphic features common to magical gems antedating the fourth century. The second is presented by the Nott and Constanza gems which display

²¹⁸ Morton Smith cites two “magical” gems [Pereire & Gaza], along with the Palatine graffito, as the earliest representations of the Crucifixion: (1978), pp. 61-62. On the Montagna amulet see Cat. nr 7.

²¹⁹ Tristan (1996), pp. 563-565.

²²⁰ Schiller (1972), p. 89-90.

²²¹ For example Engemann (1981), p. 294, who lists the Pereire, Constanza and Nott gems under the classificatory heading “Magische Gemmen mit Kreuzigungsbildern”. The magical supposition is made in particular connection with the Pereire intaglio: Delatte & Derchain (1964), pp. 284-5.

²²² Schiller (1972), p. 89. Kartsonis handles the evidence in similar fashion, recognising the evidence but placing it within a separate niche, classifying the representations of the Crucifixion as “amuletic”. On noting the rare appearance of the Crucifixion as an independant image prior to the sixth century, she footnotes the existance of the gems: Kartsonis (1994a), p. 157 & 183 n. 10.

both early Christian epigraphy and iconography intimately related to Christian triumphal art of the fourth century. A third mode is represented by the Lewis gem, which illustrates iconography and a compositional unit drawn from the Syro-Palestinian art of the early Byzantine period. The fourth and final tradition is delineated on the Gaza gem, which although assigned a fourth century or earlier date in previous discussions of its iconography will be seen to show an emphatic dependency on Middle Byzantine pictorial types. The identification of the four traditions, as will be outlined in Chapter III, indicates that the collective period of production for the corpus spans over ten centuries; therefore classified together, the gems, or an unspecified number thereof, cannot be used as a coherent group to intimate the appearance of the Crucifixion in art prior to the fifth century.

The selective approach and consequently inconsistent use of the gems in previous studies of Crucifixion iconography, with omission, segregation (as magical or amuletic), relegation to the periphery of Christian art, or attempted integration, is in fact symptomatic of the serious difficulties facing scholars in the classification of the individual gems and of engraved gems in general. Indeed, the difficulty of classification is bound in the much broader issue of the definition of Christian art and the problems faced in categorising objects exhibiting syncretistic imagery.²²³ Before an examination of the gems can take place, these difficulties need to be outlined in brief.

III. The Origins and Definition of Christian Art

The boundaries defining what constitutes “orthodox” and “non-orthodox” Christian imagery in Late Antiquity are inherently blurry, it being difficult to determine with any clarity where Christianity ends and magical or superstitious beliefs, expressed in both word and image, begin. Furthermore, the extent of religious and spiritual pluralism in the Late Roman world renders impossible the task of setting Christian “culture” apart from Jewish or Pagan.²²⁴ If by way of its apparent religious syncretism, in word and/or image, an object can be seen to have emerged from magical circles, it is able to be classified separately and without

²²³ Elsner (1998a), pp. 744-748, highlights some of the problems of syncretism and the definition of Christian art.

²²⁴ On this see Markus (1990), pp. 1-17.

impinging on that art viewed as “Orthodox”. Hence the description of the Gaza or Pereire stones as magical, being objects which present a fusion of Christian and other characteristics, can be seen to have become an obstacle to the utilisation of the evidence in mainstream studies of “Christian” iconography and art. As Jas Elsner has articulated: “Syncretistic combinations tend to be seen as odd and out of line with an ideal of straightforwardly orthodox Christian iconography”.²²⁵ The terms “magic” or “Gnostic” have therefore been used to cover anything that does not conform to an “orthodoxy”: in this way magic could become, as one scholar bemoaned, “a refuse-heap for the elements which are not sufficiently ‘valuable’ to get a place within ‘religion’.”²²⁶

The dichotomy between magic and religion in the Ancient world remains unclear.²²⁷ Whilst we might presuppose that they are somehow definable entities, there is an inevitable and obfuscating degree of overlap. Consequently, the definition and application of the term “magic” in the Late Antique World will remain a perpetual source of debate.²²⁸ In recent scholarship there has been a distinct move away from the labelling of magic.²²⁹ John Gager for example refuses to use the term, arguing “that magic, as a definable and consistent category of human experience, simply does not exist”.²³⁰ Without having to set out the problems of classification in too much detail, it is important to recognise the ramifications of this debate for the study of the gems, and particularly the Pereire and Gaza jaspers. With respect to the Pereire, this difficulty was probably sharpened rather than alleviated by Derchain’s efforts to explain a marriage of Crucifixion imagery and amuletic script on a stone that in size and shape, as well as design, lettering and carving style, betrayed a magical character. For in noting

²²⁵ Elsner (1998a), p. 746.

²²⁶ O. Pettersson, who argued for the burial of the term “magic”, is quoted by A.A. Barb (1963), p. 100.

²²⁷ On the difficulty of separating religion and magic see the essays in Faraone & Obbink (eds), (1991), including Graf “Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual”, p. 188 & corresponding notes nrs. 1-4, p. 207. See also Meyer & Smith (1994), pp. 2-6. For a recent summary of the different approaches to the topic: Cunningham (1999). Aune (1980), pp. 1507-1557, provides a comprehensive literature review of studies on magic in anthropology and Classics in the last century. On magic in Late Antiquity see briefly J. North in Bowersock et. al. (eds) (1999), pp. 552-553.

²²⁸ see Graf (1997), and Kotansky (1991), n. 1, p. 123.

²²⁹ see Meyer & Mirecki (1995), p. 2.

²³⁰ Gager (1992), & pp. 24-25.

forces beyond Christianity proper that are obviously at work on the gem, Derchain effectively ratified an inclusive approach to the evidence at a time when the interaction of various levels of religious or spiritual belief manifest in art was already a contentious issue. The desire to pigeon-hole artefacts according to a specific milieu of production, such as orthodox Christian, Gnostic, or amuletic, thereby places those gems on which there is a conflation of Christian and Jewish, pagan or magical motifs, in a particularly precarious position.

Recourse to previous reflections on the possible heretical origins of the gems has allowed scholars to draw a neat line underneath the evidence and to move onto the “orthodox” Christian images of the fifth century: the Maskell ivory and the Santa Sabina panel. In this way, as mentioned above, scholars can include the evidence whilst avoiding any pitfalls associated with their classification. Such an approach, manifest in Cécile Jéglot’s study of the Crucifix in 1934, reappears in Tristan’s 1996 tome *Les premières images chrétiennes*, seemingly indicating that in the intervening sixty year period, little progress has been made in effecting a satisfactory integration of the Crucifixion gems into wider iconographic studies.²³¹ Invariably, the insinuation of “unorthodoxy” made in the segregation of the gems has maintained their detachment from the study of Crucifixion iconography proper. To be fair, in his far more comprehensive study Tristan did devote a significant proportion of space for the description of the Gaza, Constanza, Nott and Lewis gems (with the notable omission of the Pereire gem). And it should also be said that without a comprehensive study of the individual gems to draw upon, the segregation method used by Tristan does remain the only viable method of citing the evidence.²³² It is hoped that the research contained in this thesis will provide the basis for a new iconographic study wherein testimony of engraved gems can be combined with that of the extant material and literary evidence outlined in Chapter II.

From the foregoing historical survey it is apparent that few scholars since Cecil Smith have attempted a cohesive discussion of engraved gems and those representations of the Crucifixion denoted as “orthodox”, although Paul Thoby

²³¹ Jéglot (1934), p. 15. Tristan (1996), pp. 563-565.

²³² Hence Kartsonis (1994a), p. 183 n.10.

did work to accomplish such an end in his broader study *Le Crucifix*.²³³ The problems faced in categorising engraved gems within the broad scheme of Christian art can be seen to have seriously impeded such a study. Perhaps the most detrimental by-product of this categorisation hurdle is the unease and therefore inconsistency of use which continues to mar Crucifixion-gem scholarship²³⁴ and casts a deleterious shadow of doubt upon the evidence.

Towards a New Perspective

Considering the two methods used to explore the growth of Crucifixion imagery and problems relating to the study of the gems, it is apparent that before a thorough examination of the question of the development of Crucifixion iconography can be undertaken, fundamental issues relating to the gems require urgent resolution. Since the effective study of the gems in broader iconographic studies of the Crucifixion in Late Antiquity is bound in the question of the definition of Christian art, a question beyond the parameters of this thesis, the primary aim of this study is to eradicate the element of mystery and insinuation of scholarly invalidity that has grown around the gems. This is thus the first stage in what is potentially a much larger re-evaluation of the evolution of Crucifixion iconography prior to the sixth century. To begin to effect a more successful utilisation of the iconographic evidence presented by the five gems, it is necessary to clarify the number of gems we are dealing with, and to eliminate any that are not relevant to the discussion of pre-fifth century art and the emergence of Crucifixion iconography. It will also eliminate three amulets that have proven problematic in such studies (Chapter III, Part 3). As noted earlier, it will emerge that only three gems can be used to demonstrate a pre-fifth century appearance of the Crucifixion. This process of clarification will necessitate a close examination of each gem in open recognition of the limitation of that evidence: the Nott gem is

²³³ For instance, in his summary of the iconographical variants in those present at the Cross: Thoby (1959), "Résumé" p. 35. His survey of the development of early Crucifixion iconography includes discussion of the Gaza, Constanza and Nott gems, pp.18-19.

²³⁴ The inconsistency is witnessed in the anomalies between dictionary or encyclopedia articles, an obvious starting point on a subject for many readers: whilst Finney cites the Constanza carnelian as one of the earliest known representations of the Crucifixion in his article "Cross" (1999), pp. 303-305, there is no mention of the gems in other publications: eg. V. Grossi "Cross, Crucifix" in Berardino (1992) v. 1 p. 210; R. Giordani in Berardino (1992), v. 1 p. 435; C. Oaks "Crucifix" in Turner (1996), v. 8, p. 210.

lost, and there are no recorded find spots for the remaining four gems (although the Gaza jasper is named after its supposed place of discovery, we are without a specific archaeological context). A thorough appraisal, containing a detailed interpretation, will take place in Chapter III, and will be seen to have important ramifications for our understanding of the evidence of the evolution of Crucifixion iconography as it is known from other material and literary evidence dating from before the sixth century. Before the ramifications can be demonstrated, it is therefore necessary to undertake in the next chapter a brief re-examination of the material and literary evidence that is known from the pre-fifth century. Chapter II thus sets out the formative history of Crucifixion iconography as it is presently understood.

CHAPTER II

CRUCIFIXION ICONOGRAPHY c.200-c.600

A Brief Review

Since the late nineteenth century, the principal studies of Crucifixion iconography, and even the briefest iconographic compendiums tracing its early development, have traditionally begun with, or at the very least, included some reference to, the drawing of a mock-crucifixion from the Palatine [*Pl.1a*].²³⁵ Prior to 1856, when it was excavated, the first five centuries of Christian art were seen to be completely devoid of representations of a crucifixion.²³⁶

The seismic change that the discovery of the drawing, with its accompanying graffito, wrought in the second half of the nineteenth century on the history of the Crucifixion image is therefore a relatively recent one. This impact was augmented by the public appearance of a second similarly pivotal image in the same year: in 1856 the British Museum acquired the important collection of ivories belonging to the great scholar of Anglican liturgy, William Maskell.²³⁷ Within his collection was the now famous series of four ivory reliefs [MLA 56,6-23,4-7; *Pl.4b*] carved in high relief with a sequential cycle of seven episodes from the Passion that included a highly detailed representation of the Crucifixion [*Pl.5a*].²³⁸ Since they

²³⁵ eg. Reil (1904), pp. 105-108; Bréhier (1908), pp. 13-18; Leclercq "Croix et Crucifix", in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3050-3056, fig. 3359; Sulzberger (1925), pp. 388-391; Jégnot (1934), p. 14; Thoby (1959), pp. 19-20; Wessel (1966), p. 6; Schiller (1972), p. 90; Jensen (1995) p. 22; Tristan (1996), pp. 565-567. Briefer summations of Crucifixion iconography containing reference include: St J. Tyrwhitt's essay, "Crucifix & Representations of the Crucifixion" in Smith & Cheetham (eds) (1875), v. 1, p. 513; Martigny (1877), p. 227; Kraus (1896-1897), v.1, p. 173; Marucchi (1905), v.1, p. 321. More recently: Snyder (1985), pp. 27-28; Grossi "Cross, Crucifix" in Bernardino (ed.) (1992), v. 1 p. 210; Murray & Murray (1996), p.126.

²³⁶ eg. Withrow (1895), p. 274, citing Piper, *Ueber den Christlichen Bilderkreis* (Berlin, 1852), p. 7.

²³⁷ The Maskell Collection contained 170 objects, of which 168 were ivories. John Cherry writes, "The Maskell collection was thought to be so important that a special grant from the Treasury of £2,444 was sought for its acquisition.": Caygill & Cherry (1997), p. 190.

²³⁸ Maskell (1905), pp. 89-93; Dalton (1901), p. 49 nr 291, & (1909), nr 7, pp. 5-6; L. Kötzsche in Weitzmann (1979), nr 452; D. Buckton in Buckton (1994), nr 5; S. Avery-Quash in Finaldi (2000), nr 43. I have been unable to consult L. Kötzsche's article "Die trauernden Frauen. Zum Londoner

have a groove along their lower edge and are rebated at the top it is likely that the panels originally formed the sides of a square box, with the lid and base now missing [Pl.6].²³⁹ Although not immediately dated to the fifth century, the stylistic association of the casket panels with fourth and early fifth century Roman sarcophagi was eventually noted,²⁴⁰ and they are now believed to have been produced in Rome between about AD 420-30.²⁴¹ This date effectively makes the Crucifixion relief the earliest surviving representation of the subject in a narrative context, coming roughly two hundred years after the Palatine graffito.

For its absence of realism, the Maskell Crucifixion relief has a striking companion figuration in the Crucifixion panel on the wooden doors of the Church of Santa Sabina [Pl.5], a similarity noted at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁴² Hence, following Kondakov's conclusion that the door-panels dated to a time after the production of fourth century sarcophagi and before the sixth century, the ivory soon had a contemporary figuration.²⁴³ Now the immediate result of this connection was that by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the development of Crucifixion iconography in Late Antiquity had three prominent points of reference where previously it had none: in addition to the Palatine graffito, scholars had two figurations that could be cited to indicate the inclusion of the Crucifixion within pictorial cycles by the fifth century.

Passionskästchen", in *Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture presented to Peter Lasko*, D. Buckton & T. Heslop (eds) (New Hampshire, 1994), pp. 80-90.

²³⁹ On the date and classicising style of the ivories: Kitzinger (1977), pp. 47-8. For the literature on the centre of production: Volbach (1976) cited in Kitzinger (1977), p. 137 n. 7. Schiller (1972) p. 91, cites Northern Italy. Buckton (1994) nr 45 p. 58, cites Roman provenance, with bibliography p. 59.

²⁴⁰ Dates initially ranged from the fifth to the eighth century: Westwood (1876), p. 44; Maskell (1905), p. 89. Dalton (1909), p. 5, demonstrated a fifth century date.

²⁴¹ Buckton (1994), cat. nr 45 & Finaldi (2000), cat. nr 43.

²⁴² Both were included in volume 6 (published 1880) of Garrucci's *Storia della arte Cristiana* (1873-1881): the ivories pp. 67-68, tav. 446.1-4; Santa Sabina door panels p. 179, tav. 499.1. In the same year, Dobbert published a detailed study of the two: (1880), passim. Previously: on the ivories, Westwood (1876), p. 44; on the door panels, Kondakov (1877), passim, including earlier references. Despite these studies, see King (1881), p. 3, who comments: "The *Crucifixion*, all writers upon Christian iconography are agreed, does not appear upon any monuments anterior to the tenth century."

²⁴³ Kondakov (1877), pp. 5-6 & 12.

Prior to the collective knowledge of the Palatine, Maskell and Sabina Crucifixions in the late nineteenth century, the image cited as the earliest surviving visual representation of Jesus on his cross was the full page illuminated pictorialisation of the subject, appearing with the Resurrection, in the sixth century Rabbula Gospels [*Pl.7a*].²⁴⁴ Remarkably, the Byzantine codex, held in the Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence, since 1497,²⁴⁵ was signed by its scribe Rabbula, a monk of the monastery of St John at Zagba in northern Mesopotamia, and its date of completion recorded as 586. The Gospels thus furnish a secure date and precise geographical region for the execution of the illuminated Crucifixion. This means that the Rabbula illumination demarcates a critical point in the development of Crucifixion iconography; for in light of fifth century pictorialisations, we now know that it stands at the beginning of what is classified as early Byzantine iconography, accompanied by related figurations on objects produced for the pilgrim trade in the Holy Land at the end of the sixth century and into the seventh century.

Iconographic evidence for the representation of the Crucifixion prior to the late sixth century is augmented by literary evidence. For example, shortly after 400 in the West two poetical compositions, Prudentius' *Dittochaeon* and the possibly Ambrosian *tituli*, suggest that in the late fourth century the Crucifixion was included in cycles of Old Testament and New Testament illustrations intended for the decoration of Christian basilicas in the West. In the sixth century Gregory of Tours in the West and Choricius of Gaza in the East record that representations of the Crucifixion could appear alone or as part of a cycle of New Testament images within Churches.²⁴⁶

This body of surviving material and literary evidence customarily cited to indicate the representation of the Crucifixion between c. 200 and c. 600 is not only small, its primary content was largely assembled over the last 150 years. From this

²⁴⁴ Cited as such by R. St J. Tyrwhitt in Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1, p. 515; Martigny (1877), p. 227; Withrow (1895), p. 275. See also Dobbert (1880), p. 1, *, citing earlier references, including Piper [note above].

²⁴⁵ Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 85. The comprehensive study by Cecchelli et.al. (1959), remains an essential reference; see especially pp. 33-35, 69 & 85. See also Weitzmann (1974); H. Kessler in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), cat. nr 445, pp. 495-496; Manion (1999), pp. 156-157 & passim.

²⁴⁶ Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum* I, ch. 23; Choricius of Gaza, *Laudatio Marciani* I, 17ff.

evidence Gerke posited the existence of two types for the representation of the Crucifixion in the first five centuries: symbolic and narrative. Both will be examined below. Whilst we are intimately familiar with the evidence through such surveys as were produced in the twentieth century by Bréhier, Leclercq, Thoby and others,²⁴⁷ the following recapitulation is intended to provide the necessary background against which to view and assess the engraved gems in Chapter III.

I. Second and Third Centuries

Amidst all of the theories regarding its derivation and meaning,²⁴⁸ the Palatine drawing witnesses to the fact that a visual conception of a crucifixion was attempted, at least in Rome, by the third century. Interestingly, that conception is remarkably compatible with later figurations of Jesus' Crucifixion formulated from around the third and fourth centuries onwards, as will be discussed in Chapter III. For ignoring the ass-head and comparing the Palatine image with subsequent visual representations of the Crucifixion, the graffito's simple configuration of the victim's body set against two intersecting lines that are meant to indicate the cross introduces the rudiments of later Crucifixion iconography. In view of the complete lack of artistic evidence concerning the Roman practice of crucifixion, the graffito's unequivocal evocation of this form of execution is crucial in plotting the emergence of Crucifixion iconography. Perhaps the most confronting reality of this hastily executed image is the fact that in apparently parodying the Christian belief in a crucified deity, it furnishes a somewhat perverse beginning for what would become the *par excellence* symbol of Christian art: the body of Jesus affixed to the cross.

Beyond iconography, the significance of the graffito has been demonstrated on several fronts. Aside from being used to illustrate the folly of the cross as it was perceived outside the church, with the graffitist seemingly mocking the Christian belief in a crucified deity by equating the Christian God with an ass, it is likely

²⁴⁷ see the references in note 233 above.

²⁴⁸ Early theories linked the graffito to the Gnostic Sethian sect, which identified Christ with the ass-headed god Seth: Bréhier (1908), pp. 16-18; Sulzberger (1925), pp. 388-391; Labriolle (1934), pp. 198-9; Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.1, col. 3055; Thoby (1959), p. 20. Nevertheless, Morton Smith perceived a confusion of Seth/Yahweh with the crucified Jesus: (1978), pp. 62-3 & corresponding notes p. 183. The Sethian interpretation no longer holds currency: Hengel (1982), p. 19; Matthews (1993), p. 50.

that the specific accusation of onolatry underlies the caricature. During the first centuries of this era it was believed that the Christians, like the Jews with whom they were often confused, worshipped a deity in the form of an ass. The charge, initially levelled at Jews and transferred to Christians, is mentioned by both Tertullian [*Apologeticum* 16.1-5, with reference to Tacitus *Historiae* 5.3-4], and Minucius Felix [*Octavius* 28.7].²⁴⁹ Yet it is not only the ancients who were confused on this issue. As part of his ambitious attempt to redefine early Christian art, Thomas Matthews suggested that Christians did in fact worship the ass and he interpreted the graffito as an expression, rather than a parody, of Alexamenos' own faith.²⁵⁰ Whilst there are instances in which the ass appears as an isolated image on artefacts from the early Christian centuries, including gold-glass and amuletic devices,²⁵¹ the single other instance in which a crucified ass is presented in iconographic terms that might be construed as reverential is the spurious bone crucifix found in Montagnana [Chapter III, Part 3, B]. In the absence of an archaeological context and the impossibility of dating it with any certainty, this object has not yielded any firm conclusions since its publication in 1947.²⁵² Perhaps most pertinent to this discussion, as will be outlined in Chapter III, there are specific iconographic features which call into question the authenticity of this amulet. Thus the crucifix cannot be used to sustain Matthew's thesis of Christian ass-worship, or any other equally problematic notions regarding the initial production of Crucifixion imagery in heretical circles that have been couched around such dubious evidence. For example, it is precisely the inconclusive nature of the Montagnana amulet that allows Morton Smith to use it, in conjunction with the Palatine graffito and several engraved gemstones, for his purpose of suggesting a possible relation between magical practices and early Crucifixion imagery.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Mnaseas of Patara, writing c. 200 B.C., and later cited by Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.112-4), is the first writer to testify to the supposed ass-worship of the Jews. For the ancient sources see M. Stern (1974), v.1 pp. 97-101; Feldman & Reinhold (1996), pp. 362-363. For a selection of the extensive secondary literature on reputed Jewish onolatry: Nordenfalk (1968), p. 130 n. 57. See also Hanfmann (1979), pp. 206-207. On the Christian context: Labriolle (1934), pp. 193-197; Leclercq "Ane" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 1.2 cols. 2041-2047.

²⁵⁰ Matthews (1993), pp. 48-50.

²⁵¹ For the appearance of the ass and ass-headed figures in Early Christian art (with bibliography) see Leclercq "Ane" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 1.2, cols. 2041-2076.

²⁵² Bettini (1947), pp. 60-70, fig. 1.

²⁵³ Morton Smith (1978), p. 62.

The graffito does conform to various ancient traditions involving the ascription of asinine features for the purpose of mockery. The near-contemporary Carthaginian caricature of Jesus as an asinine teacher, mentioned by Tertullian and noted in Chapter I, is a case in point. Yet there were other more sinister instances of men being equated with the ass in ritual acts of public humiliation, and even as a prelude to execution. For example, it was reported that during the annual festival of Purim, celebrating the story of the Book of Esther, Jews carried a representation of the Biblical villain Haman as crucified instead of hung. Since Haman was seen as an evildoer and reviled by the Jews, the practice can only have been of the highest offence to Christians; it was forbidden by law in AD 408.²⁵⁴ More serious is the account by the Antiochene writer Libanius (AD 314-c.393) of a man, sentenced to whipping, being forced to wear a donkey's head.²⁵⁵ The connection between execution and the despised donkey is further highlighted by Hanfmann, who cites the custom of punishing those who pretended kingship by showing them as donkey-men or donkeys. Hanfmann uses the execution of the Seleucid pretender Achaios in 213 BC as an example, Achaios having been publicly crucified with his head sewn into a donkey's skin.²⁵⁶ Whether this particular tradition was known to the author of the Palatine graffito in his presentation of the reputed King of the Jews is purely speculative. Hence whilst individually none of these incidents may have a direct bearing on the Palatine graffito, collectively they sketch a vibrant historical and social backdrop against which the image should be read.

Whilst there is a temptation to analyse the iconographic details of the Palatine drawing in closer detail than the poor quality of its incision work merits,²⁵⁷ it is important to note that several features used in fourth and fifth century material figurations of the Crucifixion, and several compositional devices that would become prominent in Crucifixion iconography of the fifth, sixth and even seventh

²⁵⁴ *Codex Theodosianus* 16.8.18. Rutgers assumes that the act was intended to poke fun at the Christians: (1992), p. 102, n. 8 with references.

²⁵⁵ Hanfmann (1979), p. 206, n. 9.

²⁵⁶ Hanfmann (1979), pp. 205-207, citing Polybius VIII.21

²⁵⁷ the difficulties encountered in doing so are witnessed in the unusual interpretations of King (1887), pp. 229-231 [who argued that the figure is not crucified but stands on a pedestal, holding a cross in front of him], and Morton Smith (1978), p. 62 [who felt that the crucified is seen from behind, not in front].

centuries, are present in the graffito: the use of a tau cross; the upright stance of the body against the cross; the tapering of the arms upwards to suggest that they are attached to the crossbar; the profile view of the victim's head; the representation of the victim clothed and not naked; and the more controversial depiction of a foot support. These features will be discussed more fully at the end of this chapter, for as the foregoing review of the development of Crucifixion iconography will be able to show, we have in the Palatine graffito a visual conception of crucifixion that in comparison with later Crucifixion iconography appears strikingly conventional.

In western art and religious culture we are so accustomed to seeing images of Jesus attached to a cross that we hardly notice them at all. Our familiarity with the story of the Crucifixion through the visual arts makes it difficult to imagine how we might go about pictorialising the event if we had only our imagination to work from. In the fifth century it seems that such imagining was possible: Pope Leo the Great was confident that since his congregation knew the history of the Passion so well, hearing it read aloud in the service would create for them a mental picture or vision.²⁵⁸ Saint Jerome's almost contemporary story of the pilgrim Paula relates a similar kind of vision-making: whilst standing on Golgotha before a replica of Jesus' cross, confronted with the fact and actuality of the Crucifixion, Paula fell prostrate in adoration as if she actually saw the body of Jesus hanging on the cross.²⁵⁹ Whilst the survival of the graffito happily shows that the story of the Crucifixion *was* interpreted visually, possibly within a pagan milieu, extant Christian art suggests that such visions as Paula or Pople Leo attest to, did not manifest themselves in Christian art with any regularity before the sixth century. With the exception of several engraved gems, as will be outlined in Chapter III, there are no images of the Crucifixion surviving from the fourth century. The subsequent gap of roughly two hundred years between the execution of the Palatine graffito and the fifth century Christian figurations of the Crucifixion preserved on the Maskell ivory and the Sabina door-panel does beg the question:

²⁵⁸ Sermon 64.1, cited in Loerke (1984), p. 38.

²⁵⁹ Paula's experience is recounted by St Jerome in his letter to Eustochium: *Epistula* 108,9; trans. Wilkinson (1977), p. 49. See the comments of Loerke (1984), p. 34.

what was happening in the meantime *vis à vis* the representation of Jesus' Passion?

II. Third and Fourth Centuries

Prior to the fourth century, visual references to the theme of the Passion appear to have commenced in Christian art via symbolic allusions rather than direct pictorialisation of individual episodes from the Passion narrative. With the interspersion of Old Testament subjects amongst episodes from the New to suggest but never articulate the Passion, these allusions expressed the three principal theological interpretations of the Crucifixion and death of Jesus in the early Church. As outlined by Schiller, these interpretations are as follows. Firstly, the Crucifixion was seen as the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy of suffering²⁶⁰ with Christ the High Priest representing the culmination of Old Testament sacrifices. Secondly, it was interpreted as a victory over death and evil, the Crucifixion perceived as a passage to Christ's Sovereignty. The third interpretation followed Pauline teaching [eg. Rom 6.3-4; ii Tim. 2.10-12] which saw the death and resurrection as events into which the faithful were baptised and in which they could thus participate. This latter understanding was aided by the experience of persecution and martyrdom, and particularly the martyrdoms of Saints Peter and Paul.²⁶¹ The only surviving exception to the rule of symbolic allusion is the two-part processional frieze in the Christian Baptistery of the Christian *domus ecclesiae* at Dura Europos. If this is interpreted as depicting the pious women approaching and entering the Sepulchre on Easter morning, as seems likely,²⁶² it would indicate that episodes from the Passion story were portrayed in the East from as early as the 240s.²⁶³ Further to the Durene frieze is

²⁶⁰ The Crucifixion was an obstacle to acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, as Luke 24:25-7 attests: there, to explain this problem of the Crucifixion, Jesus was presented as a kind of suffering servant who undertook sufferings before entering into glory. Brandon (1965), p. 155.

²⁶¹ Schiller's summary of the early interpretations of the Crucifixion in the Church remains a seminal introduction to the theological material: (1972), v. 2 pp. 1-3. See also Hengel (1979), chs. 2-4.

²⁶² Henry Seyrig first proposed the identification of the fresco as the Woman at the Tomb: Kraeling (1967), pp. 80-88, 190-197 & 231. See also Grabar (1968), I, pp. 517-28; Wharton (1995), pp. 53, 59-60, figs 17 (hypothetical reconstruction of the decorative scheme after Kraeling) & 18 (the well known photograph of the reconstruction in the Yale University Art Gallery).

²⁶³ The essential source on the Resurrection in Early Christian art, with comments on the image of the Crucifixion, is Kartsonis (1986), esp. pp. 18-39. See further on the Durene fresco and the

the second/third century fresco in the crypt of the Passion (Catacomb of Praetextatus) showing a figure wearing a leafy crown and being hailed by two figures waving foliate branches. Whilst it is not inconceivable that the image depicts Jesus being crowned with thorns, the evidence unfortunately remains inconclusive.²⁶⁴

Given the scarcity of figurative representations, the explicit theme of the Passion can be seen to emerge in western funerary art on Passion sarcophagi between 340-370. Known by virtue of their pictorial focus, Passion sarcophagi feature episodes immediately preceding the Crucifixion, presented separately or in combination with other episodes relating to the ministries and martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. According to Gerke they mark the arrival of the first distinct type of representation of the Passion to be found in early Christian art: this type is symbolic.²⁶⁵ The central theme of the sarcophagi is Christ's triumph; hence the scenes are subordinated to the central idea of an enthroned and heavenly Christ.²⁶⁶ The celebrated single-register, five-niche columnar Passion sarcophagus of c. 340 formerly known as Lateran 171 and now in the Museo Pio Cristiano [*Pl.2b*]²⁶⁷ is arguably the finest example of the type of Passion sarcophagi and thus of Gerke's first type of the Passion in early Christian art. Its frieze shows an incipient Passion cycle, with four episodes arranged either side of the central emblem of the *crux invicta*, the unconquered cross: the two endmost niches are occupied by the Carrying of the Cross (left) and Pilate Preparing to Wash his Hands (right), the central niche flanked on the left by a Crowning with Thorns scene, and on the right, The Arrest, Christ being led away as prisoner. The pervading and unifying theme of victory is manifest most prominently in the strategically placed *crux invicta*. The emblem, which consists of the wreathed *chi-rho* monogram, complete with jewels and ribbons, surmounting the victory trophy in the form of a latin cross, appears in lieu of a literal representation of the crucified or risen Jesus. Yet the

figurative representation of the resurrection in early Christian art: Pearson & Harley (2000), pp. 82-91, esp. pp. 86-87.

²⁶⁴ On the date of the fresco see Soper (1938), p. 187 Excursus III; & Du Bourget (1965), p. 16, fig. 53.

²⁶⁵ Gerke (1940), pp. 47-48.

²⁶⁶ Gerke (1940), p. 40; a point reiterated by Schiller (1972), p. 3.

²⁶⁷ Deichman (1967), nr 49, with bibliography. Veganzones (1990), pp. 571-572.

theme is further articulated in each episode. For instance, in his act of passing judgement on Christ, Pilate's power and authority is undermined in the hesitation he shows in looking away.²⁶⁸ Perhaps more obvious is the dramatic reinterpretation of Christ's humiliation in the Crowning of Thorns as a ceremonial coronation with the victory wreath.

As the Vatican sarcophagus illustrates, the friezes of Passion sarcophagi show no interest in the historical sufferings of Jesus. The high points of his torment, including the Garden of Gethsemane, the flagellation and the Crucifixion, are therefore absent.²⁶⁹ Such scenes appear in the Middle Byzantine period with those of the Deposition and Lamentation to further expand the cycle of Christ's Passion.²⁷⁰ Perhaps more decisive than the omission of scenes in pointing to the focus of the reliefs is the reinterpretation of episodes that might otherwise carry connotations of defeat. The Crowning episode is arguably the clearest case in point. Horsley has documented various instances of mock-crownings in the ancient world which may serve as a general background to the mock-crownings of Jesus in Mk 15.16-20, Mt. 27.27-31, Jn 19.1-3; & Lk. 23.11.²⁷¹ The reaction against such tradition, perceived in the re-reading of the episode on the Vatican sarcophagus, where a laurel wreath replaces the crown of thorns to transform the episode,²⁷² is a radical one that may have its precedent in New Testament literature. Schmidt argues that a segment of the Markan Crucifixion narrative, 15:16-32, which includes a crowning, evokes a Roman triumphal procession and is intentionally crafted in this way by the author to suggest that the scandal of the cross is actually an exaltation of Christ.²⁷³ Certainly, in its presentation of the scene the sarcophagus mirrors contemporary theology on Jesus' trial, which specifically interpreted the Passion as a coronation.²⁷⁴ Hence as Brandon observed, if the Praetextatus fresco mentioned above is a depiction of this crowning, it shows that at a very early date the incident of the mocking was re-

²⁶⁸ Toynbee (1970), pp. 97-98.

²⁶⁹ Gerke (1940), p. 33.

²⁷⁰ Maguire (1977), p. 160.

²⁷¹ Horsley (1987), nr 34, p. 137.

²⁷² Schiller (1972), p. 5.

²⁷³ Schmidt (1995), pp. 1-18.

²⁷⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 13.6.22.

interpreted and transformed to become one of symbolic victory; moreover, it anticipates the Vatican sarcophagus by effecting in Brandon's words, "an even more remarkable transformation of the Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus..."²⁷⁵

The thematic and iconographic path to the post-Constantinian Passion sarcophagi can be plotted through the third century. At this time, as Christian communities began to experiment with figurative rather than symbolic and typological expressions of Christ's divine power, the human figure of Jesus was beginning to enter Christian iconographic programmes more consistently and explicitly. Since the Church had no iconographic tradition for the expression of Jesus as a victorious figure, this was achieved predominantly through the utilisation of visual formulae and subjects already developed for the expression of imperial ideology and perfectly suited to the Church's needs.²⁷⁶ Primary amongst these formulae was the appearance and subsequent development of the theme of Christ amongst the Apostles, which drew on the Imperial iconographic and thematic model of the Emperor seated amongst his retinue. The formula showed the Apostles arranged symmetrically around a youthful and clean-shaven Christ, shown frontally and invariably enthroned [*Pl.3b*]. In its Christianised guise, this theme emerged in catacomb art during the late third century but was widely popularised during the fourth century in sarcophagus sculpture.

Initially, Christians elaborated on the theme in the light of their own concept of Jesus as the true philosopher or *magister*, teacher (perhaps a reference to Mt. 29:28).²⁷⁷ Hence they can also be seen to be drawing on pagan scenes in which philosophers intellectualised over matters, Jesus shown as the true philosopher and guardian of the true doctrine.²⁷⁸ This composition, strikingly eastern in

²⁷⁵ Brandon (1975), pp. 109-10. Interpreted as crowing, the fresco could thus be seen to augment the evidence of the Lateran sarcophagus: eg. Marucchi (1905), v. 1, pp. 320-321.

²⁷⁶ Not all models were derived from Imperial precedent, but this was an important source. Grabar (1969), p. 42ff; Shepherd (1980), p. 110; Brenk (1980), pp. 39-52; Janes (1998), pp. 118-134. See also Matthews (1993), pp. 12-21, although his revisionism, which seeks to discount the imperial derivation of Christian art explored by such scholars as Kantorowicz, Alföldi, Grabar, L'Orange and Gerke, is not convincing.

²⁷⁷ as on Sarcophagi in the Louvre and Arles Museum, whereon Lawrence compares the arrangement of the twelve seated Apostles to Mt. 19.28. Lawrence (1932), p. 114 n. 32, figs 10 & 11.

²⁷⁸ On this composition and its imperial and other sources: Brenk (1980), pp. 44-45; Matthews (1993), pp. 109-114.

rhythmic pattern and in the diminution of emphasis from a central figure, could thus express in its Christian guise the continuity and immutability of the divine law. It was subsequently influenced by a contemporary trend in Roman Imperial art, effected during the Diocletianic period around the turn of the fourth century, whereby the emperor was gradually divinised and portrayed in official art as *princeps*, enthroned and invariably surrounded by his retinue. Whilst this process of divinisation had begun in the third century, it reached new intensity under Diocletian's attempt to restore solidarity to the empire in the early fourth century.²⁷⁹

On Christian sarcophagi, variants on the pervasive *magister* theme multiplied and emerged in quick succession.²⁸⁰ In the course of the fourth century Jesus was cast as what Grabar termed the "*panbasileus celeste*", "all-King of heaven".²⁸¹ This recasting, with Jesus seated on a throne above the personification of the heavens, has also been shown to have direct links with Imperial art.²⁸² MacCormack noted that once adapted by Christianity and applied to Jesus sometime after the Peace of the Church, the motif could no longer be applied to the mortal ruler and it thus disappears from Imperial art.²⁸³ Shortly after, the *traditio legis* was developed. This is the scene in which the exalted Christ hands an open scroll or codex (usually) to St Peter, who stands on his left with St Paul on Christ's right. The scene appears on sarcophagi at Ancona and Milan, the latter pictured on *Plate 3b*.²⁸⁴ Appearing in various media, and possibly devised in Rome, the *traditio legis* emphasised the primacy of Peter and Paul as princes of the Apostles and martyrs. Yet it also had an eschatological meaning, signifying the resurrected Christ of the Second Coming.²⁸⁵ The scroll of the Law representing the New

²⁷⁹ L'Orange (1965), pp. 85-125, remains an essential account of the artistic changes.

²⁸⁰ For the different themes and the Passion sarcophagi: Veganzones (1990), pp. 572-5.

²⁸¹ Grabar (1936), pp. 196-197 & 207-208; cited by Matthews (1993), p. 100.

²⁸² One of the finest examples of this type is the sarcophagus from St Peter's, Rome, (previously Lateran 174): Deichmann (1967), nr 677. See also the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, central scene, top register: Malbon (1990), fig. 44 (detail). On the theme see Grabar (1969), pp. 43-44; Brenk (1980), pp. 45-46; MacCormack (1981), pp. 127-132, all of whom cite the enthronement of the emperor on the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki.

²⁸³ MacCormack (1981), pp. 130-131. Brenk (1980), p. 52 n. 45, notes that the adoption of Imperial art did not take place *immediately* after 313.

²⁸⁴ Dresken-Weiland (1998), nrs. 149 & 150.

²⁸⁵ On the origins of the scene and its meaning: Frazer in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), pp. 556; and Brenk (1980), pp. 144-145, who suggests that it was devised for an apse.

Covenant is the counterpart of the Old Covenant given to Moses; Paul, the upholder of the Mosaic Law, was converted to the New and became one of its most passionate advocates. This central image could be accompanied by other episodes from the Passion narrative. In the case of two almost identical five-arch-columnar sarcophagi from the late fourth century, one in Arles and the other in the Vatican, it is accompanied by Christ before Pilate (far right) and a foot washing scene (far left).²⁸⁶ As both the Arles and Vatican sarcophagi attest, this is also the time when the bearded so-called “Syro-Palestinian” Jesus, seen on the Sabina Crucifixion panel, appears. Other variants on the theme of Jesus amongst the Apostles that emerged in the course of the fourth century were Christ ceremonially acclaimed by the Apostles and Christ as the conqueror of death, sometimes receiving from the Apostles the crown of martyrdom. Such sarcophagi, including the example in Palermo pictured on *Plate 2a*, are thus often referred to as “acclaim” sarcophagi.²⁸⁷ Again, this latter formula owed much to the utilisation of such imagery by the Emperors as a means of connoting victory.²⁸⁸ In certain instances Jesus was replaced at the centre by the symbolic monogram of the cross-trophy, as he is on the Vatican sarcophagus discussed above. Hence the figure of Jesus and the symbol of the cross were interchangeable; either could be represented as the object of the Apostles’ adoration without changing the general meaning of the frieze.

The diffusion of individual episodes from the Passion immediately preceding the Crucifixion occurred concomitantly with the spread of these adorative compositions in the fourth century. The most popular Passion episodes for representation included the Entry into Jerusalem, Christ Washing the Feet of Peter, the Denial and Arrest of Peter, Pilate’s Hand Washing, the Crowning with Thorns, up to the episode of Simon of Cyrene Bearing the Cross. The Crucifixion remained absent. The emphasis in sarcophagus sculpture on non-narrative presentations of Jesus amidst the Apostles and the *traditio legis* betrays, in

²⁸⁶ Campenhausen (1929), Abb. 7 & 8; Gerke (1940), pp. 91ff. See Lawrence (1932), pp. 108-110, figs 1 & 2 for the similarity between the two.

²⁸⁷ Kühnel (1987), pp. 69-70.

²⁸⁸ On the Christian use of the presentation of the crown to Christ see S. Swirn in Bowersock et. al. (1999), pp. 400-401, with bibliography. For the acclaim sarcophagi see Kühnel (1987), especially pp. 69-70.

western art at least, an intense pre-occupation with the expression of the authority of the Roman Church and the glorification of the Apostles. Given this emphasis, it is perhaps not surprising that the representation of the aforementioned scenes from the Passion that had begun to infiltrate continuous friezes of biblical programmes on funerary reliefs at the beginning of the fourth century,²⁸⁹ should become subordinated to the theme of power and authority. The episode of Pilate washing his hands for instance, which signified the passing of judgement on Christ, was one of the most popular episodes from the Passion narrative in the later fourth century and was often used to embody the entire Passion story.²⁹⁰ Yet as the pictorialisation of the event on the Vatican sarcophagus reveals, it was used as a vehicle for the expression of Christ's authority and that of the Church, not Pilate's. The invariably detailed enumeration of each episode, including Pilate's averted gaze in the Vatican sarcophagus figuration [*Pl.2b*], betrays an increasing interest in and concern for the historicity of the Passion story. It also reveals a vivid interest in the participants themselves.

The most decisive impetus for the expansion of the Passion cycle, and ultimately for the formulation of explicit Crucifixion imagery, was the more regular appearance in western Christian sepulchral art in the fourth century of figurative representations of episodes from the Passion. By the mid-fifth century, twenty scenes from the story of the Passion and Resurrection have been identified in western art.²⁹¹ No eastern art works survive from this century on which the theme is preserved. The seemingly sudden expansion of the repertoire of Passion episodes was greatly facilitated by the adoption of the narrative style in early Christian art. Perceptible in some third but particularly fourth century Christian images, this style allowed entire sequences of events to be pictorially re-enacted.²⁹² Having been handed down as a continuous account in the Gospels, the Passion narratives provided artists with a ready-made sequence of events that comfortably fitted the narrative representation of biblical themes. The thematic

²⁸⁹ such as on the Two Brothers sarcophagus (AD 330-340): Kitzinger (1977), fig. 42, p. 25.

²⁹⁰ as discussed by Schiller (1972), p. 64; Malbon (1990), p. 46; Matthews (1993), p. 89. On various single register, five niche columnar sarcophagi, including the Vatican Passion sarcophagus, Pilate's judgement is located in the extreme right niche: see Campenhausen (1929), Table I.

²⁹¹ Gerke (1940).

²⁹² see the comments of Kitzinger (1977), p. 26. Murray (1982), p. 169.

expansion and elaboration of scenes that had once been compressed,²⁹³ subsequently drew attention to individual episodes. On those Passion sarcophagi produced in post-Constantinian workshops in North Italy and Gaul, this episodic quality was facilitated and indeed enhanced by the insertion of columns, as on the Vatican sarcophagus [Pl.2b], or trees²⁹⁴ to separate and thus frame individual episodes, thereby creating self-contained compositional units.²⁹⁵

The key to solving the problem of the absence of the Crucifixion scene in these incipient Passion cycles on mid-fourth century sarcophagi can possibly be located in the strategic use of the aniconic motif of the unvanquished cross at the centre of the sculpted friezes.²⁹⁶ It was placed amidst Passion episodes and at the centre of the apostolic processions developed at that time, and in the latter instance, as noted above, can be seen to have replaced the figure of Christ.²⁹⁷ From about 350 onwards Christ enthroned in heaven, or from about 370 onwards the *traditio legis*, with Christ standing on the mount of Paradise, could appear in its stead. Schiller thus argues, “This makes the point, in hieratic manner, that Christ as Emperor through his victory over death gives the New Law in eternal sovereignty”.²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it was the *crux invicta* that remained the frequent and central motif on Passion sarcophagi until the Theodosian period (379-395).

Essentially, the motif converted into visual imagery an already promoted theological notion of the unconquerable cross. Visually, it assimilated the official, widely disseminated and universally recognised emblem of Roman military victory, the trophy or *tropaeum*, with the victorious cross of Christ. The theological assimilation had begun in the second century when Christian apologists conveniently perceived a superficial similarity between the shape of the trophy and that of the cross. Yet as Storch has demonstrated, it was Eusebius who secured the connection, transforming the Christian cross into the supreme trophy

²⁹³ as on the Two Brothers sarcophagus, Kitzinger (1977), fig. 42.

²⁹⁴ eg. Lateran 164, Museo Pio Cristiano: Deichman (1967), nr 61.

²⁹⁵ Schiller (1972), p. 5. Roberts (1989), p. 95, comments that this quality is already present on the frieze sarcophagi but less prominent.

²⁹⁶ Deichman (1967), nrs. 49, 57-59, 61, 106, 151, 164, 171 & 174.

²⁹⁷ For the use of the motif on the acclaim sarcophagi: Kühnel (1987), pp. 69-70.

²⁹⁸ Schiller (1972), pp. 5-6.

of the Empire.²⁹⁹ In Roman imperial art of the fourth century, the trophy, in the form of a stake with a cross-bar, was displayed with the arms of the vanquished and often draped in the imperial cloak, the conquered barbarians beneath it; in the Christian context, the *tropaeum* became the trophy of the Cross, being surmounted by a triumphal crown and the captured barbarians replaced at the foot of the cross-trophy by two soldiers.³⁰⁰ Sometimes the trophy cross remains draped with a military cloak, betraying the imperial military model more clearly, and this iconography continued into the fifth century.³⁰¹ Within the wreath was placed the *chi-rho* monogram, known also as the *Chrismon*, comprising the first two letters of the Greek ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ, *Christos*, set in a stylised form with the X bisected by the P. The union of the two letters in this way has pre-Constantinian origins³⁰² but as Leclercq argues, from Constantinian times the union lost its value as an abbreviation and emerged as a symbol of religious allegiance and subsequently of protective significance.³⁰³ Both functions were promoted, at a time of great superstition, by Constantine's construction and subsequent use of a military standard which bore the symbol following his infamous vision of the cross in 312 (often referred to as the *labarum*).³⁰⁴ Both the Christian Latin apologist Lactantius and Eusebius, in detailing the efficacy of the sign of the cross and recording tales

²⁹⁹ Storch (1970), pp. 111-112, and passim. As Storch outlines: Justin Martyr [*Apologia* 1.50] was the first author to note the connection between the two, demonstrating that the cross was at the core of the *tropaeum* carried in all processions as a sign of Rome's dominion and power; Tertullian repeated this allusion [*Adversus Marcionem* 4.20]; Minucius Felix [*Octavius* 29.7-8], whilst repudiating reverence for the cross, discerned the figure of one crucified as well as the cross in the trophy.

³⁰⁰ Both Grabar and Brenk cite Pagan sarcophagi as the inspiration for this iconography. Grabar (1969), p. 124-125 fig. 299, uses a fragment of a pagan sarcophagus in Mainz, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, to illustrate the iconographic connection. Brenk cites an example from the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore: (1980), p. 43, fig. 7.

³⁰¹ see the fragment of a fourth century sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano: Deichmann (1967), nr 62, plus bibliography; Veganzones (1990), fig. 5. In the early fifth century Paulinus describes a cross draped in purple appearing in the apse mosaic of the church he built at Nola: *Epistula* 32, cited by Raw (1970), p. 246 & n.35. See the comments of Goldschmidt (1940), p. 100-101; and the reconstruction in Engemann (1974), p. 25 Abb. 3a.

³⁰² Note the carnelian incised with a *chi-rho*, and still in its original gold ring-setting, dated to the third century by Zwierlein-Diehl (1991), v. 3, p. 147 nr 2172, taf. 84G. The letters had previously appeared together in such inscriptions as IN XP, "in Christ", eg. the pre-Constantinian graffito near the tomb of S. Peter in the Vatican: Cecchelli (1953), fig. 18 nr 1. Pitt-Rivers (1966) pp. 18, 25-33, 68, & 74, argued that the *chi-rho* had pagan meaning (standing as an abbreviation for *chreston*, neuter of *chrestos*, meaning "auspicious"- spelt with an *eta* not an *iota* as in *christos*) before its appropriation by Constantine, re-presentation and subsequent adoption as a Christian symbol.

³⁰³ Leclercq "Chrisme" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.1, cols. 1481-1534.

³⁰⁴ On the vision see Nicholson (2000). As is well known, there are two forms of the symbol, the Lactantian and Eusebian versions: Sulzberger (1925), pp. 401-409; Llewelyn (1998), p. 166 n. 39.

of the *labarum* performing miracles, showed the monogram to have a protective significance.³⁰⁵ Hence on the reverse face of a Constantinian bronze coin dating from the year 327, the Christian military and victory standard is shown surmounted by the monogram and rising out of a snake, symbolising the defeat of evil opponents.³⁰⁶

In the crowned cross-trophy, which unequivocally demonstrated the glory of the Passion, there is the visual allusion to the twin themes of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The cross clearly evokes the instrument of the Passion. The wreathed *chi-rho* is a reminder of the ultimate victory attained after the death in the Resurrection, whilst the realistic soldiers at the foot of the cross act as a reminder of the tomb. Birds representing the souls of the dead and the phoenix³⁰⁷ are often shown resting on the arms of the cross to allude to resurrection. The phoenix was of course legendary in ancient literature as capable of regenerating itself out of its decomposing remains and was appropriated by both writers and artists as an allegory of Christian, and of Christ's own, resurrection.³⁰⁸ Primarily through the elaboration and dissemination of this aniconic motif of the *crux invicta* in the mid-fourth century on sarcophagi [*Pl.2b*], encapsulating as it did the Christian reading of Jesus as the all-powerful victor, any opprobrious connotations that may have been attached to the cross as the instrument of the Passion were defiantly cancelled.

The interest in Jesus' victory over death is further developed in the christological Passion cycle displayed prominently on the lid of the fourth century Brescia reliquary casket [*Pl.4a*], one of the larger reliquaries of rectangular form surviving from the early period.³⁰⁹ An expanded Passion cycle, extending from the Garden of Gethsemane, the Arrest, the Petrine Denial, the Judgement of Annas and

³⁰⁵ Alföldi (1948), pp. 22-23 & corresponding notes. On the matter of the *chi-rho* monogram and its protective significance see the comments and notes made by Llewelyn (1998), pp. 166-167. For schematic drawings of the *labarum* (Eusebian and Lactantian versions) see now Finney "Labarum" (1999), pp. 659-660.

³⁰⁶ London, British Museum: 1890-8-4-11. Finaldi (2000), nr 6, pp. 18-19.

³⁰⁷ eg. Deichman (1967), nr 62.

³⁰⁸ see Finney "Phoenix" (1999), pp. 918-919.

³⁰⁹ It is roughly 32cms long, 22cms wide, and 25cms high: Watson (1981), p. 284. Watson records the speculation of J. Folda that the reliquary was displayed in a small chapel within a basilica where it could be visited by the masses and thus the iconographic programme viewed at close range, p. 290 & p. 297 n. 64.

Caiaphas, culminating in Christ's Appearance before Pilate, is now distributed across two registers.³¹⁰ Moreover, each episode is developed, with an increasing number of characters portrayed. This oblong ivory box was possibly manufactured in a Milanese workshop.³¹¹ What is interesting to note is that on each of the vertical sides of the box, where Old and New Testament episodes are carved in relief, the themes seemingly regarded as of primary importance are represented within a central horizontal panel on each side; those themes of lesser significance are shown on a substantially reduced scale in narrow friezes above and below. This format is abandoned on the lid where two registers of equal size present the Passion scenes in narrative sequence.³¹² Whilst we can note the prominence thus accorded to the Passion on this box, the Crucifixion is still omitted. Nevertheless, in its expanded form, the Brescia Passion cycle should be seen as coming at a stage in between the Passion sarcophagi (with their use of only two or three Passion scenes shown as isolated episodes) and the more mature early fifth century cycles (on which the Crucifixion is included with the Resurrection), as Soper previously noted.³¹³

III. Fifth Century

Regardless of the ways in which one might view and so interpret the symbolic, typological and narrative allusions to the death of Christ that appeared in the first centuries of Christian art, the fact remains that according to extant evidence, Jesus' body was never placed on the cross in fourth century Passion narrative cycles. The delay in preparing or being prepared, both artistically and theologically, to formulate a non-symbolic representation of the Crucifixion, makes this ultimate step towards realism, apparently taken in the fifth century, seem larger than perhaps it was. For whilst the figuration of the "cross" itself changed dramatically, the meaning of the image did not: the same faith expressed

³¹⁰ Museo dell' Età Cristiana, Brescia, Italy. Volbach (1976), nr 107; Kollwitz (1933); Soper (1938), pp. 177-181, 185-187; Delbrueck (1952); Watson (1981); Elsner (1995), pp. 280-284. Watson proposes the year 386 for the casket's date of production, pp. 283 & 292.

³¹¹ Watson (1981), *passim*, countering the previous work of Soper [(1938), pp. 177-81 & 185-187, who argued for a north Italian or Provençal origin], concurs with Kollwitz (1933), pp. 64-68, and Grabar (1969), p. 137, in positing a Milanese provenance for the casket.

³¹² A row of six birds set against a backdrop of drapery appears in a narrow frieze at the top of the lid.

³¹³ Soper (1938), p. 178. Watson (1981), p. 289, sees an expansion of Orthodox christology in the casket's Passion cycle.

via the *crux invicta* on the Passion sarcophagi reliefs imbued and informed the iconography of the alert body of Christ on the cross which emerged in the fifth century: triumph.³¹⁴ In Chapter III, two gems will be shown to provide a critical phase of development in between these two stages.

Gerke's second type of the representation of the Passion in Christian art occurs in miniature art. Where the first type of representation, seen on the sarcophagi, was symbolic, the second type is narrative, the Brescia Casket illustrating a developmental stage between the two. As represented by the small but carefully detailed Maskell casket panels [*Plate 4b*] and by the door panels from the Church of Santa Sabina, the narrative type tells the story of the Passion in stational fashion: on the panels, the events are those between Pilate washing his hands and the post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus to the Apostles; on the doors the events are those between Gethsemane and the Ascension.³¹⁵

Where the Passion sarcophagi showed a synthesis of the themes of the Crucifixion and Resurrection in the cross-trophy, the four Maskell reliefs now tease out the themes and show them on separate panels. Despite this development, the Passion episodes are still shown as part of an organic whole: the four panels detail a cohesive passage from death to Resurrection, the Resurrection being the culmination of the arrest and death shown on the first panels. This is appropriate given the likelihood that the panels probably constituted a casket that was used to store the eucharistic host or a relic.³¹⁶ Compressed into the first relief are three episodes: Pilate washing his hands, Christ carrying the cross and the Petrine denial. The second relief shows two episodes: the suicide of Judas and the Crucifixion, which punctuates the end of this two-plaque sequence from betrayal to death. The cycle ends with the appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples, incorporating the Incredulity of Thomas. The third and fourth reliefs show one episode each, and both are post-Resurrection scenes: the women and sleeping soldiers at the empty tomb, followed by the appearance of Jesus to the Apostles

³¹⁴ Reil (1904), pp. 108-110; Schiller (1972), p. 91.

³¹⁵ Gerke (1940), p. 47.

³¹⁶ Although it is impossible to establish the intended function of such a box with any certainty, this function is re-asserted in the most recent writing on the ivories: S. Avery-Quash in Finaldi (2000), p. 108. On ivory boxes and caskets see Dalton (1909), p. xxii.

and the Doubting of Thomas on the final relief. Gerke hypothesised that on the missing casket lid one would expect to see the Ascension or *Maiestas*, as on the Pola Casket; he also noted that on the Santa Sabina doors, the Ascension is portrayed for the first time as the conclusion of the Passion cycle.³¹⁷ The pictorial and thematic emphasis in the series as a whole thus rests on the Resurrection rather than the events leading up to and including the Crucifixion. It asserts the power of Jesus as well as the triumph of the Church, encapsulated in the final panel of the risen Jesus appearing amongst his Apostles and handing over to them the responsibility of teaching to the Church.

As the earliest surviving representation of the Crucifixion in a narrative context, the Maskell Crucifixion has attracted much discussion. Yet this is an ideal context in which to re-examine the figuration in some detail. The striking feature of the figuration is the peculiar vigour conveyed by the artist in his representation of the youthful body of an apparently living and quiescent Jesus on the cross. Whilst his eyes are wide open and look with intensity from his head, Jesus' gaze is not directed at the viewer. Although the head and neck are firmly upright, the artist has skilfully turned Jesus' head fractionally to his right so that he looks past the viewer and out of his physical condition on the cross. As will be noted later, this technique communicates the divinity of the figure and has an intriguing correlative in the divinised representation of the Emperor in Imperial art of this time.³¹⁸

Physically, in this representation of the Crucifixion, Jesus unfolds his arms flat against the *patibulum* of the cross. Likewise his hands, with their carefully delineated fingers, are stretched open and shown quite flat, unflinching at the nails penetrating the midst of the palms. Jesus' body is shown rigidly *en face* as though he is standing defiantly against the cross, his legs and feet placed side by side. From close inspection of the panel it is evident that the artist did not render a *suppedaneum* or foot support projecting from the cross to support the feet and toes, which are also untouched by nails. This fact visually underlines the strength of Jesus intimated in the stance of his body. A plain nimbus encircles his head, emphatically pointing to his divinity shown forth on the cross. Although Dalton

³¹⁷ Gerke (1940), p. 46.

³¹⁸ L'Orange (1965), p. 124.

and Maskell noted that the finely engraved line of the nimbus may have been a later addition, Jesus being without a nimbus in the first “Arrest” panel,³¹⁹ there is no reason to doubt that it was not an original feature for the triumphant figure on the Cross and later in Resurrected form in the fourth panel, when his indomitable divinity is further revealed.

The interpretation of the Crucifixion as a triumph in this pictorialisation is manifest not merely in the iconography employed for Jesus’ body, but also in the juxtaposition of that iconography with the representation of Judas, hanging in death at the far left of the scene. The limpness of Judas’ body, his broken neck, and the downward fall of his feet contrast directly with the taut body of Jesus, with its erect head and its feet flexed firmly upwards, a contrast especially visible in the photograph on *Plate 6b*. Note also the details of the eyes: Judas’ being closed, Jesus’ wide open. The ineffectual action of the soldier thrusting the lance into Jesus’ side and the title-board appearing at the top of the cross punctuate the interpretation of Christ as the victor.

Whilst the visual juxtaposition of the Judas’ suicide with Jesus’ execution might be unexpected in this early period, the suicide does appear in other early Christian and Byzantine visual contexts:³²⁰ the fourth century Brescia Casket,³²¹ the Servannes sarcophagus, roughly contemporaneous with the Maskell Passion ivories,³²² the sixth century Rabbula³²³ and Rossano Gospels,³²⁴ and on the variously dated front right ciborium column at San Marco.³²⁵ The description of

³¹⁹ Dalton (1901) p. 50; Maskell (1905) p. 93.

³²⁰ As noted by Soper (1938), p. 186. Morey (1942) p. 107 noted the prevalence of the orientaling Latin style in certain of these representations.

³²¹ The hanging Judas on the Brescia casket is pictured in Gerke (1940), pl. xviii, fig. 76. Watson (1981) cites an alternative interpretation furnished by Ambrose: “The image is not heretical but a reminder that Christ, who hung on the tree at Calvary, and Judas, who hanged himself, were both cursed: Judas, for his own sin and to his own destruction; Christ, for the sin of humanity and for the purpose of redemption.”, p. 290 & p. 297 n. 56.

³²² Gerke (1940), pl. xvii figs 70 & (reconstruction) 71. It also contains a primitive form of the Ascension.

³²³ Cecchelli et.al. (1959), f.12r: Canon table showing Judas’ betrayal on the right, his hanging on the left.

³²⁴ The Codex Rossanensis, f. 8r: Christ before Pilate appears in the upper register; the repentance and subsequent suicide of Judas below. Probably Syria, sixth century. Kessler assents to the previously posited view that this page had its prototype in a fifth century mural painting: Kessler in Weitzmann (1979), nr 443.

³²⁵ Lucchesi-Palli (1942), pp. 72ff.

the hanging in Prudentius' *Dittochaeum* was according to Soper, strongly suggestive of a visual cycle of illustrations.³²⁶ Similarly, the inclusion of such details as the coins in certain versions, including those on the Brescia Casket and on the Maskell relief, where they spill from a purse beneath Judas' feet, have been seen to point to a common model in an illustrated Passion text.³²⁷ Both theories remain speculative. Interestingly however, the record of such details in the *Dittochaeon*, essentially a walking tour of Jerusalem for the Christian tourist, indicates that by the fourth century, the Holy Land experience was known to westerners as well as to locals from the eastern part of the Empire.³²⁸ The detail of the coins symbolically registers the fact of his betrayal: it reminds us that if Judas had not betrayed Jesus with the silver, the Son of God would not have been crucified.

Turning to the other figures in the scene, traditionally there has been some unnecessary apprehension and/or confusion with regard to the identification of the figure on the far right. This apprehension has arisen in part from damage sustained to sections of the relief, including the surface area either side of Jesus' head above the arms of the cross [*Pl. 6a* shows this clearly]³²⁹ and the loss of the lance that the figure on the right originally held. (Note that Christ's right index-finger and both thumbs are also broken, and that the middle section of the tree from which Judas hangs has been replaced). Resulting from the breakage and subsequent loss of the lance, the figure's arm gesture has often been, and is still, misinterpreted as one of "wonder" in accordance with Mt 27.54, Mk 15.39, & Lk 23.47.³³⁰ The tendency towards misinterpretation has been compounded by the fact that the figure, clothed in oriental dress, wears the flat cap often given to Jews in early Christian art,³³¹ and so has been simply identified as a Jew.³³² Westwood identified the man in

³²⁶ Prudentius *Dittochaeon* 39. Soper (1938), p. 186.

³²⁷ L. Kötzsche in Weitzmann (1979), nr 452 p. 504.

³²⁸ In the fourth century, many pilgrims to the Holy Land came from West, but the majority were locals: Sivan (1988a), p. 64.

³²⁹ Schiller (1972), p. 91, felt that the damage to this area was due to the breakage of the cosmic symbols of the sun and moon, which she believed to be original features of the panel. Given the inclusion of the symbols on Passion sarcophagi either side of the *crux invicta* this is not impossible, but remains speculative nonetheless.

³³⁰ eg. Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 69. Macgregor (2000), pt. 3.

³³¹ The dress is noted by Dalton (1901), p. 49, & (1909), p. 6, and Maskell (1905), p. 93.

³³² eg. Kraus (1896-1897), v. I p. 174: "...links einer der Juden mit phrygischer Mütze".

1876 as the centurion who pierced Jesus' side.³³³ That this identification is correct, with the lance an original feature of the carving, is evident on several fronts.³³⁴ Whilst the centurion's body leans away as though he is preparing to plunge the spear into Christ's side, his right-hand is actually shown tightly clasped, as though gripping onto a spear-like object. The broken end of the lance is still visible protruding from his clasped fist. Moreover, there is a distinct mark carved on the left side of Jesus' chest, in line with the soldier's fist, to indicate the wound. The latter two details are clearly visible from a frontal inspection of the plaque. Although the small but important details of the wound and the lance-fragment are rendered in the illustration included by Dobbert,³³⁵ they are absent from the illustration of the ivory in the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*.³³⁶ Similarly Garrucci renders the wound only and not the stumpy remnant of the lance in the fist.³³⁷

Having demonstrated the identity of the centurion, the significance of his location on Jesus' left should be pointed out. The Gospels do not specify the side on which Jesus was pierced (cf. Jn 19.33-5). According to Pseudo-Quintilian however, soldiers usually thrust the spear into a victim's left side so as to penetrate the heart, and thereby guarantee death. Consequently, the piercing usually followed the breaking of the legs with an iron bar, an act that brought about the death more quickly by causing the body to slump, thus inducing asphyxia.³³⁸ At this formative stage in the development of Crucifixion iconography then, it would seem that the Maskell figuration has been constructed with some sense of historical verisimilitude. Since the side was changed only after the time of the Rabbula Gospel [*Pl.7a*], as Reil noted,³³⁹ the piercing of Jesus' left side on the relief can hardly be seen as a lapse in orthodoxy,³⁴⁰ there being no established iconographic

³³³ Westwood (1876), pp. 44-45, & subsequently Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6 p. 67, & Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2 col. 3067. Dobbert (1880), p. 46, is incorrectly credited with the identification by Gurewich (1957), p. 358.

³³⁴ Westwood (1876), p. 44, noted the "very spirited attitude" needed to effect the insertion of the spear.

³³⁵ Dobbert (1880), p. 6.

³³⁶ Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3068 fig. 3376. This line drawing seems to have been taken from the photograph published in Dalton (1901), pl. VI.

³³⁷ Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6 tav. 446 nr 2.

³³⁸ For these details: Légasse (1997), p. 98 & p. 161 n. 113.

³³⁹ Reil (1930), p. 19, & 87. For the change and its significance, Gurewich (1957), pp. 358-362.

³⁴⁰ Baldwin Smith (1918), p. 188 n. 1, described it as such.

traditions for the pictorialisation of the lance-bearer at the scene of the Crucifixion at this date as far as we can determine from extant evidence. That the placement of the centurion was deliberate in this early instance is attested on the final panel where in conformity to the Crucifixion panel, Thomas inserts his finger into a wound in Christ's left side [*Pl.4b*]

On the subject of visual consistency between the four panels, the shape of the cross on which Jesus ultimately hangs should be noted. In the figuration of the Crucifixion, the cross, which is flared at its extremities and stands flat on the ground, has been classified as tau-shaped for over a century.³⁴¹ Indeed, from an examination of the surface of the relief the only indication that the upright post projected above Jesus' head is the presence of the *titulus* above his head. Yet, given his attention to detail in other matters, we might assume that the artist wanted the viewer to think that the *stipes* reached head-height since the *titulus*, sitting behind and projecting above Christ's head, was presumably meant to be connected to it (rather than merely being attached to the border of the panel). The omission of the upper part of the *stipes* can best be understood when viewing the panel in profile. This reveals that the upright shaft was not carved behind Christ's body; Jesus is set flush against the back surface of the panel, his head slightly overlapping the base of the *titulus*. The concern to establish the shape of the cross is merely to see whether it is possible to ascertain when the tau cross might have been dispensed with in depictions of the Crucifixion in Late Antiquity. [If some concrete evidence can be established with regard to the shape of the cross in the Makell relief then a line can also be drawn under previous assumptions on the matter.] As the examination of the Pereire and Constanza gems will indicate, the tau cross was shown in earlier representations of the Crucifixion but seems to have been abandoned by the time of the Maskell figuration, and certainly by the late sixth century in eastern Crucifixion iconography.

As an aside, it is also interesting to observe that in depicting Jesus as bearing his own cross the artist seems to follow the Johannine Gospel account [*Jn 19.17*].³⁴²

³⁴¹ eg. Dobbert (1880), p.7; C. Smith (1896/7), pp. 202-3; & latterly Tristan (1996), p. 568.

³⁴² The Synoptics record that on the road to Golgotha, Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Jesus' cross: Mt 27.32; Mk 15.21; Lk 23.26-7.

John's gospel is also favoured in the Crucifixion panel with the inclusion of Mary and John [Jn 19:26-27] and in the piercing [Jn 19:34.35]. As a pair, Mary and John were to have a high profile in Crucifixion iconography subsequent to the fifth century. Their appearance at this formative stage in the subject's pictorial evolution is therefore significant. Also interesting is their pairing to one side of the cross, a practice continued in the Rabbula figuration [Pl.7a].

A further feature to note in this early pictorialisation of the Crucifixion is Jesus' loincloth. Whilst it was believed in the early Church that Jesus was crucified naked, his nudity is only inferred from the Gospel narratives in the descriptions of the parting of his garments. In the second century, his nudity was vividly described by Melito of Sardis.³⁴³ In this visual context however, his nudity can be seen to have a thematic rather than historic import. His naked physical form, which is carefully delineated, does not necessarily refer to his death as a man³⁴⁴ but should be seen to emphasise his divinity and thereby the central theme of victory, a victory attained both by Christ and the Church. The ivory in fact shows a development of this theme as it is presented on the Nott and Constanza gems, as will be shown in Chapter III. The humanity suggested in the naked form is in fact subjugated to the expression of his divinity, the nudity interacting with the form and posture of the body, the nimbus and the *titulus* to procure a visual assertion of Jesus' spiritual and universal pre-eminence. Whilst Jesus' body conforms to the rather stocky style associated with art of the Roman period, its description as such should not prejudice a high regard for this visual representation. For the artist has mindfully articulated a well-proportioned and somewhat idealised physique, the naked human form being sensitively and in fact quite explicitly detailed: Jesus wears only the very narrow loincloth or *subligaculum*, shown pulled in around the waist to accentuate from side view the curve of the buttocks; the flesh creases of the groin are very deliberately rendered, as is the shapely musculature of his body. As such, this is an athletic or heroic display of nudity of the kind understood in the Roman world as a mark of superior status.³⁴⁵ This interpretation is borne out in the juxtaposition of Jesus' strong, victorious and semi-naked body with the fully

³⁴³ Melito of Sardis, *Homily on the Passion*: see the excerpt translated by Hengel (1982), p. 21.

³⁴⁴ As Schiller (1972), p. 91, and Tinsley (1972), pp. 32-33, suggest.

³⁴⁵ Brown (1998), pp. 9-10.

clothed and unmistakably dead figure of Judas. Hence in its heroic guise, rigidly unfurled on the cross, the naked human form of Jesus in this image is “dressed” in divinity.

Whilst the nudity may not necessarily be a vehicle for the expression of Jesus’ humanity, there are iconographic elements that clearly are. The human nature has been distinguished by the artist in the inclusion of Mary at the cross with John, the nails in the open palms and the lance plunged with force into his side (hence the added importance of correctly identifying the centurion). As Jesus was already dead we are told that the spear pierced his side producing water and blood (Jn 19:34,35). This peculiarly Johannine detail was later inserted, notoriously by Jerome, into the Matthean narrative after 27.49 where it gave the impression that Christ was pierced *before* his death, and subsequently died because of it.³⁴⁶ Hence in this context, Moore argues that the image presents Christ just prior to his death, reflecting the belief that the spear thrust precipitated the death.³⁴⁷

Despite the panel’s enumeration of narrative and historical detail, its concerns lie beyond the exact replication of such truths. In the representation of Jesus as a clean-shaven youth, defiantly upright and rigidly *en face*, his limbs energetically stretched out against the cross, his eyes wide open gazing intensely into the distance, his head encircled by a nimbus, his body unaffected by the nails or the insertion of the lance into his side, there is a strong theological statement regarding the insuperability of his triumph over the cross and of his divinity; in fact, the stance seems to emulate the powerful description of Jesus, made by Cyril of Jerusalem nearly a century before, stretching out his hands on the cross that he might encompass the ends of the world.³⁴⁸ In its poetic evocation and simultaneous juxtaposition of otherworldly and humanistic forces at work in the scene - in the presentation of the coins spilling from the loosely tied purse and the symbol of renewal in the image of the bird nesting in Judas’ tree of death, and in

³⁴⁶ On the addition of the words: “and another took a spear and pierced his side, and there came out water and blood”, see Throckmorton (1949), p. 183 nr 250. See also Moore (1974), pp. 108-109; Gurewich (1957), p. 359 n. 8.

³⁴⁷ Moore (1974), p. 108.

³⁴⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 13.28. Stevenson (1988), p. 6, dates Cyril’s delivery of the lectures to baptismal candidates to about 348.

the tragic attribute of pathos evoked by the bodies and downcast gazes of Mary and John - this is both a highly competent figuration and sophisticated conception of the Crucifixion. There are many dramatic tensions and paradoxes which cut across this image to gracefully articulate Christ's human and divine natures. For instance: the nails and the lance, yet the open eyes and vibrancy of body; the human shape but its divine glow (nimbate and muscled); the demise of Judas and the new life that is forecast in the bird's nest in the tree and born of his betrayal; the coins symbolising the betrayal, and the victory won on the cross.

Although Christian literature continued to enunciate the painful and sacrificial death of Christ, artists seem to have remained unswervingly committed to this "unrealistic" portrayal of the Crucifixion which underlined Christ's status as the supreme and divine victor and avoided all reference to his human suffering. And whilst christological debate raged within the Church about which of Christ's natures, divine or human, suffered on the cross, it would remain the method of portrayal into the early Byzantine period.

The Maskell Crucifixion probably predates by only a few years the single other extant fifth century depiction of the subject, occurring as a panel on the doors of the Church of Santa Sabina [*Pl.5b*].³⁴⁹ Crafted out of cypress wood, the pair of doors originally consisted of some twenty-eight figurative panels; yet of these only eighteen are preserved on the outer side, five depicting Old Testament scenes, which roughly parallel the incidents from Christ's life, displayed on the remaining panels. Nineteen purely ornamental panels survive on the inner side. The panels are thought to have been executed either during the reign of Pope Celestine I (422-432), when the church was founded and therefore completed by 432, or when the

³⁴⁹ Kondakov (1877), pp. 1-12; Garrucci (1873-1881), vol. 6 p. 179, pl. 499 nr 1; Berthier (1892), pp. 23-29; Dobbert (1880), pp. 41ff; Reil (1904), pp. 59-62 & pp. 110-111; Grondijs (1957), pp. 457-465; Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3045ff; Jeremias (1980), pp. 59-63; & Delbrueck (1954), pp. 139-45. E. Lucchesi Palli in Weitzmann (1979), nr 438. On the iconographic programme see Spieser (1991), pp. 47-81, with literature.

church was consecrated under Sixtus III (432 -440).³⁵⁰ The second dating is now generally preferred.³⁵¹

Both doors are divided vertically to form, in effect, four half-doors. Each half-door bears seven panels, of which three are large (40 x 85cms) and four are small (40 x 30cms).³⁵² The Crucifixion panel is of the smaller size, and is at present located in the top left-hand corner of the left door beside a panel depicting two Holy Women and an Angel at the Tomb.³⁵³ Because over a third of the panels are lost, with only eighteen of the original twenty-eight front panels surviving, it is difficult to preserve the programme of the cycle and subsequently to discern the principle driving the choice of scenes. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the original order of the panels has been changed, hence we cannot be sure in what relationship the Crucifixion was placed, or with what it was originally paired.³⁵⁴ Generally speaking the programme seems to combine parallels between the Old and New Testaments, incorporating scenes from the Passion and Resurrection. There is much emphasis on the Crucifixion panel as the second of only two fifth century representations of the subject in a narrative context. Admittedly, its inclusion within such a comprehensive, large-scale and public cycle at this date is pivotal to the history of Crucifixion image. However, it is not impossible that given its size, the subject was slipped in as a space-filler; for its inclusion is by no means integral to the overall pictorial programme of the doors in the way that the figuration of the Crucifixion is in the Passion cycle on the Maskell ivories.

Several artistic trends can be discerned in the panels, causing some problems in attribution for the doors. The carving style varies between what Delbrueck termed “brilliant” and “plain”: the former, exhibiting well-modelled figures in high-relief

³⁵⁰ A mosaic inscription above the door states that the church was built in the time of Pope Celestine, and according to the *Liber Pontificalis* it was consecrated by Sixtus III: Soper (1938), p. 168 n. 71. Schiller (1972), holds to a completion date of 432, p. 91. Delbrueck (1954), p. 143. Spieser (1991), p. 47.

³⁵¹ Lucchesi-Palli in Weitzmann (1979), nr 438 p. 488; although see Adams, “Crucifix” in Turner (1996), v. 8 p. 211.

³⁵² Spieser (1991), p. 49.

³⁵³ for a schematic drawing of the doors, showing the survival of the original panels and their present location, see Delbrueck (1954), p. 139. For a photograph see Spieser (1991), fig. 1.

³⁵⁴ Regarding the survival and arrangement of the panels see Delbrueck (1954), pp. 139ff; Spieser (1991), pp. 49-51, 74-78. See also Lucchesi-Palli in Weitzmann (1979), nr 438 pp. 486-488.

in skilfully arranged compositions, possibly influenced by eastern and specifically Constantinopolitan, art; the latter, presenting squat and often lumpy figures, as in the Crucifixion scene itself, seemingly reproducing the rough popular style of Roman sarcophagi.³⁵⁵ This style is also glimpsed on the Maskell ivories. Soper suggests that the practice of decorating door surfaces with figurative scenes was eastern in origin: he notes the example of the Durene Synagogue frescoes which show an elaborately decorated door leading to the Temple.³⁵⁶ Parallels for the Sabina doors include those of S. Ambrogio at Milan, plus the decorative door panels of the sepulchre as it is represented on both the Milan (ex-Trivulzio Collection) and Maskell Resurrection ivories [Pl.4b]. However, the Sabina doors are now ascribed to a Roman workshop,³⁵⁷ and in many important respects the figure of the Italian Maskell Jesus is duplicated in this panel: the protagonist is portrayed as short and stocky in the Roman fashion; he is presented rigidly *en face*, standing erect with eyes wide open, unyielding to pain, and clad in the narrow loincloth. There are however some important iconographic and compositional changes.

The Maskell figuration evokes several aspects of the Crucifixion story as it is narrated in the Gospels: Judas' betrayal and subsequent suicide; Jesus stripped and nailed to the cross; the title affixed above his head; the piercing of his side by the centurion; and Jesus addressing his mother and John from the cross. In contrast, as befitting its visual context on a large door (therefore likely to have been viewed at a distance) and not a small hand-held object (viewed at close range) such as a casket as the Maskell ivories probably constituted, the Sabina Crucifixion abbreviates the story to show Jesus crucified between the two thieves. The three figures are shown standing on the same ground-line, wearing the same clothing and striking the same pose, their arms not outstretched but bent at the elbows. As a comparison with the Daniel pendant reveals [Pl.1b & c] this attitude is

³⁵⁵ Delbrueck (1954), pp. 139-143; for the literature on the possible origins for the doors, namely eastern, Italo-Gallic/North Italian, or Roman, p. 139, n. 1. The imitation of sarcophagi in the figural style was noted by Marucchi (1905), p. 333, following the previous studies of Berthier (1892) & Kondakov (1877).

³⁵⁶ Soper (1938), p. 170. For the Milan ivory c. 400, now in the Civico Museo d'Arte, Castello Sforzesco, see Kitzinger (1977), fig. 77. For panel in the Dura Synagogue (first panel right of centre on the West wall, second zone), Wetzmann & Kessler (1990), figs 5 & 139.

³⁵⁷ Lucchesi-Palli in Weitzmann (1979), nr 438.

reminiscent of the prayerful posture of the *orant*.³⁵⁸ The attitude is sometimes found in visual representations of Jesus' Crucifixion in eastern art from the sixth century, including certain Jerusalem ampullae³⁵⁹ and contemporary medallions in Paris [the Aba Moun amulet, *Pl.13c*] and Stuttgart.³⁶⁰ More commonly, it is utilised in early Byzantine art to distinguish Jesus from the thieves.³⁶¹ On the Sabina panel, the heads of both thieves turn slightly, as the Maskell Jesus did, with one thief looking straight ahead, the other averting his gaze away from Jesus.³⁶² As opposed to the Hellenistic type of the clean-shaven, youthful King of the Jews in the Maskell figuration, here Jesus has long wavy hair and a beard, the type generally favoured in, and commonly associated with, the East.³⁶³ The three figures are also set against a schematic representation of the Jerusalem city walls,³⁶⁴ each placed beneath a pedimented roof-structure. This architectural backdrop provides the frame against which the three are nailed; no crosses are shown and only the extreme ends of the cross-bars and upright shafts of the thieves' crosses are visible beyond their palms and heads. No such details are rendered in the case of Jesus; although his hands are nailed he seems to stand voluntarily. For Grondijs, the absence of Jesus' cross indicated the repugnance that the Crucifixion still inspired in artists at this date.³⁶⁵ The absence may simply be due to the presence of the architectural backdrop, which provides a rudimentary frame of its own.

Whilst the artist of the Maskell ivory raised the outstretched Jesus high on the cross to denote his victorious and divine stature, as well as his centrality to the scene, the artist responsible for the Sabina figuration has manipulated the scale

³⁵⁸ This was Grondijs's interpretation of the pose: (1957), pp. 464-465.

³⁵⁹ eg. Monza numbers 12 & 13: Grabar (1958), pls XX & XXIV.

³⁶⁰ Balicka-Witakowska (1997), figs 21 & 22. On the Aba Moun medallion see further Chapter III.

³⁶¹ For example: Monza nrs. 5, 6, 8, 14, 15 & Bobbio nrs. 3, 4, 18: Grabar (1958), pls XI, XII, XIII, XXVI, XXVIII, XXXIV, XXXV, XLVII.

³⁶² Grondijs thus discerned a good and bad thief: (1957), p. 465.

³⁶³ Morey (1941), pp. 48-49, outlines three ways of portraying Christ in the early period: the beardless head with long-hair falling on the shoulders, derived perhaps from an antique Dionysiac type and in use in Constantinople at the turn of the fifth century; the Syro-Palestinian bearded Christ, in use in Rome by the end of the fourth century; and the oldest, Hellenistic type, the beardless head with short hair.

³⁶⁴ Kondakov (1877), p. 5; Schiller (1972), p. 91. Peter Brown (1998), p. 67, has also interpreted it as an inaccurate representation of the Church with three entries built by Constantine on Calvary.

³⁶⁵ Concerning the attitudes struck by the figures and the significance of the absence of the cross see Grondijs (1957), p. 464-465.

and composition to achieve this end, showing Jesus twice as large as his companions and at the centre of the scene. And whilst greater realism is effected in the ivory through uniformity of scale and a concern for narrative detail, the Sabina infers a sense of realism and historicity in the presence of the thieves, the nails, and even the geographical location. The Sabina artist, although not celebrated for his style, achieves a striking effect of triumph and vigour in this composed figure of Jesus. Again the iconography in which the human nature of Jesus, clearly indicated by the nails, co-exists with the triumph of divine will, indicated by the alert eyes and body resistant to the cause of death, effects a strong theological statement concerning the interpretation of the Crucifixion as a triumph.

In addition to the two fifth century material figurations, Prudentius' poem *Dittochaeon* (348-c.405), and the *tituli* attributed to St Ambrose (339-97)³⁶⁶ furnish evidence to suggest that pictorialisations of the Crucifixion may have been included within typologically arranged Old and New Testament cycles intended for basilical decoration in the West in the late fourth century.

As Kessler has outlined, extant archaeological and literary evidence suggests that extended chronological sequences of biblical images entered Christian art in the East and West around the late fourth/early fifth century under the likely stimulus of post-Edict of Milan building activity and the increased interest at this time in the historicity of scripture.³⁶⁷ Such sequences, devised for the decoration of doors, as at Santa Sabina, and particularly church interiors, included the pictorialisation of episodes from the Old and New Testaments in interconnective fashion; in other words, they illustrated often elaborate typological concordances between the Hebraic and Christian scriptures. Whilst intimations of a comprehensive expansion of the vocabulary of Old Testament images in Christian art were shown as early as c. 315 in the Via Latina Catacomb, Rome,³⁶⁸ a fuller elaboration of

³⁶⁶ On the role of *tituli* as verse descriptions of, or commentaries on particular works of art in the early Church see Gaston (1969), esp. pp. 7-10.

³⁶⁷ Kessler (1985), pp. 17-18 & passim. For the evidence see also Soper (1938), pp. 189-190; Grigg (1974), p. 46, n.3 pp. 88-89. Grigg argues that images were introduced into Palestinian churches and memorials at roughly the same time, ie. late fourth century, pp. 81-87.

³⁶⁸ The paintings are dated from c.315 to 370: Tronzo (1986), pp. 10-17. See also Ferrua (1990), & briefly concerning their exegetical role, Elsner (1995), pp. 271-282.

New Testament iconography, with images from the life of Christ, was achieved only in the West around the late fourth century.³⁶⁹ The procedure of juxtaposing Old and New Testament figures, following upon the example of Christian exegesis, was widespread at this time on larger scale objects, such as sarcophagi, on smaller-scale objects such as the Brescia Casket, and in monumental decorative programmes.³⁷⁰ The earliest surviving basilical programme is rendered in mosaic and comes from the West: it is that lining the walls of the nave of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, a church built and decorated during the pontificate of Sixtus III 432-440.³⁷¹ The programme is a visual enumeration of the Biblical narrative from Genesis 13 to Joshua 10, reputedly articulating supercessionist theology,³⁷² and amongst the Old Testament panels on the left wall of the nave are prototypical examples of sacrifice, including the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (now lost).³⁷³

It is clear that by the early fifth century in the East and West, such decoration was becoming highly favoured for its symbolic potential and instructive value for the illiterate. At this date Paulinus of Nola is found expressing his delight in the symbolism of decorating his new basilica of S. Felix with frescoes illustrating scenes from the Old Testament, and historical scenes from the New Testament in an older basilica, built over the grave of St Felix, which he remodelled.³⁷⁴ Paulinus' belief in the spiritual and educational efficacy of sacred representations

³⁶⁹ The fragmentary fifth century mosaics in the baptistery of S. Giovanni in Fonte (a Constantinian foundation at Naples), combine New Testament miracle scenes with such familiar early Christian themes as the Good Shepherd, the *traditio legis*, and themes from the Graeco-Roman repertory. The scheme is noted for paralleling various aspects of the 3rd C paintings in the Christian Baptistery at Dura Europos, which includes the Good Shepherd motif, the New Testament miracles of Christ and the Samaritan Woman and the walking on Water, plus a scene of the Myrophores, the popular visual motif of the Resurrection in early Christian art. On the mosaics see Pariset (1970), pp. 1-13.

³⁷⁰ Grabar (1969), pp. 128-146, outlines the dogmatic intent of such juxtapositions. Elsner (1995), pp. 279-284, discusses the creation of religious typology.

³⁷¹ On the iconography of the mosaics (with bibliography) see Spain (1979), pp. 518-540.

³⁷² Twenty-seven of the original forty-two panels remain: Miles (1993), pp. 159-162. Spain (1979), p. 518.

³⁷³ van Woerden (1961), p. 226.

³⁷⁴ *Carmen* 28, Goldschmidt (1940): Latin text lines 167-179 p. 80 & trans. p. 81. See also trans. in Walsh (1975), p. 300: "The new theme in the old setting and the ancient theme in the new setting are decorations equally useful to us, for thus we can have both new life and the wisdom of age."

was passionate,³⁷⁵ and his description of the churches richly decorated with biblical persons and scenes as *raro more* [*Carmina* 27.542] is now interpreted as a comment on their good quality rather than the rarity of such pictorial schemes at this date.³⁷⁶ In view of this literary and material evidence, St Nilus of Sinai's (d. c. 430) recommendation to the Prefect Olympiodorus in the East, that he decorate a large church in honour of the holy martyrs with scenes from the Old and New Testament on both sides of a nave, seems a reasonable proposition for the time period rather than a radical one.³⁷⁷

The inclusion of the Crucifixion in such cycles is not unknown. Obviously the Santa Sabina doors attest to this materially; but further evidence, albeit less solid, can be found in literature. Of the twenty-one distichs possibly composed by Ambrose as explanatory captions for a pictorial system of Old and New Testament scenes, *titulus* seven has been construed as a reference to the Crucifixion; the subject has therefore been reconstructed as an original element of the full cycle of illustrations.³⁷⁸ Some of the "Ambrosian" inscriptions are lost and the surviving ones were probably collated at a later time; hence they may not even reflect an original sequence. Nevertheless, Merkle suggested that they were possibly conceived as a collection of Old and New Testament episodes, arranged according to typological and allegorical relationship rather than functioning as a chronological narrative.³⁷⁹ Unfortunately, there remain some concerns about the

³⁷⁵ The evidence is well-known: Paulinus writes about cycles of pictures he had painted in his basilicas; see Goldschmidt (1940); Gaston (1969); Engemann (1974); and Arnulf (1997), pp. 47-65. *Epistle* 32 written 403/4 to Sulpicius Severus includes poetical descriptions of the apse mosaics at Nola and Fundi, depicting the Trinity and the Last Judgement respectively. For the dating see Goldschmidt (1940), p. 17, and on the letter (including text and trans.) pp. 35-48, 93-124; see also Engemann (1974). *Carmen* 27 written in the early fifth century describes a cycle of Old Testament scenes painted in the new basilica he had built in Nola and the tituli he composed for them: again Goldschmidt (1940), pp. 48-69; see also Lienhard (1977), p. 30.

³⁷⁶ The text reads: "pingere sanctus raro more domos animantibus adsimulatis." It was originally interpreted as a reference to the rarity of pictorial decoration of churches at this date: eg. Koch, cited by Bevan (1940), p. 124; Soper (1938), p. 189-190. This interpretation was discounted by Bevan (1940) p. 124, & subsequently Murray (1981), p. 25 & p. 139 n. 76, who noted that "rarus" was often used in the sense of "outstanding".

³⁷⁷ St Nilus, *Epistula ad Olympiodorum Praefectorum*, PG 79, cols. 577-80; trans. Mango (1986), p. 33.

³⁷⁸ *PL* supp. 1 (1958), cols. 587-589. Merkle (1896), passim, & p. 252. The seventh *titulus* reads: "Ioseph manipulus Christi crux, stellaque Christus; Quem sol, luna Deum coeli terrae quoque adorant."

³⁷⁹ Merkle (1896), pp. 209-212.

authenticity of the *tituli*, and until these are resolved they remain of limited use.³⁸⁰ More pointedly, the visual imagery of the seventh *titulus* itself, concerning the dreams of Joseph in which the Sun and Moon and eleven stars bow down to Joseph's sheaf [Gen. 37:5-11], seems more directly reminiscent of the acclaim iconography on fourth century sarcophagi [*Pl.2a*] than evocative of an explicit Crucifixion figuration.

More useful in terms of iconographic evidence is Prudentius' *Dittochaeon*, written shortly after 400 and therefore just prior to the production of the Maskell relief and the Sabina panel. In the forty-nine hexameter quatrains that comprise this poem, Prudentius evokes forty-nine scriptural scenes, each referring to an event or character of scriptural history:³⁸¹ the first twenty-four are from the Old Testament, the twenty-fifth is the Annunciation, and the last twenty-four are from the New Testament. As a whole, the quatrains seem to suggest a format for the arrangement of Biblical scenes within a Christian basilica, with the Old and New Testaments respectively probably appearing either side of the nave and the Annunciation featuring in the apse.³⁸² The quatrains probably functioned as verse inscriptions to accompany and thereby explain the images depicted by the artist. The Crucifixion appears within this scheme as one of a small number of sequential Passion scenes: *The Field of Blood* [nr 39] referring to the suicide of Judas and the price of Christ's blood, Mt. 27:3-10; *The House of Caiaphas* [nr 40] wherein Christ was falsely accused; *The Pillar at which Christ was scourged* [41];³⁸³ and finally *The Saviour's Passion* [42]. Of the latter Prudentius writes:

*Traiectus per utrumque latus laticem atque cruorem
Christus agit; sanguis victoria, lymfa lavacrum est.*

³⁸⁰ Much of the question of their authenticity rests on Merkle's article, wherein he identified three main causes of hesitancy in ascribing authorship to Ambrose: Merkle (1896), *passim*. Although Soper (1938) would seem to accept Merkle's Ambrosian attribution, listing the *tituli* as evidence of the juxtaposition of Old and New Testament scenes in visual programmes by the early fifth century (see p. 189), his citation of the Ambrosian evidence elsewhere is cautious: eg. pp. 187-189. Watson (1981), p. 292, accepts Ambrosian authorship since the *tituli* support her notion that Ambrose was enamoured by art. According to Berardino (1986), v. 4, p. 178, the question remains open. Gaston (1969), p. 10, alludes to the problems of authorship.

³⁸¹ Pillinger (1980).

³⁸² Davis-Weyer (1971), p. 32 n. 96, regards quatrain 43 to be a later insertion, leaving only 48 quatrains which could be divided equally on either side of the nave. On their structure and carefully planned spatial arrangement: Macklin Smith (1976), pp. 121-122. See also Baumstark (1911).

³⁸³ Davis-Weyer (1971), p. 32 n. 95, suggests that within number 41 Prudentius refers to the tradition that the column on which Christ was scourged was later included into the fabric of a church in Jerusalem.

*Tunc duo discordant crucibus hinc inde latrones
contiguus; negat ille deum, fert iste coronam.*³⁸⁴

Including the act of piercing, in the presence of the two thieves, this vision of Jesus' Crucifixion seems to be an amalgam of the Maskell and Sabina figurations. Moreover, aside from the scourging, the series of Passion scenes recounted in the poem is itself reminiscent of the Passion cycle on the Maskell ivories [Pl.4b].

Although correlations between the quatrain and extant artistic evidence have been explored elsewhere,³⁸⁵ it is interesting to reflect on a few of these similarities here. From extant artistic evidence it would seem that the blood and water, elements of the narrative emphasised in quatrain 42 and elsewhere by Prudentius,³⁸⁶ do not form iconographic elements of any visual renderings of the Crucifixion until around the late sixth century. At this date, in the Rabbula Illumination blood is shown spurting from Jesus' side at the insertion point of the spear and from the nails in the hands and feet. On the eighth century Crucifixion icon from the Holy Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai, the stream of blood from the side is paralleled by one of water from the same wound [Pl.14c].³⁸⁷ Prior to this time, as the fifth century art attests, he is always shown alive and physically impervious to the spear, seemingly illustrative of the Docetic conviction that Christ's manhood, and by extension his sufferings, were not real. The thieves, which appear in the Sabina figuration, form an important element in that Crucifixion iconography developed in the Syria-Palestine region in the sixth and seventh centuries. This tradition appears to begin with the Rabbula Gospels of 586 and continues in the figuration on the inner lid of the contemporary Vatican reliquary box [Pl.7a & b], on the series of lead ampullae from the Holy Land [egs. Pl.8], the sixth/seventh

³⁸⁴ CCL 126, pp. 390-400, nr 42, lines 165-168, p. 398. Davis-Weyer (1970), p 32, translates the verse: "Pierced through either side, Christ gives forth the water and blood. The blood is victory, the water baptism. At this time two robbers on crosses close by on either hand are at variance; the one denies God, the other wins the crown."

³⁸⁵ Pillinger includes photographs of the Maskell Ivory and the Rabbula Gospels in her analysis of the quatrain: (1980), abb. 67 & 68 respectively, with Latin text and analysis pp. 103-106. Most recently, Arnulf (1997), pp. 82-84 who publishes the ivory and Sabina panel, abb. 20 & 21.

³⁸⁶ for example, at *Hymn* 9.85f; *Peristephanon* 8,15f. Also noted by Arnulf (1997), pp. 82 & 83.

³⁸⁷ Weitzmann (1976), pp. 61-62.

century silver Perm plate [*Pl.13e*], octagonal gold rings [egs. *Pl.12d & e*]³⁸⁸ and the series of bronze censers decorated with christological scenes [eg. *Pl.13d*].³⁸⁹

It is impossible to say whether Prudentius describes an existing cycle or is proposing one of his own. Either way, his inclusion of the Crucifixion is extremely important, suggesting that even if the scene was not yet appearing in art up to this time (as surviving evidence seems to confirm) theologians and, conceivably, laymen were expecting it to appear in the narrative cycles that were beginning to dominate the decoration of public basilicas and liturgical and private objects of this period. Since at least one quarter of the verses from the *Dittochaeon* are strongly topographical and parallel the accounts of the pilgrims to the Holy Land, Soper suggested that the poem may have functioned as a kind of “guide book” to Palestinian pilgrimage. On this notion Prudentius can be seen to have chosen subjects according to the import attached to them through local Palestinian custom rather than on the basis of their direct illustration of the New Testament.³⁹⁰ Critically, Soper’s proposition now seems to support the theory that the Holy Sites and pilgrimage to them in the fourth century promoted the pictorialisation of the Passion, and particularly the Crucifixion, as mentioned in Chapter I.

It is unlikely that the four carved alabaster columns supporting the *ciborium* over the high altar of San Marco, Venice, can contribute additional evidence on this matter of the appearance of the Crucifixion in pictorial cycles in the fourth and fifth centuries since their date remains open to debate.³⁹¹ Each of the four column drums is divided vertically into nine tiers, with each tier divided into a series of nine niches by nine columns.³⁹² The niches contain sculpted forms, pictorialising scenes from the New Testament. In the sixth zone (from the bottom) of the front right column, within a sequential cycle of Passion scenes, there appears a

³⁸⁸ eg. the gold and niello ring in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, nr 47.15. Pictured in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), cat. nr 446.

³⁸⁹ eg. Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), cat. nrs. 563 & 564.

³⁹⁰ Baumstark (1911), pp. 177-196; Soper (1938), Excursus III p. 188.

³⁹¹ Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6 p. 177, pl. 497 nr 1. For a description of the columns with a comprehensive bibliography of the early literature: Leclercq “Ciborium” in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 3.2, cols. 1598-1603, figs 2922- 2928. On the iconography see most recently Balicka-Witakowska (1997), pp. 95-101, with reference to past scholarship.

³⁹² For a drawing of a single column: Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2 fig. 2923.

symbolic representation of the Crucifixion.³⁹³ This subject extends across three niches, with Jesus' cross at the centre and the two crucified thieves appearing in the outer niches in a segregation of pictorial components not dissimilar to the episodic quality of post-Constantinian columnar sarcophagi. The difference of opinion regarding their date (suggestions ranging from the fifth to the thirteenth century) and provenance (including Ravenna, Alexandria, Syria, Constantinople and Venice) are well known and cannot be explored or solved here.³⁹⁴ Moreover, a thorough examination of the Crucifixion iconography has been conducted elsewhere.³⁹⁵ Suffice to say, despite Reil's dating of the front pair of columns to the sixth century on the basis of the Crucifixion iconography,³⁹⁶ the iconography of all four columns seems to betray a Venetian origin and thirteenth century date.³⁹⁷

Beyond material and literary evidence for the representation of the Crucifixion as a narrative scene, evidence for the use of the Crucifixion as an isolated image and for the representation of Jesus on the cross, ie. a crucifix, as a possible tool for devotional contemplation prior to the sixth century is both scant and tenuous. The thesis of early contemplation has sometimes been seen to be validated by the survival of the tragedy *Christus patiens*. This literary work is sometimes dated to the fourth century, a date hinging on its successful attribution to Gregory of Nazianzus (329-89). Yet on the whole, the fourth century date has been viewed with scepticism.³⁹⁸ There is also the peculiar passage in the fifth century *History*

³⁹³ For a strip drawing of this zone see Soper (1938), fig. 64. The Passion cycle begins on the lower zones of the column and includes Jesus' trial, the judgement of Pilate, Judas's suicide, Jesus led to Calvary, and a post-resurrection scene (an angel, two sleeping guards and two women, not unlike the Maskell Resurrection panel).

³⁹⁴ A concerted attempt at dating would necessitate a careful examination of each column, considering the iconography of each scene in turn, as Lucchesi Palli (1942) did for the front-right column.

³⁹⁵ Both Lucchesi Palli (1942), pp. 89-99, and Balicka-Witakowska (1997), pp. 95-101, have undertaken more in depth studies of the Crucifixion iconography than the boundaries of this thesis permit here.

³⁹⁶ Reil (1904), pp. 55-56, 70, 93-94.

³⁹⁷ Lucchesi Palli (1942), particularly pp. 139-148. The thirteenth century date is accepted by Schneider (1943-49), pp. 276-279, in his review of Lucchesi Palli's book. See also Morey (1941), p 52 & 53 n. 38 and Lowrie (1969), pp. 166-169. For a succinct discussion of past research see Demus (1960), p 166-168, who suggested that the columns were reworked by a Venetian sculptor in the thirteenth century, when the inscriptions were added.

³⁹⁸ Tuilier (1978), pp. 403-409, argued for a fourth century time of composition. Dölger (1934), pp. 81-94, argued for a later date. Quasten (1950), v. iii p. 245, regards it as the only extant drama of the Byzantine period; for the references see p. 246.

of the Armenians by Agathangelos from which later supporters of images inferred that the author was referring to circulated imagery. From the passage we might deduce that by this time, wooden crosses bearing the human body of Jesus, and specifically the *dead* body, were used by Christians:

Because men loved to worship images in human shape, skilfully carved from wood, he himself became the image of men, that he might subject to his own image of his divinity the image-makers and image-lovers and image-worshippers. And because men were accustomed to worship lifeless and dead images, he himself became a dead image on the cross. He died and breathed his last, in order that by this (image) familiar to them he might quickly subject them to his own image... And instead of carved pieces of wood he set up his cross in the middle of the universe, that those who were accustomed to worshipping wood, by this familiar and accustomed (object) might be persuaded to worship the cross of wood and the image and bodily form upon it.³⁹⁹

In its context, the passage may refer either literally or metaphorically to the use of crucifixes; the crosses about which Agathangelos writes may be a metaphor of the Eucharist, men being drawn to the divine kingdom by the hook, which is the cross, and the bait, which is Christ's body on the cross.⁴⁰⁰ At best then, the passage confirms the likely growth in meditative contemplation on Jesus crucified. As far as we know, there are no surviving images of Jesus dead on the cross from before the eighth century. The earliest image portraying him dead, with his eyes closed, occurs on an eighth century icon (nr B.36) from the Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai [*Pl. 14c*].⁴⁰¹

The sixth century evidence provided by the bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus, Leontius Cyprius, is similarly shaky. Leontius discussed the glorification of Christ through the cross in his book entitled *Against the Jews*:

Therefore when you see Christians bowing down before the cross, know that they bow down to Christ crucified, and not to the wood.⁴⁰²

These lines leave us with few clues on the subject of the representation of the Crucifixion other than that in sixth century Cyprus, the crucifix was possibly

³⁹⁹ Trans. Thomson (1976), pp. 91& 93. See the comments of Kartsonis (1986), p. 33 n. 61.

⁴⁰⁰ Thomson (1976), p. lxxxvii.

⁴⁰¹ Weitzmann (1976), pp. 61-64.

⁴⁰² The passage is quoted by St John of Damascus in his work, *Orationes de imaginibus tres*; trans. Anderson (1980), p. 43, Leontius quoted pp. 41-44.

being used as meditative aid for contemplation on Christ's death and its significance for mankind. Even then, there is no clear indication that the author is actually talking about physical representations of the body affixed to the cross. All that this literary evidence can do is indicate that the spiritual milieu of the fifth century may have been conducive to the portrayal of the Crucifixion in art. It provides us with very little iconographic detail regarding the way in which the scene might have been constructed or the way in which Jesus was actually portrayed.

IV. Sixth Century

After the paucity of material evidence from fifth century, there is substantial evidence for the representation of the Crucifixion in the sixth century. The first image to discuss is the illuminated folio in the Rabbula Gospels, which presents a vivid pictorialisation of the Crucifixion in conjunction with the subject of Jesus' Resurrection.

The Byzantine "Rabbula" codex is decorated with marginal miniatures but contains full-pages devoted to the representation of particularly important scenes, including a full-page illuminated pictorialisation of the Crucifixion and Resurrection (folio 13r) [Pl. 7a].⁴⁰³ It is apparent from the mutilation of right-hand sections of the miniatures that the folios, now measuring 33.6 x 26.6cms, were originally larger, the edges having been cut down.⁴⁰⁴ It is also apparent that the order of the folios has been disturbed. Despite earlier doubts as to whether the full-page miniatures of the Ascension and Crucifixion-Resurrection were executed at Zagba at all, they are taken to be part of the original whole, executed at Zagba around the time of the manuscript's completion at the end of the sixth century,⁴⁰⁵ and not later additions or even copies of miniatures in the Byzantine style.⁴⁰⁶ As noted earlier, having a secure date and being localisable to a precise geographical region, the Rabbula Gospels provide decisive evidence in plotting the evolution of

⁴⁰³ On the combined presentation of the two themes in early Byzantine art, Kartsonis (1986), pp. 31-35.

⁴⁰⁴ Cecchelli (1959), p. 27; for the measurements Kessler in Weitzmann (1979), p. 495.

⁴⁰⁵ See Morey (1926), pp. 163-164; Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 27, & regarding style, p. 85. On their date and arrangement, Wright (1973), pp. 199-208.

⁴⁰⁶ As suggested by Venturi (1901-1908), v. I, p. 390, & Schiller (1972), p. 91, n. 6. For the literature, Wright (1973).



Crucifixion iconography. For this reason, it is worth examining the figuration of the Crucifixion contained therein in some detail.⁴⁰⁷

The representation of the Crucifixion exhibits an exquisitely symmetrical compositional form, and in addition to vibrant colouring and deft brushwork, this would indicate some confidence in handling the subject. Jesus is portrayed in the Crucifixion scene as having a beard and long dark hair. He is stretched out flat on the cross and attached to it by four nails, one in each hand and foot. He is alive and is robed on the cross in a full-length purple sleeveless tunic, or *colobium*, which is decorated with vertical gold stripes. Jesus dominates the centre of the composition and is flanked by the two thieves, who wear loincloths and turn their heads to face him. Blood drips from the wounds of all three men and from the wound in Jesus' side. In an unusual representation, three soldiers sit cross-legged at the base of the cross. Tyrwhitt suggested that they are not casting lots but playing a game of "Mora" on their fingers for the attainment of Jesus' garment.⁴⁰⁸ Flanking Jesus' own cross, which is taller than those of the thieves, are the soldier with the lance (on Jesus' right) and the bystander with the sponge (on his left). Both are shown *en face* with one arm stretched across the body towards the cross: in the first instance, this action is undertaken to plunge the lance into Jesus' side; in the second, it is to extend the sponge on the reed. To the far left of the scene, portrayed on a smaller scale, stand the Virgin Mary and St John the Theologian.⁴⁰⁹ Both figures stand in profile to face Jesus, extending their hands to the faces in grief. Whilst they look up to him, they do so only with their eyes, their heads remaining motionless as though they can hardly bear to tilt their heads upwards to see Jesus' face. This is a subtle but important display of emotion. This pairing is balanced on the far right of the scene by a group of three women, again on the reduced scale, who also turn in profile to face the cross: two tilt their heads upwards to look at Jesus; one takes both hands to her face. The numerical imbalance between the latter group and the corresponding pair of Mary and John on the far left, is counteracted by the application of a large circular nimbus to the

⁴⁰⁷ Cecchelli's remains the most detailed and vivid description of the folio: see Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 69.

⁴⁰⁸ R. St J. Tyrwhitt in Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1, p. 515

⁴⁰⁹ Tyrwhitt incorrectly identified John as a female: Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1, p. 515.

head of Mary. With Jesus, Mary is the only other character in the scene to have a nimbus. The taller and heavier figure of the centurion with the lance, clothed in a short red tunic and his limbs splayed behind the lance to exert full-force in its thrust, is contrasted with the smaller sponge-bearer who stands, wearing a sleeved tunic indicating that he is a Jew (Mt. 27;48). Either side of Jesus' nimbed head are the symbols of the sun and moon, possibly referring to the eclipse that occurred at the sixth hour [Mt. 27.45, Mk 15.33, Lk. 23.44-45] or even to the cosmic significance of Jesus' death (see further on the symbols ch. 3. pt. 2A.3). The scene is set against the mountains of Gareb and Agra, which rise behind the two thieves.

Whilst this composition fills two thirds of the page and is thereby the predominant image, it is portrayed in conjunction with the theme of the Resurrection. This is illustrated in three episodes below: the angel greeting the Women at the Tomb, the soldiers falling back from the tomb, and the *Noli me tangere* incident in the garden at Gethsemane. The three episodes are shown to coalesce in a continuous frieze-like form, the first and last incidents separated chronologically by the tomb placed at the centre of the frieze to punctuate the triadic sequence.⁴¹⁰ The two themes that are thus represented on the page, Good Friday and Easter morning, are detached by a thin line and the whole framed to form a composite Easter narrative.

As an aside, it is interesting to observe that the three other principal manuscripts surviving from the sixth century do not include a depiction of Jesus on his cross: the Syrian Rossano Gospels, mid-sixth century;⁴¹¹ the Syrian Sinope fragment of Matthew's Gospel, also mid-sixth century but thought to be stylistically later than the Rossano;⁴¹² and the Latin Gospels of St Augustine, dated to the late sixth century.⁴¹³ Preceding the Gospel of Luke, the latter manuscript contains twelve miniature Passion scenes on a full page [f.125], beginning with the Entry into Jerusalem and finishing just prior to the Crucifixion, with the Bearing of the Cross. Importantly, it is thought that similar pages of miniatures accompanied at

⁴¹⁰ Weitzmann (1974), p. 42, describes the frieze.

⁴¹¹ Il Duomo di Rossano. Weitzmann (1977), pp. 17-21 & 89-93. Cavallo, Gribomont & Loerke (1987). For the date, on stylistic grounds: Manion (1999), pp. 156-157.

⁴¹² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS suppl. gr. 1286. Weitzmann (1977), 17 fig. xiv.

⁴¹³ Gospels of St Augustine. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286; from Italy, late 6th century: Schiller (1972), p. 14 & fig. 11. For a discussion of the four manuscripts and their association with the eucharistic liturgy see Manion (1999), pp. 156-171.

least two of the other now missing Gospels and that one page may have illustrated the formative period of Jesus' life, including birth, and the other may have completed the Passion cycle by continuing on from the Carrying of the cross and therefore including the Crucifixion.⁴¹⁴ According to Wormald, the existence of the latter cycle is certain since a page of this kind existed at the end of the Gospel of John.⁴¹⁵ Nevertheless, such a page does not survive and the suggestion that it once existed is based only on supposition.

Stylistically, compositionally, and iconographically (despite some differences in detail), the Rabbula Crucifixion provides an excellent companion figuration for the representation of the subject surviving on the inside face of the lid of the reliquary that came to the Museo Sacro of the Vatican from the Treasury of the Sancta Sanctorum in the Lateran at Rome [*Pl.7b*]. Although initially dated to the tenth century, in comparison with the Rabbula illuminations and the representations preserved on the ampullae fabricated in the Holy Land in the late sixth/early seventh century,⁴¹⁶ this small red wooden box [23.7 x 18 cms], filled with relics from the Holy Land was probably manufactured in Palestine in the late sixth/early seventh century⁴¹⁷ specifically as a portable receptacle for relics obtained on a pilgrimage. It is carefully decorated with scenes that correspond to the holy sites customarily visited by pilgrims to Jerusalem,⁴¹⁸ and was prepared before the present contents were obtained.⁴¹⁹ The outer lid shows a patriarchal cross within a mandorla, standing on Paradisical/Golgothic hill and crossed by two staves that Morey suggested were intended to represent the lance and reed.⁴²⁰ The upper half of the composition contains the *nomen sacrum* "IC XC", Jesus Christ, whilst the lower half has the alpha and omega, the monogram for God-

⁴¹⁴ Nordenfalk (1995), p. 19. Manion (1999), p. 169.

⁴¹⁵ Wormald, "The Miniatures of the Gospels of St Augustine, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 286", in Wormald (1984), p. 23.

⁴¹⁶ For the date of the ampullae see Grigg (1974), ch. 1, n. 4 pp. 32-37.

⁴¹⁷ Morey (1926), p. 152 & passim; Underwood (1950), p. 98; Wessel (1960b), pp. 60-61; Weitzmann (1974), p. 49; Kitzinger (1988), pp. 59-60; Werner (1990), p. 183, n. 30.

⁴¹⁸ See the photograph of the open box, showing the lid and the contents, in Vikan (1982), p. 18, fig. 13a, with measurements. The box contained small stones, fragments of wood and cloth, some of which were labelled: eg. "from the Mount of Olives", "from Mount Sion".

⁴¹⁹ The relationship between the images and the objects is therefore only generic: Morey (1926), pp. 151-152; Vikan (1982), p. 19.

⁴²⁰ Morey (1926), p. 151; & see now Werner (1990), p. 183 n. 30.

Christ as the beginning and the end.⁴²¹ The inner lid is painted with a christological cycle of five scenes [*Pl.7b*]. With the Crucifixion at the centre, the Nativity and Baptism below and the Resurrection and Ascension above, the cycle is not represented as a chronological summation of Christ's earthly life; nor are the individual scenes illustrative of specific biblical narrative. Rather, beginning in the bottom left-hand corner with the Nativity, as a cycle they seem to read from left to right in ascending order, conceivably approximating an intricate theological commentary regarding the relationship between Christ's human and divine natures.⁴²² Having said this, the figuration of the Crucifixion itself is a detailed presentation of the event as it is narrated in the Gospels, although slightly cruder than the Rabbula version of the subject. Kartsonis also notes that the images depicted inside the lid obtain an especial holiness by virtue of their contact with the relics inside the box.⁴²³ The cycle thus has its own mystique.

Like the Rabbula figuration, the reliquary's contains three crosses, with Christ's now raised on a slight mound. Jesus is again bearded, has a nimbus, and is arrayed in a purple *colobium* with vertical stripes. He is flanked on his right and left by the lance and sponge-bearers, and at one remove, by his Mother (on his right) and St John (on his left). In addition to Mary, John is also nimbed in this composition. The splitting of Mary and John to opposite sides of the cross now means that the two thieves stand at the extremities of this beautifully symmetrical composition. The soldiers at the foot of the cross have been eliminated from the composition, as have the Holy Women. In the background, the twin peaks of Gareb and Agra now form a composite frame for Jesus' perfectly erect and nimbed head. There is none of the pathos intimated in the Rabbula-Christ's tilted head and solemn gaze.

Closely related to the Vatican reliquary in function, iconography and date⁴²⁴ are the tiny lead ampullae produced in the Holy Land in relation to Palestinian pilgrimage art.⁴²⁵ The figurations preserved on these small and cheaply

⁴²¹ Grisar (1908), p. 116, fig. 60.

⁴²² On the configuration see the comments of Vikan (1982), pp. 18-19 & Kartsonis (1994a), p. 157.

⁴²³ Kartsonis (1994a), p. 157, & p. 182 n. 9. This is in contrast to Kitzinger (1988), p. 60, who assumed a subsidiary role for the images on account of their hidden location.

⁴²⁴ Vikan (1982), pp. 20-21; Kartsonis (1994a), pp. 160-161.

⁴²⁵ The main references on the ampullae in both the Monza and Bobbio collections are Grabar (1958) & Grigg (1974), and throughout this thesis, ampullae from both Italian collections are cited

manufactured flasks, measuring 6-7cms in diameter and cast with a lead-tin alloy,⁴²⁶ contribute to the material evidence for the representation of the Crucifixion in the late sixth/early seventh centuries. In comparison with the larger reliquary preserved in the Vatican, containing a range of highly prized relics and thus probably owned by a wealthy pilgrim if not by a church, the flasks were manufactured for ordinary pilgrims and carried oil sanctified by contact with such relics, namely the wood of the True Cross.⁴²⁷ In fact, the inscription “Oil from the Wood of Life from Christ’s Holy Places” or “Oil of the Wood of Life” borne by most of the ampullae was shown by Grigg to be particularly important in their dating to the late sixth/early seventh century: the amplification of the worship of the True Cross through the use of oil is not testified in early sixth century literary sources, but is by the mid-late sixth century literary sources.⁴²⁸

The bulk of the 47 ampullae that are known today are preserved in two Northern Italian collections: in the Treasury of the Cathedral of S.Giovanni at Monza, and the Abbey of S. Columbano, Bobbio.⁴²⁹ Although small, the flasks depict a range of christological scenes in detail: the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Baptism, Adoration of the Magi and Shepherds, the Crucifixion, Holy Women at the Tomb, Incredulity of Thomas, the Ascension, and some even incorporating portraits of Christ and the Apostles.⁴³⁰ Significantly the majority show the Crucifixion and Resurrection as the main decoration, either shown together superimposed on one side [*Pl.8a-c*], as in the Rabbula miniature, or divided, one on each side. For example, of the 38 flasks at Monza and Bobbio, 29 show Crucifixion and Resurrection scenes and three show the Crucifixion as an historic scene, ie. with

and numbered according to Grabar’s catalogue. On the ampullae and pilgrimage art: Hahn (1990), & Vikar (1990b).

⁴²⁶ On the measurements; Grigg (1974), p. 2, citing A. Paredi et. al., *Il tesoro del Duomo di Monza* (Milan, 1966), pp. 27-29. See also Engemann (1973), pp. 5-6 for the measurements of ampullae in Berlin, Detroit, London & Washington.

⁴²⁷ Kartsonis (1994a), pp. 160-161.

⁴²⁸ On the ampullae and the establishment of their date see Morey (1926), pp. 152-155 & passim; Grabar (1958), pp. 13-16, 32-33; Grigg (1974), pp. 1-2, n. 4 pp. 32-38; Werner (1990), pp. 195-198.

⁴²⁹ Monza (18); Bobbio (20); Berlin, Staatliche Museen (2, lost since 1945); Washington, Dumbarton Oaks (1); Detroit, Institute of Arts (1); London, British Museum (1); Bonn, F.J. Dölger-Institut (2). These are listed by Engemann (1973), pp. 5-6, with references, and passim. There are also two in Stuttgart, Württembergischen Landesmuseums: see Kötzsche-Breitenbruch (1984), pp. 229-246. This listing also appears in Kühnel (1987), p. 94.

⁴³⁰ eg. Monza nr 3, reverse: Grabar (1958), pl. ix.

the full human figure of Jesus, arrayed in the *colobium* between two thieves as in the Rabbula and Vatican reliquary figurations [*Pl.8b*].⁴³¹ That this frequency has an intimate connection to the perception of the cross is evinced not only in the belief that the mouth of these oil flasks may have been in contact with the cross itself (the oil boiling over), but also in the inscriptions they bear which refer, as noted above, to the wood of the cross as the wood of life.⁴³² Mostly the Crucifixion is shown in symbolic fashion, with Christ's bust surmounting the cross.⁴³³

In the Rabbula Gospels, the Crucifixion is one of the subjects chosen to be illustrated (in conjunction with the Resurrection) on a full page. The use of the scene as the pivotal event within a cycle of New Testament scenes is emphatic, theologically and visually, on the Vatican reliquary, dated c. 600 AD. Thereon, the Crucifixion is the largest and central panel, the body of the triumphant Christ forming "the vertical and horizontal center of the overall composition".⁴³⁴ In the case of the lead ampullae, the concentration of artisans on the subject is unequivocally attested in the frequency of depictions of the scene and in those instances of its central position within pictorial cycles, as on Bobbio ampulla nr 18 [*Pl.8d*].⁴³⁵ The importance of the Crucifixion within christological cycles continues to be shown on other objects dating from the sixth, seventh and even eighth centuries, associated with the pilgrim trade and exhibiting striking iconographic similarities in choice and scenic configuration with the ampullae.⁴³⁶ A fine example is the depiction of the Crucifixion on a bronze censer in Richmond where the subject is the largest composition within the frieze of New Testament subjects [*Pl.13d*].⁴³⁷ Hence by the early seventh century, the Crucifixion had arisen from its apparently low profile in fifth century cycles to

⁴³¹ eg. Monza 12, 13 & Bobbio 7: Grabar (1958), pls XXII, XXIV, & XL.

⁴³² Grabar (1958), p. 63ff; Engemann (1973), pp. 8ff; Grigg (1974).

⁴³³ On the bust motif see Warland (1986), pp. 116-121, 254ff. On the distinction between the symbolic and historic figurations see Chapter III, Part 2, section A.1 "Jesus".

⁴³⁴ Kartsonis (1994a), p. 157.

⁴³⁵ as observed by Kühnel (1987), p. 96.

⁴³⁶ Kitzinger (1988), pp. 58-63 contains (and remains) a good summary-introduction to the material.

⁴³⁷ Gonosová & Kondoleon (1994), cat. nr 95.

emerge as a key subject not simply for inclusion within New Testament cycles, but for depiction in Christian art *per se*.

Some scholars have inferred that a Crucifixion similar to the Rabbula and Vatican reliquary figurations was portrayed in the Church of S. Sergius of Gaza, built probably before 536.⁴³⁸ In describing a New Testament cycle depicted within the Church, Choricus of Gaza mentions several episodes from the Passion: the Last Supper, the Betrayal, Judgement of Pilate, Crucifixion, and the post-Resurrection scenes of the Guard at the Tomb and the Appearance to the Women.⁴³⁹ Of the Crucifixion scene he writes: "After heaping many outrages on Him or rather upon themselves - since it is forbidden to insult God - they have finally consigned Him to the most shameful kind of death, between two thieves".⁴⁴⁰ Despite some reluctance to infer from the description the existence of a realistic image,⁴⁴¹ Cecchelli argued that the images described by Choricus were animated and realistic, the very characteristics of the Rabbula illuminations that were produced at a similar time and in the same geographical region; moreover, given Choricus' description of Christ crucified between two thieves, there is a direct compositional relationship between the Rabbula and Gaza figurations.⁴⁴² Hence further support is given to the theory that by the early sixth century, images of the Crucifixion were known, circulated and reproduced in various visual contexts, miniature and monumental, in the East.

In the absence of any material figurations, Gregory of Tours' mid-sixth century description of a Crucifixion image in the oldest church in Narbonne, attests that in the West isolated images of the subject existed in the sixth century.⁴⁴³ It appears

⁴³⁸ Bréhier (1908), pp. 30-31.

⁴³⁹ Mango (1986), pp. 67-68. A reconstruction was attempted by R. W. Hamilton, "Two Churches at Gaza as described by Choricus of Gaza, *Palestine Exploration Fund Statement* (1930), [cited by Mango (1986), p. 60 n. 26]. I have not been able to consult this reference.

⁴⁴⁰ Choricus of Gaza, *Laudatio Marciani* I, 17 ff. Trans. Mango (1986), pp. 67-68. The evidence is listed in Jerphanion's survey of the written and archaeological evidence: (1923), p. 45. See also Bréhier (1908), pp. 30-31.

⁴⁴¹ Jerphanion (1923), pp. 45-46, points to the example of S. Apollinare and the hesitation of artists at the end of the sixth/beginning of the seventh century, to realistically depict Jesus crucified.

⁴⁴² Cecchelli in Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 34, discounts the evidence of S. Apollinare on the basis that the Church, being Arian, was heretical.

⁴⁴³ This was once believed to have been the first public painting of the Crucifixion: Martigny cited in Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1, p. 512.

that the image, portraying Jesus crucified naked, was in full view of the congregation. According to Gregory, Jesus appeared to a presbyter named Basileus three times requesting that this image be covered with a curtain. In the third vision, Jesus hit the priest and threatened him with death if the request was not acted upon. In fear, the priest consulted his bishop, who ordered that the image be draped with a veil. Only occasionally was it then unveiled.⁴⁴⁴

Unfortunately Gregory fails to provide a date for this incident and he offers no details which might otherwise have helped to date the veiling of the image. The Narbonne cathedral itself had been constructed in the early 440's by bishop Rusticius of Narbonne. If the image was an icon-style panel picture or even a fresco, it could have been executed any time from this date up to the time of Gregory's writing. Yet presumably it was not portable, since it could easily have been removed rather than draped if this was the case. At best one can learn from the text that the image still existed in the time of Gregory (whose dates are 539-594) and that due to the extreme offence caused by Jesus' nakedness, it was mostly veiled.

Although Grondijs assumed from the Narbonne story that at the time of Gregory a depiction of the naked Christ was something new and offensive,⁴⁴⁵ Wessel has demonstrated that the Narbonne Crucifixion was already an old image by the time of Gregory.⁴⁴⁶ Using the example of the gradual clothing of Daniel in early Christian art, Wessel argues that a new attitude to the covering of bodies in art had emerged in the fifth century, concluding that nakedness no longer corresponded with the perceived holiness of the subject depicted. He goes on to suggest that the bishop who ordered the covering of the image might even have known of the eastern type of Crucifixion in which Christ is shown wearing a *colobium*: the Monza ampullae are dated to the late sixth century and it is conceivable that such examples were in circulation in the West during that century. Given this evidence, as Reil originally posited, it is likely that the earlier depictions of Jesus Crucified in a loincloth were perceived to be inappropriate following the circulation of the

⁴⁴⁴ Gregory of Tours, *De Gloria Martyrum* Bk 1 ch. 23; PL 71, 724; trans. Van Dam (1988), p. 41.

⁴⁴⁵ Grondijs (1957), pp. 461-462.

⁴⁴⁶ Wessel (1967), p. 340, and *passim*.

eastern *colobium* type.⁴⁴⁷ Wessel also notes that the tenor, tone and well-rounded form of the story is suggestive of the possibility that it is told by Gregory in hindsight.⁴⁴⁸

It seems clear therefore that the Narbonne image was similar to the two surviving images from the fifth century, the Maskell and Sabina figurations, and showed Jesus in the skimpy loincloth [*Pl.* 5]. This likelihood is strengthened by the fact that both of these extant images were probably produced in Rome at roughly the same time as the Narbonne Cathedral was constructed: the two material figurations testify to the fifth century presence in the West of the naked image described as so offensive at Narbonne by the sixth century. The legend seems to suggest therefore that the earlier naked type fell out of fashion, and that the abhorrence shown by the Jesus of the legend towards his naked likeness reflects a newly acquired sentiment. This may have occurred with the circulation of the *colobium*-type, so popular in the East during the sixth century (and preserved in the Rabbula miniature, on the Vatican reliquary and the “historic” ampullae), beyond the East and into the West. This belief is compatible with the theory put forward by Wessel that nudity was becoming less acceptable for the depiction of biblical characters by the sixth century.

With a dramatic increase of material and literary evidence testifying to the representation of the Crucifixion after the sixth century, scholars have been able to posit the formulation and development in art of the eastern Empire by this date of a highly detailed historical image of the Crucifixion. Citing the example of the ampullae, Grigg argues that there are four indications that by this date, not only was the Crucifixion part of the repertory of artisans who made the flasks, but there were several prototypes available to them.⁴⁴⁹ Firstly, there is the written testimony of the rhetorician Choricus of Gaza to the inclusion of the subject within a cycle of New Testament scenes decorating the Church of St Sergius in Gaza; secondly, the visual testimony of the illuminated Crucifixion scene in the late sixth century Rabbula manuscript; thirdly, the slightly different version of the same scene on the

⁴⁴⁷ Reil (1904), p. 112.

⁴⁴⁸ Wessel (1967), pp. 335-336.

⁴⁴⁹ Grigg (1974), p. 221 & p. 267 n. 76.

Vatican lid; fourthly, the survival of ampulla nr 6 from Bobbio.⁴⁵⁰ The two painted versions show a mature Palestinian Crucifixion scene, with the full-figure of Christ on the cross. A scene replete with such fulsome narrative detail is less anticipated on the smaller and circular pictorial design field of a flask; nevertheless, the artisan who fashioned Bobbio nr 6 successfully incorporates the various details enumerated on both the Rabbula and Reliquary scenes and according to Grigg, therefore draws upon a known model: two kneeling figures, the sponge and lance-bearers, the two thieves, John and Mary (the latter now lost), plus the personification of the moon on the right.⁴⁵¹ Weitzmann also argues for the existence of two or three different archetypes of the Crucifixion, comparing the Rabbula and Vatican figurations, those on the ampullae and an eighth century icon from Mount Sinai [nr B36 pictured on *Plate 14c*].⁴⁵²

It should be mentioned that monumental art, examples of which no longer survive, has been posited as providing the models for the figurations of the Crucifixion and other New Testament subjects as they are represented on the ampullae and the Vatican reliquary.⁴⁵³ Schiller, whilst not believing that the reliefs on certain late sixth century ampullae reflect a monumental image, particularly that from Constantine's Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, does presume that they derive from earlier prototypes and represent an early stage of the Crucifixion image that derives from that of the Veneration of the Cross on Golgotha.⁴⁵⁴ Sadly, there remains no extant evidence, material or literary, to support such ruminations. No monumental images of the Crucifixion survive from the early Christian period in the West and none are known from written accounts. Whilst Gregory of Tours

⁴⁵⁰ Grabar (1958), pls XXXVII - XXXIX. Bobbio 6 does not show the *colobium*-clad body of Christ; rather the bust-cross format: Grabar (1958), pp. 57-58.

⁴⁵¹ Grigg (1974), p. 221 & p. 267 n. 76.

⁴⁵² Weitzmann (1974), pp. 40-41.

⁴⁵³ eg. Conant & Downey (1956), p. 10, accept that a mosaic or fresco in the apse of the Hemispharion (part of the Martryion Basilica, erected to witness of the Saviour to the world in his crucifixion and resurrection) depicted the Crucifixion and provided the model for the iconography that appears on the ampullae and the Vatican reliquary. For a summary of the extensive literature which theorises on the influence of monumental compositions in Holy Land sites on the imagery of early Byzantine pilgrimage *devotionalia*, a theory originally conceived by Iakob Smirnov, see Vikan (1995a), pp. 377-378. Werner also raised the issue of a Constantinian fresco or mosaic existing in the Golgotha complex that might have been a Crucifixion scene relating to these later Palestinian examples: (1990), pp. 204-205.

⁴⁵⁴ Schiller (1972), p. 89.

mentions an image in Narbonne that seems to have been viewed alone and not as part of a cycle, the earliest surviving painting of the subject on a wall is the fresco from the chapel of Theodotus in S. Maria Antiqua (741-52), which exhibits the influence of eastern models.⁴⁵⁵ The earliest surviving example of an extensive New Testament cycle in monumental art is the mosaic Christ-cycle of S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, c. 500 AD. This pictorial biography of the adult Christ, which raises the acute question of the relation between his divine and human natures, begins on the north wall with the Miracle at Cana and culminates on the south wall with a post-Resurrection appearance of Christ to the disciples. On the north wall, where the divine nature of the incarnate deity is shown, the youthful, clean-shaven Christ of the ivory panel performs miracles, robed in purple and having the stature and composure of a Roman emperor. On the south wall the human nature of the historical Jesus is shown, his face now longer, thinner, and bearded, his humanity now revealed in his submission before Pilate for example. Thus, for the two natures there were formulated two faces,⁴⁵⁶ a distinction that also occurs on the Sabina doors.⁴⁵⁷ The Passion cycle on the south wall is in fact the only monumental Passion cycle to have survived from Late Antiquity. Although regarded as mature, including ten pre-Crucifixion scenes, the Crucifixion itself is excluded.⁴⁵⁸ The exclusion in this context brings us back to the issue raised by the small amount of evidence surviving from the second to the fifth centuries: perhaps there was no demand for images of the Crucifixion at this time.

Where does all of this leave the Palatine graffito? The apparent iconographic concordance of the graffito with Christian pictorialisations of the Crucifixion as they emerged in the fifth and sixth centuries has led some scholars to argue that the Roman (possibly) pagan image derives from a Christian source. In other words, that a Christian prototype of the Crucifixion was already formulated in the

⁴⁵⁵ Schiller (1972), p. 100 & n. 26, citing a series of now destroyed images which also exhibited an eastern influence.

⁴⁵⁶ The distinction was noted by Kondakov (1877), p. 3. See also Bréhier (1918), p. 80; Jerphanion (1938), pp. 14-15; Schiller (1972), p. 14. Grinnell (1946), p. 177 n. 25, argued that the two reflect a duality of sources (Hellenistic=unbearded / Oriental=bearded) rather than a theological distinction between the two natures.

⁴⁵⁷ Gerke (1940), p. 47.

⁴⁵⁸ On the cycle see Elsner (1995), pp. 238 & 221-239; fig. 56 illustrates the movement of the cycles.

pre-Constantinian period, and that the Palatine image is a caricatured copy. Martigny argues for this possibility from the premise that had the graffitist been working from imagination, he would have portrayed the figure naked in the knowledge, widely held, that Roman crucifixions were executed in this way; since the clothing appears to indicate symbolic treatment, the image presumably imitates a Christian prototype.⁴⁵⁹ As the examination of the evidence in this chapter attests, the practice of concealing Jesus' naked form beneath the full-length *colobium* was a later, sixth century, development, the narrow loincloth being customary in the fifth century. In the following chapter, the Late Antique gems engraved with miniature pictorialisations of the Crucifixion will confirm that nudity was in fact commonplace prior to the sixth century. This means that the presence of the short tunic worn by the donkey-man in the Palatine graffito does not denote the representation as derivative from a specifically Christian source. Neither does the strictly frontal presentation of the victim, with arms outstretched and legs flat against the upright shaft of the cross. Whilst the rigid frontality does accord with the early Christian prototypes as they survive from the fourth and fifth centuries, frontality was a compositional device well known to the Romans prior to its subsequent adoption by Christians.⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, the gesture of the raised forearm conveying a sense of prayer, surprise, ritual, acclamation or bearing witness,⁴⁶¹ was established in both pagan and Christian art and so does not provide any clues as to the derivation of the image's iconographic features. Finally, the tau cross on which the victim is mounted does not indicate a Christian source *per se*. Importantly the "T" shaped cross, or *crux commissa*, is known on the magical Pereire gem which probably dates not much later than the Palatine graffito. During crucifixion it was formed when the transverse bar or *patibulum*, to which the criminal had been attached at the wrists, was raised to sit in a groove made on the top of the upright post; it was therefore an alternative form to the

⁴⁵⁹ Martigny (1877) p. 227.

⁴⁶⁰ Swift (1951) pp. 160-161, discusses the frontality of the representation and the extreme lengths to which frontality, as a compositional device, was taken in the West.

⁴⁶¹ On the gesture and its attendant meanings, see Grabar (1969), pp. 32-33.

crux immissa, which was created when the *patibulum* was fixed to an indentation on the upper part of the upright post thus producing a latin cross, †.⁴⁶²

On the question of graffito's model, an iconographic feature of particular interest is the depiction of a flat foot support, or *suppedaneum*, on which the donkey-man appears to stand. From historical accounts the feet of those condemned to death by crucifixion were left unsupported, being bound or nailed (one or two nails) to the upright post of the cross.⁴⁶³ A foot-platform, first recorded as a feature of crucifixion in the sixth century by Gregory of Tours, is otherwise unknown prior to the time of the graffito.⁴⁶⁴ It does not appear in Christian art until the early Byzantine period, surviving in the rare iconographic type preserved on a Palestinian ampulla c. AD 600 now in Stuttgart.⁴⁶⁵ It is also shown in the Vatican reliquary figuration [Pl.7b], itself the type of model used by the ampullae makers [Pl.8].⁴⁶⁶ The support re-appears as a single bar on the seventh century silver Perm Plate [Pl.13e].⁴⁶⁷ On Crucifixion icons of the seventh and eight centuries at Mount Sinai, it is shown both as a flat square base [Pl. 14b & d] and a bar [Pl. 14c], although it is the former that proved most popular in Byzantine art. For the derivation of the motif and its inclusion on the Palatine graffito we can only speculate. Heribert Meurer has made an interesting reference to Psalm 99 vs. 5: "O exalt the Lord our God: and bow down before his footstool for he is holy."⁴⁶⁸ Certainly in early Byzantine art its presence aided in the assured presentation of Jesus as the victor, his triumphant body upright and displayed on the platform rather than supported by it. Paradoxically though, its later popularity, particularly in the flattened form, seems to have been due largely to its ability to display and thus accentuate Jesus' bloodied feet and to provide a solid base onto which Jesus'

⁴⁶² Weber (1979), p. 6.

⁴⁶³ Hengel (1977), p. 31 & 32; Weber (1979), p. 6; Légasse (1997), p. 91.

⁴⁶⁴ Légasse (1997), p. 91 & p. 156 n. 74, with reference to Gregory of Tours as the first written attestation to the feature, *De gloria martyrum* I.6. The reference was also noted by Reil (1904), p. 107 n.1. Martigny (1877), p. 229, pointed out that New Testamental literature simply refers to Christ "hanging" on the cross, eg. Acts 5:30, Galat. 3:13.

⁴⁶⁵ Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart, Inv. nr 1980-205b: Kötzsche-Breitenbruch (1984), pp. 236 & 237, taf. 26a.

⁴⁶⁶ Morey (1926), p. 166.

⁴⁶⁷ Leningrad, State Hermitage Museum. Kent & Painter (1977), p. 90, nr 153.

⁴⁶⁸ Meurer in Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart (1985/6), p. 22.

legs, buckling under the agonised weight of the dead or dying body, could appear to collapse.

The creation of the Palatine drawing by an opponent of Christianity does not prove that such an image existed in Christian circles or religious groups on the periphery of “orthodox” Christianity. It is assumed that if the mock-crucifixion was modelled on a Christian prototype, it was a prototype produced in Gnosticising or heretical Christian circles, where we know from Irenaeus (c. 130-200) that figurative images were made and revered.⁴⁶⁹ Regarding its derivation then, we are unable to say whether the image mirrors a Christian prototype existing at the time and perverts it by adding the ass-head, or is a spontaneous caricature of the *perceived* beliefs of the Christian Alexamenos.⁴⁷⁰ Whilst the image and its origins will remain a perpetual source of debate, the most critical aspect for us to note here is that the drawing unequivocally indicates the pre-Constantinian formulation of an image that manages to outline a crucifixion, and specifically the Christian belief in a crucified deity.

Summary

As it presently stands, the formative history of Crucifixion iconography, stretching from the third to the sixth centuries AD, is essentially a piecemeal accretion of literary and material evidence. In the main, the collation of the evidence as it is presently known, and as has been recalled here, took place from the mid-nineteenth century following the discovery of the Palatine graffito and the acquisition of the ivory casket panels from Maskell by the British Museum. These were added to a body of surviving material evidence that included the Sabina doors, the Rabbula manuscript, Vatican reliquary box, the ampullae, pilgrim tokens, jewellery, icons, mosaics, wall paintings and liturgical objects, all of which bore representations of the subject. Since the late 1800’s then, the evolution of Crucifixion iconography has been sketched with some certitude, the evidence

⁴⁶⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.25:6. Dinkler (1967), p. 153, saw the graffito as indirect evidence of Christianity outside the Church; see also pp. 150 ff (with bibliography). Finney (1978), pp. 396-404, who argued for the origin of Christian art in Gnosticising circles.

⁴⁷⁰ Schiller (1972), p. 90 n. 4.

being shaped to achieve some semblance of continuity in iconographic development. Hence in the 1940s Gerke was able to name two distinct types of representations of the Passion in extant art from the early Christian centuries.⁴⁷¹ The first emerges between 340-370 in Roman sculpture on the Passion columnar and tree sarcophagi: it is symbolic, dominated by the theme of triumph, standing under the idea of the unconquerable cross and focusing on individual scenes preceding the Crucifixion itself. The second, represented by the Maskell ivory relief and the Sabina Crucifixion panel, appears by the mid-fifth century in miniature biblical cycles: it is narrative, recalling in stational fashion the events between Gethsemane and the Resurrection (in the case of the ivories) and Ascension and showing the suffering of Christ as part of his, and of the Christian, life.⁴⁷²

To distinguish between the two types Gerke cites the treatment of the episode of Christ before Pilate. On sarcophagal friezes, the scene is symbolic and draws out the going of Christ to his death. On the Maskell ivory, the scene is a station on the way from the Mount of Olives to Golgotha. This distinction is significant as both have a different purpose: on the Passion sarcophagus, meaning is inherent in each episode; on the ivories the Passion is perceived as a cycle. Hence, the symbol of the *crux invicta*, the unconquered cross, appears at the centre of the Passion sarcophagi, whilst the mid-point of the Passion cycles is the Crucifixion. Gerke thus notes that whilst the sarcophagi want to raise up and highlight the victorious symbol of the Christian religion, the Passion cycles want to demonstrate the sufferings of Christ. For this reason, he concludes, the Crucifixion is unthinkable on the sarcophagal reliefs prior to the fifth century, and similarly, the Gethsemane events are not found on sarcophagi but do appear in narrative cycles.⁴⁷³

As an explanation for the absence of the Crucifixion prior to the development of narrative art in the fifth century, Gerke's model is helpful. In the following chapter, the study of gemstones engraved with images of the Crucifixion and dating to the Late Antique period will be seen to add to Gerke's developmental

⁴⁷¹ Gerke (1940), ch. III, "Victoria Christi".

⁴⁷² Gerke (1940), pp. 46 & 47.

⁴⁷³ Gerke (1940), p. 48.

model. The first gem augments the evidence provided by the Palatine graffito, whilst the “acclaim” gems provide a critical phase in between Gerke’s posited “symbolic” and “narrative” types of the third-fifth centuries. The iconographic evidence of the Byzantine gems contributes to the understanding of the development of the clothed crucified Christ in the late sixth to the eighth century, and subsequent development with the posture of the body in the Middle Byzantine period.

CHAPTER III

THE CRUCIFIXION GEMS

Just how many Crucifixion gems survive from the Late Antique period has become a point of unnecessary confusion. As outlined in the introduction, this situation has arisen in part from the custom of citing several, or an unspecified number of, gems as evidence for a pre-fifth century propensity to depict the Crucifixion. Such citations invariably occur at the expense of any helpful discussion regarding the compositional scheme of individual gems or the iconography they display. Five gems, previously used either individually or collectively to assert the existence of Crucifixion imagery prior to the fifth century, are presently known to exist. Whilst two are intimately related stylistically, iconographically, and compositionally, the series as a whole presents a collection of remarkably disparate iconographic types. Their very iconographic disparity will be seen to indicate experimentation with the Crucifixion on amuletic devices over a broad time period, from the second/third until possibly the thirteenth century.

In comparison with the frequent occurrence of other early Christian subjects or symbols on Christian gemstones from the Late Antique period, such as the Good Shepherd, this number seems particularly small.⁴⁷⁴ Yet in consideration of the rarity of Crucifixion images in other genres of Christian art antedating the sixth century, the significance of the number cannot be over-emphasised. The survival of more than one gem testifies to the formulation of pictorial models of the Crucifixion as early as the third and fourth centuries. Yet the rarity of the surviving images also raises an important possibility: that although in circulation such models, or the subject itself, proved unpopular. For according to the dates here posited for the production of the extant Crucifixion gems and the absence of

⁴⁷⁴ The number of gems surviving with representations of the Good Shepherd engraved on their bezel is high. Leclercq cites at least twenty-two examples in his article "Gemmes", in Cabrol &

additional material evidence it would seem that although pictorial models for the representation of the Crucifixion in visual art were in existence prior to the fifth century, they were not widely reproduced or developed.

As a loose body of diverse images, the gems document not simply an earlier experimentation with the subject than suggested by the Maskell relief and Sabina panel, but also several of the iconographic changes that occurred in the transition from the early Christian period into what is known as Byzantine art. These changes conform to art surviving in other media, including paint, mosaic, jewellery and ivory. A primary aim of this thesis is to clarify the usefulness and value of the gems in the wider study of the evolution of Crucifixion iconography. It is impossible to do so, or to pass judgement on their ability to point to a pre-fifth century appearance of the image, without a careful study of each gem from which to draw. This Chapter's purpose is to provide such a study.

With the exception of the Syrian jasper, the gems are without provenance and cannot be compared with any associated finds. In order for them to be properly evaluated, and for the degree of their individual contribution to the broader understanding of the evolution of Crucifixion iconography in Christian art to be appraised, it is therefore necessary to undertake a systematic examination of each gem: noting and commenting on the physical attributes of the stone, including the type of stone/material used, its shape, size and setting if this remains applicable; the subject portrayed; the iconographical details; compositional schema; the orientation of its design; and the content and placement of any inscriptions.⁴⁷⁵ It must be acknowledged and emphasised that the primary interest here is in iconography; the technical details, such as the carving style of the inscriptions and possible tools used, deliberately lie outside the scope of this thesis. Throughout this examination several key questions must also be addressed. For instance: is the iconography reasonable for a particular period of artistic development? Does a gem exactly reproduce the composition of another work? Does each gem fit into what was happening elsewhere in Christian art at the time posited for their

Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, cols. 832-835; the motif also appeared in conjunction with other early Christian subjects and symbols, cols. 837-840.

⁴⁷⁵ For example see Henig (1974), pp. 41-51.

individual production? Are there iconographic errors that are unlikely for the times of production previously proposed by scholars? Are certain features, which otherwise point to an early date, contradicted by the iconography?⁴⁷⁶ Such an examination is conducted in this Chapter and some conclusions are also drawn from the evidence presented.

Owing to the length of the following examination, this Chapter is divided into two main parts according to chronology: Late Antiquity and Byzantium. Part 1 discusses the Pereire, Nott and Constanza gems; Part 2 discusses the Lewis gem and the more problematic Gaza gem. The much smaller Part 3 is given over to a brief discussion of three amulets that have previously been mentioned in connection with these five gems and erroneously linked to the early development of Crucifixion iconography. Two of the amulets, the well-known Orpheus Bakchikos seal-cylinder and the lesser known Montagna crucifix, are of dubious authenticity as far as their early dating is concerned. The third amulet is a haematite intaglio featuring a possible arrest scene. It is less problematic in terms of authenticity, yet bears no explicit Crucifixion iconography. Since it may relate to magical attitudes in Late Antiquity to the Crucifixion and suffering of Jesus, I have felt it worth including in this discussion.

⁴⁷⁶ These questions are directly modelled on those posed by Kornbluth in her examination of early Byzantine crystals (1994/5), p. 23.

Part 1 LATE ANTIQUITY

A. The Pereire Jasper [Cat. nr 1]

The earliest gem in the corpus of five Crucifixion gems is a dark green and red/brown jasper [Pl.9a & b].⁴⁷⁷ This upright-oval gem (3.005 x 2.49 cms), with its wide angled bezel, is the largest and most recent addition to the group of supposedly Late Antique Crucifixion intaglios, being published in 1964 by the French scholar Philippe Derchain. Credit for its initial publication must go to Henri Seyrig, who noted the gem amongst the private collection of Roger Pereire in Paris and subsequently brought it to Derchain's attention.⁴⁷⁸ Although acquired by the British Museum from Jack Ogden as recently as 1986 [MLA: 1986, 5-1,1] the jasper has been consistently identified in past scholarship in connection with Pereire. To avoid confusion, the Pereire appellation is retained here.⁴⁷⁹

Carved in positive intaglio, the jasper preserves what is easily the most controversial of the five Crucifixion images to be discussed in Parts 1 and 2 of this Chapter. A tau-shaped cross appears at the centre of the obverse face, consisting of a very tall upright shaft and a *patibulum* that terminates in short transverse bars. On this structure there hangs a bearded man. His outstretched arms are affixed to the *patibulum* of the cross by two short ties over the wrists. His legs are forced apart at the knees to hang in an open position. This position is presumed to be caused by the fact that the victim is seated on a bar or peg protruding at pelvis height from the upright shaft of the cross, although the protrusion is not shown. The man's torso, neck and head remain upright against the shaft, the head turned sharply to the left and seen in profile protruding above the crossbar. Despite the erect carriage of the upper body, the presentation of the naked victim in strict frontality before the viewer does not elicit a sense of triumph as it does in the Christian pictorialisations of Jesus' crucifixion in the fifth century; it is evident from the fall of the elbows and the flaccidity of the hands that the arms are not

⁴⁷⁷ The blotching of one colour through another is not uncommon for jaspers. Green jasper with small red spots is termed heliotrope, also known as bloodstone: Spier (1992), p. 5.

⁴⁷⁸ Derchain (1964), p. 109.

⁴⁷⁹ Finney (1994), p. 141, n. 51, uses this name.

voluntarily outstretched, as later Christian artists would intimate in their triumphal iconography. Moreover, the cruel positioning of the legs and the explicit nudity of the victim as it is presented here, both accentuated in frontal presentation, emphasise his vulnerability rather than victory on the cross. Thus the iconography leaves us in no doubt about the reality of crucifixion: that this barbarous form of execution subjected the condemned to an intensely physical and humiliating death.

The stark figure, reaching almost to the extremities of the obverse field, is set amidst densely inscribed letters from the Greek alphabet. These are arranged in nine horizontal lines, reading across from left to right and commencing at the top of the design field with three letters placed symmetrically above the victim's head. Thereafter, the remaining lines continue below the arms of the cross to form one continuous inscription that completely covers the remaining surface area, broken only in the middle by the crucified figure. Significantly, the inscription commences with an invocation of Jesus' name, hence the identification of the figure as Christ. The reverse face is similarly covered with nine densely inscribed lines of script which run horizontally and in continuous fashion from one side of the gem to the other. There is no image on the reverse face. Although badly chipped, the bezel does not appear to have been engraved with any script.

Before analysing the iconography it is necessary to review the epigraphical evidence that the gem furnishes.

1. The Inscription

As Derchain originally observed, the carving style on both sides of the gem is uniform and seemingly executed by the one hand.⁴⁸⁰ As an aside it is interesting to note that the letters on the obverse face are more sharply defined than those on the reverse. This may simply be due to the fact that the tool used for the letters on the obverse became blunt in the process of carving the first half of the inscription, or that a different, blunter tool was used for the carving on the back.

⁴⁸⁰ Derchain (1964), p. 109.

A full transcription of the vowels, showing them as minuscules, first appeared in Delatte and Derchain's work *Les Intailles magiques*.⁴⁸¹ Their transcription appears below; however for ease of comparison with the photograph of the gem, the vowels as Delatte and Derchain read them are shown as majuscules and are arranged in the layout as it appears on the gem.

Obverse:

[E] I C	
Π A T HPIH	
COYX PICTE	
COAM N Ω A	4
M Ω A Ω I A	
C H I O Y Ω	
APTA NHA	
YC IO	8
I	

Reverse:

IΩE	
EYAEΩII	
[I]OYICYE	
[B]AΔHTOΦΩ	4
ΘIECCETICKHE	
MMANAYHΛA	
CTPAICTKMH	
ΦMEIΘωAP	8
MIMΠE	

A revised transcription was undertaken for the purposes of this study with the help of Paul Tuffin.⁴⁸² Our transcription closely follows Derchain's reading, including his acceptance of the symbol C, used throughout the inscription, as a commonly used form of the Greek sigma. Nevertheless, we propose several modifications to the original transcription.

Sizeable chips to the edges of the stone appear to have resulted in the loss of some vowels. This is apparent on the bottom of the obverse face, but particularly to the left side of the field perimeter on the reverse face. In the revised transcription shown below, the location of the missing vowels is indicated by a [-]. The original

⁴⁸¹ Delatte & Derchain (1964), nr 408, p. 287.

⁴⁸² I am extremely grateful to Dr Paul Tuffin, Centre for European Studies and General Linguistics, University of Adelaide for his help, advice, and comments.

presence of these no longer existing vowels seems to be indicated by the symmetrical arrangement of the letters: so for example on the obverse face, where an iota seems to survive as part of a bottom line, it is presumed that another vowel appeared in the corresponding position on the other side of the base of the cross. Similarly, on the reverse face, at the beginning of lines 3 and 4, the arrangement of the lines gives rise to the belief that a vowel is missing. In some cases part of a vowel remains but not enough to enable identification. Such instances are indicated with a [?].

The transcription should be compared with the photographs of the gem at *Pl.9a & b*. To avoid confusion when comparing Derchain's reading with the revised version, only the bracketed partially remaining "vowels" [?] are included in the vowel count of each line; the bracketed missing letters [-], not included by Derchain, are therefore not included in the count. So on the reverse side: line 3 letter 4 is iota I; line 6 letter 2 is mu M.

REVISED: Obverse

	Υ	Ι	Ε	
	Π	Α	Τ	Η
	Κ	Ο	Υ	Χ
	Κ	Ο	Α	Μ
	Μ	Ω	Α	Ν
	Ω	Ι	Α	Ω
	Χ	Η	Ι	Ο
	Α	Ρ	Τ	Α
	Υ	Κ	Ι	Ο
	[Ι?]	[-]		

Reverse

	Ι	Ω	Ε	
	Ε	Υ	Α	Ε
	[-]	[?]	Ο	Υ
	[-]	[?]	Α	Δ
	[-]	Θ	Ι	Ε
	[Ψ?]	Μ	Α	Ν
	Σ	Τ	Ρ	Α
	Ψ	Π	Ε	Ι
	Μ	Ε	Μ	Π

Note: [-] indicates where a letter was likely to have formed part of the original inscription but is now missing due to a chip
[?] indicates an incomplete letter, due to a chip

For the *obverse* face, the only discrepancy between our transcription and Derchain's is in line 7: where Derchain identifies an eta, the two clearly independent strokes can be read as iotas.

For the *reverse* face there are numerous differences. Obviously in many instances the poor formation of certain letters leaves their identity open to debate. Such an example occurs at rev: line 5.7 where it remains unclear as to whether the artisan intended to carve an epsilon or a sigma; whilst there does appear to be a third horizontal stroke, the form of this letter does not compare favourably with the epsilons carved with clarity elsewhere on the gem. Similarly the letters at lines 6.9 & 8.7: in view of the form of the delta in line 4.2. we have read these as deltas. There was also some difficulty in identifying the cross-like symbol that appears at lines 4.6, 6.1 and 8.1. Although not in its Classical form, the symbol can be recognised as a version of psi which emerged particularly in the third century and is found in papyri.⁴⁸³ The transcription proposed here concurs with Derchain in identifying the 6th letter, line 8 as a minuscule omega. Taking all of these points into consideration, the following variations between the transcriptions emerge:

- reverse line 2, letter 5: Derchain reads omega Ω; read upsilon Υ
 line 3, letter 7: Derchain reads xi Ξ; possibly epsilon Ε
 line 4, letter 1: Derchain assumes a beta Β is missing; the remaining part of the letter does not conform to a beta. Given the layout of the lines (and the length of the line below) it seems that a further preceding letter at the beginning of this line is missing
 letter 7: Derchain reads phi Φ; read psi Ψ
 letter 8: Derchain reads omega Ω; read nu Ν
 line 5, (*note: Derchain reads 12 letters in this line by inserting a non-existent iota after letter 7. We believe there may have been 12 letters originally, with the first letter now missing. This number would allow the layout of the lines to balance, with the first four lines gradually increasing in length up to line 5 before decreasing after this line.*)
 letter 1: part of a letter appears to remain although Derchain does not indicate so
 letter 6: where we have read this vowel as possibly a sigma Σ, Derchain reads epsilon Ε, which is also possible
 line 6, letter 1: for this incomplete letter Derchain reads mu Μ; possibly psi Ψ

⁴⁸³ Groningen (1963), p. 31, fig. 3.

- letter 9: Derchain reads alpha A; possibly delta Δ (unclear)
 line 8, letter 1: again Derchain reads phi Φ; read psi Ψ
 letter 2: Derchain reads mu M; read pi Π
 letter 7: where Derchain reads alpha A; read delta Δ
 line 9, letter 2: Derchain reads iota I; read epsilon E

This close study of the epigraphy also reveals several inaccuracies in Jim Farrant's line drawing of the reverse face of the gem prepared for the British Museum [*Pl.c & d*]. All but one of the following corrections are supported by Derchain's reading and include:

- reverse line 2, letter 1: despite a chip to its outer edge, it appears that this letter can be read as epsilon E
 letter 4: Farrant reads sigma C; read epsilon E
 line 3, letter 1: although obscured by a chip, *this is not an iota* as Farrant and Derchain record, since part of a second stroke (coming out of the left side of the vertical stroke) is still visible.
 letter 3: the downward stroke on this letter suggests it is upsilon Υ
 line 4, letter 2: Farrant reads Δ; probably alpha A
 line 5, letter 9: Farrant draws only part of a letter (a vertical stroke); read kappa, K
 letter 11: this is drawn as incomplete; however it is an epsilon, E
 line 6, letter 1: possibly psi Ψ in the variant form noted above
 letter 2: Farrant reads nu N; probably mu M
 line 7, letter 3: Farrant draws R (not in the Greek alphabet); probably rho P
note: Farrant misses the 8th letter, kappa K
 line 9, letter 1: Farrant draws two vertical strokes; read as one letter, mu M
 letter 4: Farrant draws letters that look like iota I and tau T; read pi Π
 [*hence there are six letters in this line, not 7 as Farrant draws*]

The inaccuracies listed above are important to note; they illustrate the dangers of studying engraved gems in hand-drawn reproduction alone. The consequences of doing so will be seen again in the case of the Lewis and Gaza jaspers and their history in scholarship.

To turn to the content of the script. The opening three lines of the inscription on the obverse face were originally read by Derchain as [E]IC ΠATHP IHCOY XPICTE, "One Father, Jesus Christ".⁴⁸⁴ Despite a chip across the

⁴⁸⁴ Derchain (1964), p. 110. Derchain's translation is followed by Morton Smith (1978), p. 61. Maser (1976), p. 265 n. 44, comments on the formula [E] IC.

beginning of the line Spier has pointed out [in personal communication] that the first letter was probably an upsilon and that the opening invocation should read ΥΙΕ ΠΑΤΗΡ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΕ, “Son of the Father, Jesus Christ”. Aside from making more sense, this reading is clearly supported by the portion of the letter surviving on the stone. In the absence of any distinct iconographical features to verify his divine status, such as a nimbus, it is this petition which surely establishes the identification of the crucified figure as Jesus. Except for ΠΑΤΗΡ, *Pater* (nominative singular where we might expect to find the genitive after υἱέ, meaning “of [the] Father”), the opening words are in the vocative singular. This gives the impression of a supplication spoken directly to the Christian deity and is distinctly reminiscent of ecclesiastical language. As Graf has argued, the language employed in magical texts is often prayerful and magicians invariably borrowed verse or prayer-formulae from various religions.⁴⁸⁵

Beyond the invocation there are very few recognisable words in the inscription on the obverse face. Rather, the prayer formula co-exists with words associated with magical incantations and invocations, and with arrangements of letters believed to have had powerful meaning both in their visual appearance and in their pronunciation in magical contexts. The vowels CO [obv: line 4, letters 1 & 2] appear amongst magical groupings of vowels on a Greek house amulet of the fourth/fifth century.⁴⁸⁶ Further to this, several combinations of letters are recognisable from invocations or incantations contained in the collection of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* such as ΝΩΑ [obv: line 4. 5-7].⁴⁸⁷ Similarly ΩΙΑ [obv: line 5. 4-6] is found in incantations where it appears to be an anagram for ΙΑΩ, which Bonner identifies as the Hellenistic pronunciation of the Hebrew JHVH. ΙΑΩ is common on amulets⁴⁸⁸ and papyri.⁴⁸⁹ A typical example of its manipulation, apparently for magical purposes, is “Ιωα αωι ωια”, containing ωια as it is found here on the gem.⁴⁹⁰ Also present in the Pereire incantation are the final five of the seven Greek vowels [obv: line 6], ΗΙΟΥΩ. The sevenfold

⁴⁸⁵ Graf (1991), pp. 188-213.

⁴⁸⁶ Kotanksy (1994), nr 41.10.

⁴⁸⁷ *PGM* III.415, as part of an invocation.

⁴⁸⁸ Examples include: Bonner (1950), nrs. 359 & 361; Dauterman Maguire et.al. (1989), nrs. 132, 135 & p. 18; Henig (1994), nr 518.

⁴⁸⁹ Bonner (1950), p. 30.

sequence (αειιουω) appears frequently in magical papyri.⁴⁹¹ According to Bonner it could be intoned in the recitation of magic spells; he also suggested the presence of some or all of the vowels on many gem amulets, in alphabetic or varied sequence, simply denoted the power of the vocal incantation and was without specific meaning, variations being made to the order for aural as well as visual appeal.⁴⁹² Finally, IO [obv: line 8.3-4] can be noted. This occurs in other magical contexts, such as a second century amulet for litigants where it is repeated three times; Kotansky notes that in that context it may be a Latinised variant of the acclamation *Ιώ*, usually associated in magical texts with summoning a deity, or may have its own magical meaning, appearing with αι in *PGM IV*, 1791f.⁴⁹³

In addition to the magic words noted above, Derchain argued that the word ἀρτάνη (fettters/bonds) was distinguishable [obv: line 7], postulating a connection between the ties shown visually across the wrists of the figure and the presence of the word in the accompanying inscription.⁴⁹⁴ On this idea, it appears that only ΑΡΤΑΝ (ἀρταν) can be read on the stone, the following characters being two iotas traversed by a crack (which runs diagonally across the stone from top-left to bottom right) rather than an eta. Moreover, a search of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*⁴⁹⁵ suggests that the meaning of fettters or bonds is not one easily found for ἀρτάνη, which usually means a noose for the neck.

Looking now at the reverse face. The first line can be read clearly and comprises the letters ΙΩΕ. Derchain suggests these may be read as an expression of the name of Yahweh, not an unreasonable assertion given the prominent position assigned to the letters.⁴⁹⁶ More common on magical amulets of this type however is the form noted above, ΙΑΩ or ΙΑΟ, the latter being regarded, and used widely, as a word of power, used with other magic names and signs.⁴⁹⁷ Kotansky cites numerous instances of the divine name's appearance on Greek magical amulets

⁴⁹⁰ *PGM IV*.1040

⁴⁹¹ eg. *PGM I*.139, II.16, III.152.

⁴⁹² Bonner (1950), pp. 186-187, 193, and on their possible astrological meaning p. 12 & p. 138.

⁴⁹³ Kotansky (1994), nr 7 line 5, p. 27; see also his notes at nr 23 line 4, p. 96.

⁴⁹⁴ Derchain (1964), p. 110.

⁴⁹⁵ *TLG* (1999).

⁴⁹⁶ Derchain (1964), p. 109. On the letters, see also the comments of Maser (1976), pp. 263-265.

⁴⁹⁷ On the word see Bonner (1950), pp. 134ff. For the three letters on the Pereire gem see also the comments of Maser (1976), pp. 263-265.

from the first century BC to the fourth century AD.⁴⁹⁸ IAO is also known to have appeared with Christian invocations, as an amuletic tablet from Tyre⁴⁹⁹ and a third-fifth century amulet for ophthalmia from Lebanon record, the latter beginning with an invocation of the names of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰⁰ In line 2 of the Pereire script are the vowels EYA (obv: line 2.1-3) which spell, intentionally or otherwise, the Greek name for Eve. The three vowels appear in this order on another magic amulet: a silver probably fourth/fifth century tablet from Syria.⁵⁰¹ Interestingly, the tablet contains no meaningful Greek, and Kotansky notes that the magic names listed thereon are likely to be Egyptian or Semitic.⁵⁰² He does not comment on our vowels however. EYA is followed in the same line on the Pereire gem by EYII [rev: line 2.4-7]. Again, although possibly coincidental, Evi appears as a proper name in the Septuagint (Joshua 13.21).

The remaining inscription on the reverse may contain various magical words or patterns of letters known to have had magical significance in incantations preserved on papyri and amulets of the Late Antique period. In line 3, part of a letter is missing due to a chip, with the line now reading OYICYE. The first three of these six letters, ουι, appear (on their own⁵⁰³ or within magical words such as οουι and μουι) with other magical words in papyri.⁵⁰⁴ The letters ΘIE [rev: line 5] form a magic word, which appears for example within a spell for “self vision” in a magical papyrus.⁵⁰⁵ The grouping of three sigmas [rev: line 5.5-7] may also have a magical significance. The repetition of other Greek vowels seemingly for magical purposes occurs on Greek magical amulets.⁵⁰⁶ Specifically groupings of three are sometimes noticeable, as on a Greek house amulet of the fourth/fifth century.⁵⁰⁷

⁴⁹⁸ Kotansky (1994), eg. nr 4, line 7 (3rd C); 11.10 (2nd C); 16.1 (3rd C); 23.3 (3-4th C); 32.14 & 18 (2-3rd C); 39.6 (1 BC); 44.2 (Roman period); 48.1 (1 BC); and further in the index p. 407.

⁴⁹⁹ The tablet is noted by Kotansky (1991), p. 117.

⁵⁰⁰ Kotansky (1994), nr53

⁵⁰¹ Kotansky (1994), nr 49.5.

⁵⁰² Kotansky (1994), p. 257-258.

⁵⁰³ *PGM* XIXa.1.

⁵⁰⁴ eg. *PGM* IV.422 & VII.307.

⁵⁰⁵ see *PGM* VII.341, with the spell running from VII.335-347.

⁵⁰⁶ For examples, refer index of magic words in Kotansky (1994).

⁵⁰⁷ Kotansky (1994), nr 41.9-10, & notes p. 223; for other triplicates see nrs. 33.16 (ΠΠΠΠ), 66.2 (ηηη), 41.9 (ooo) & (ωωω).

Derchain was keen to see the magical word ΒΑΔΗΤΟΦΩΘ, Badetophoth⁵⁰⁸ [rev: line 4], which appears on magic gems, amulets and magical papyri.⁵⁰⁹ Βαδητοφωθ is also listed by Kotansky as the name of the god of the second hour.⁵¹⁰ Kotansky notes that the name could be spelt either with a *delta* or *zeta*; and in a victory charm on a fourth century gold *lamella* from Jordan, now in the Walters Art Gallery, the *alpha* is missing, with the word spelt Βδητοφωθ.⁵¹¹ On the Pereire gem however, only five of the nine letters that make up the word appear: ΑΔΗΤΟ. Moreover the first letter of the word, *beta*, is not suggested by the portion of the letter that remains at the beginning of the line. So it seems unlikely that the word is intended in this case.

Similarly, Derchain observed that the letters ΜΑΝΑΥΗΛ (rev: line 6) remind us of the word ΕΜΜΑΝΟΥΗΛ, Emmanuel, the Hebrew name “God is with us” [Is. 7:14] prophesied to be the name of the Messiah and later given to Jesus (Mt. 1:23).⁵¹² This too is a tempting suggestion. Bonner asserts that the name could be used as a magical word.⁵¹³ An example occurs on a very late Coptic amulet which contains a text requesting the removal of the owner’s pain “...in the name and by the nails which were driven (?) into the body of Emanouel, our Nouel, our God on the cross...”.⁵¹⁴ Whilst much later than our gem, the reference in the one text to the name (and the allusion to its magical potency), to the brutality of the Crucifixion and to Jesus as Emanouel, is too intriguing not to cite. Nevertheless, on the Pereire gem there are some basic problems with the identification of the word Emanouel. The first is the obvious misspelling of the alpha for an omicron. Bonner noted that misspellings of the word occur on amulets. Yet the example he cites is an amulet in Michigan on which the letters ΕΝΜΑΝΟΥΗΛ appear instead of ΕΜΜΑΝΟΥΗΛ; although misspelt, there is hardly any difference in the pronunciation of the two words.⁵¹⁵ The misspelling on our gem is more substantial, with ΟΥ changed into ΑΥ. A second more serious problem is the

⁵⁰⁸ Derchain (1964), p. 109 & Delatte & Derchain (1964), p. 284 & 287.

⁵⁰⁹ *PGM* III.506 & XIII.175; see also the references cited by Kotansky (1994), nr 58 p. 335, line 9.

⁵¹⁰ Kotansky (1994), p. 335 & see the index 405.

⁵¹¹ Kotansky (1994), nr 58 line 9.

⁵¹² Delatte & Derchain (1964), p. 287.

⁵¹³ Bonner (1950), p. 173.

⁵¹⁴ Cited by Horsely (1983), p. 118.

⁵¹⁵ Bonner (1950), p. 173.

absence of the first two letters at the beginning of the word: the epsilon could be used from the previous line as the first letter, however where we would expect a mu at the beginning of the 6th line, we have a possible psi.

More feasible is Derchain's recognition of the word ἀστραπή (lightning) in line 7.⁵¹⁶ If the word was seen to begin at the last letter of the 6th line, and this letter read as an alpha and not a lambda, the entire word could be seen to be present, save only for the sigma which appears instead of the eta: ΑΣΤΡΑΠΗ-. Derchain considered this to be a variant of the magical word ΣΑΤΡΑΠΕΡΚΜΗΦ (SATRAPERKMEPH), which appears on other gems.

A final addition might be made to the list of recognisable words in the inscription: the letters ΠΕΙΘΩ [rev: line 8] can be seen to spell persuasion, used either as a proper noun Πειθώ (*Persuasion* as a goddess) or a verb πείθω (I persuade).

In view of Derchain's transcription, with the changes suggested here, and given the number of words identifiable as Greek, including proper names and magical formulae, Morton Smith's dismissal of the rest of the text beyond the opening invocation on the front as "a long screed of mumbo jumbo" was unfortunate.⁵¹⁷ Certainly, despite the number of identifiable words the incantation makes little sense. This is not of itself a difficulty. Bonner suggested that magical formulae were usually intoned or sung rather than spoken; hence the strings of letters appearing in magical papyri or on gem-amulets produce sounds that were to be uttered in the course of the oral performance of the incantation and were probably not meant to make any literal sense *per se*.⁵¹⁸

The coexistence of the Christian formula, which ostensibly expresses stock religious values, magical formulae and proper names, all interspersed amongst groupings of letters that are often hard to pronounce and often with no apparent meaning, make it difficult to distinguish between the levels of religious piety and magic at work in the production of this gem. From the foregoing discussion however I think that the predominantly magical nature of the stone is evident. This

⁵¹⁶ Derchain (1964), p. 109; Delatte & Derchain (1964), p. 284 & p. 287.

⁵¹⁷ Morton Smith (1978), p. 61.

⁵¹⁸ Bonner (1950), p. 186.

interpretation does not disregard the significance of the Christian invocation; Kotansky has warned that the presence of Christian formulae within otherwise wholly magical incantations does not mean that the religious sentiments are thereby rendered questionable.⁵¹⁹ Nevertheless, I think that in this context the presence of the Christian prayer formula cannot do more than point to the owner's belief in the crucified Jesus as a figure of spiritual power. The image should certainly not be disregarded as suspect simply because it appears at the centre of an otherwise magical "incantation". Whilst it cannot be classified as a specifically Christian devotional representation, the image and the text within which it operates does illustrate a perception of the crucified Jesus' power that extends beyond the parameters of Christianity in Late Antiquity. As will be outlined below, this tension between magical and Christian expressions of Jesus' power is characteristic of the genre of Late Antique engraved gems into which the Pereire gem can be placed.

2. The Jasper and its Group

At first viewing, and in the light of the known Christian representations of the event from the fifth century onwards, the image of the crucified Jesus as it is carved on this gem appears extraordinarily unorthodox. In order to remain unprejudiced by the iconographic peculiarities and their appearance within a predominantly magical context, it is therefore necessary to examine the physical and compositional evidence supplied by the stone before analysing the iconography.

On several fronts, including fabric, shape, size and decoration, the gem conforms to a genre of Late Antique magical gems produced mainly in the eastern part of the Empire between the second and fourth centuries. The various types of gems have been documented elsewhere:⁵²⁰ they are small semi-precious stones engraved

⁵¹⁹ Kotansky (1991), p. 122.

⁵²⁰ Kotansky (1991), p. 114 n.43, cites the main literature, including: Bonner (1950) & (1951); Delatte & Derchain (1964); Philipp (1986); Zwierlein-Diehl (1992). In addition see now S. Michel, *Magische Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, ed P. & H. Zazoff, 2 vols (London, 2000), cited in note 186. Interesting examples are published within larger catalogues of museum collections [eg. by Henig (1994), nrs. 490-518, from the Fitzwilliam Museum], or in smaller articles [eg. Schwartz & Schwartz (1979), from the collection of the American Numismatic Society]. Kotansky (1994), discusses Greek magical amulets.

with cryptic and often abbreviated formula, mystical motifs and/or short texts; they functioned as amulets, protecting the wearer from harm.⁵²¹

Importantly, aside from a general conformity to this genre in fabric and decoration (including epigraphy, outlined above and discussed below), the jasper corresponds directly to an identifiable second-fourth century shape for such amulets, being flat and oval with wide-angled bevelled edges.⁵²² Such amulets were usually of jasper (especially green), one of the commonest materials for crafting magical amulets in this period,⁵²³ and were often carried in clothing, worn in rings or suspended as pendants around the neck.⁵²⁴ They were not normally cut for use as seal devices: they tend to be larger in size than seal-stones, have engraving on both sides and inscriptions carved in positive rather than reverse intaglio. These features indicate that the designs, and the chaotic inscriptions into which they were invariably placed, were meant to be seen and read on the stone and not in impression. Although ring stones were usually oval, it seems unlikely that a gem of the Pereire's size could be worn comfortably in a ring.⁵²⁵ There is neither a projection loop at the top of the Pereire stone nor a perforated hole for suspension [as there is for the Daniel pendant pictured on *Pl. 1b* for instance], hence the likelihood that it was carried or mounted for wearing as a pendant, with the suspension loop forming part of the now lost mounting.

The Pereire jasper further conforms to the specified genre in its characteristic integration on the one object of the apparently disparate spiritual elements of Christianity and magic.⁵²⁶ As the opening discussion of the epigraphy illustrated, this synthesis or coexistence is witnessed in the pastiche of magical words, pious invocations, magical arrangements of vowels and the possible naming of other individuals or figures, such as Eve. Engraved and probably distributed by a gem cutter to the “prescription” of a magician, the Late Antique magic gems are

⁵²¹ For Kotansky's definition of amulets see (1991), pp. 107-108 & passim. Regarding inscriptions on such amulets: Bonner (1950), pp. 186-20; Aune (1980), pp. 1549-1551.

⁵²² For shapes see Zwierlein-Diehl (1992), eg. nrs. 27, 28, taf. 18-19; Spier (1992), p. 3 fig. 5 flat nr 1.

⁵²³ Bonner (1950), p. 9

⁵²⁴ See the literature cited in note 520, plus Henig (1994), p. 119, and Kotansky (1991), p. 114.

⁵²⁵ Bonner (1950), p. 9.

⁵²⁶ Derchain (1964), p. 109: the following features are all noted by Derchain. For the difficulty of defining Magic and Christianity see ch. 2, pp. n.

distinguished by this very religious ambiguity, invariably bearing the figures and/or names of one or several gods whose help or power is sought.⁵²⁷ Bonner described this synthesis as a kind of “muddled” magic,⁵²⁸ and warned that a connection between the design and the religious proclivities of the carver or owner could not be made on the basis of an inscription. Applied to the Pereire gem, this theory means that the presence of Jesus’ name, in conjunction with the image of his Crucifixion, cannot be used as a means of determining the supposed religious disposition of the gem’s owner towards Christianity. Yet as Zwierlein-Diehl cautioned, not every amulet wearer should be relegated to the class of heretical deviants or superstitious; the religious attitude of the individual amulet-wearer might be placed on a broad scale of belief stretching from sincere faith in a god to primitive ‘fetishism’.⁵²⁹ Therefore to reiterate Kotansky’s advice,⁵³⁰ the presence of the Christian invocation and the image of Jesus on a magical device should not suggest a complete absence of sincere Christian piety, the synthesis of magic and Christianity on the one object merely illustrating the confluence of religious and spiritual values in the Late Antique world.⁵³¹ In other circumstances, on two probably sixth century apotropaic sickness amulets of unknown provenance,⁵³² credal formulae at the beginning of the talismans, reflecting some knowledge of such orthodox statements of faith as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan or Apostle’s Creed, seem to Horsley to indicate the owners’ participation in the “mainstream Church”. Moreover, he suggests that the function of the statements “is to establish the wearer’s *bona fides* as Christ’s follower, and on this basis the request for help can then be made.”⁵³³ Admittedly the papyri are much later in date than the Pereire gem; and on the latter we have only a name, not a credal formula. Nevertheless, they raise important questions regarding the maker’s conversancy with the

⁵²⁷ The features cited here as characteristic of magical amulets are taken from Bonner (1950), pp. 9-14.

⁵²⁸ Bonner (1950), p. 18 and pp. 1, 29, 30-31, 136. On “Christianised Magic” in the early Byzantine period, see Maguire (1995), pp. 61-64.

⁵²⁹ Zwierlein-Diehl (ed.), (1992), p. 17.

⁵³⁰ cited above: Kotansky (1991), p. 122.

⁵³¹ see the amulets discussed by Bonner (1932).

⁵³² The first published by Horsley (1983), nr 93, and the second cited by him as *P. Turner 49*, pp. 114- 116.

⁵³³ Horsley (1983), p. 116.

Christian invocation. Essentially it is evident that the inscription on the Pereire gem indicates some knowledge of Christian liturgical language but does not establish, as a credal formula might, a definite level of active participation in the Church. Hence it is reasonable to assert that the Pereire stone is a magic gem and that whether the owner was a participating Christian or not, the Christian invocation functions precisely in the way Horsley described for the sickness amulets: to establish some credibility with Jesus, on whose power he is calling, before continuing with the rest of the incantation.

Thus, the Pereire gem's lines of characters, completely covering both faces, betray the magical nature of the gem. The protective or apotropaic function of the stone itself is resident in the interaction, rather than the individual presence, of the cryptic words with the imagery. Since the execution of magical acts, such as warding off demons, did not necessarily require any literacy on the part of the individuals using the amulets, the exact replication of particular words or phrases on amulets was not essential.⁵³⁴ What was important was the conformity of the design with a known model and/or the perceived efficacy of that design. Subsequently, it is the mutual dependency of the written and visual invocation of Jesus that procures the magical potency of this stone rather than the words or the image alone. Having ascertained a likely date for the production of this magic gem, it is thus necessary to see whether the iconography conforms to such a date. The strictly frontal mode of presentation, the shape of the cross, and the nudity of Jesus indicate that it does.

3. The Iconography

The flat, strictly frontal and upright display of Jesus' crucified body, unusually accentuated in this case in the severe division of the legs, is typical of Late Antique art and can be favourably compared with the presentation of the crucified figure in the Palatine drawing [*Pl.1a*]. In that possibly near-contemporary image the victim's asinine-head is seen in left-profile exactly as Jesus' head is on the Pereire stone [*Pl.9a*] and his arms are similarly shown hanging from the

⁵³⁴ Russell (1995), p. 36.

crossbar.⁵³⁵ Interestingly, the drawing also shows the victim on a tau cross. Historically, Romans condemned to crucifixion were nailed or tied at the wrists to the transverse bar of the cross before being raised by the bar onto the upright pole. As mentioned earlier, the transverse bar was placed either into a groove on the top of the pole to form a tau cross, or into an indentation made part way up the pole.⁵³⁶ Artistically, the tau is common in early representations of the Crucifixion, and aside from the graffito probably appears on the Constanza gem [Pl.10d, discussed below] and the Maskell relief [Pl.5a].⁵³⁷ Later, it appears in the symbolic Crucifixion on a Byzantine crystal pendant in the Musée du Louvre [Pl.13a].⁵³⁸

There are no such parallels for Jesus' nudity on the cross, which is rarely articulated in Christian art. Whilst it is likely that Jesus was divested of his garments prior to crucifixion, in accordance with the Roman practice of utilising nudity as a means of augmenting the dishonour already felt by the victim of being publicly affixed to and executed upon a cross,⁵³⁹ the gospels themselves do not specify Jesus' nudity. Matthew states that immediately prior to his crucifixion, Jesus was stripped of his clothes and then covered in a purple robe and crowned with thorns by the soldiers [27.28]. Both Matthew and Mark specify that this robe was subsequently removed and that Jesus was reclothed in his own garments before being led away [Mt. 27.30, Mk 15.20]. We must infer from the reports that the soldiers divided his garments amongst them that Jesus was stripped of these before being nailed on the cross.⁵⁴⁰ In the Middle Byzantine period, the first suggestions of nudity are made through the transparency or strategic parting of fabric to suggest or disclose subtle views of the flesh but *never* the genitalia. Richard Trexler claims that the only medieval Crucifixion in which the penis is visible is part of a fifteenth century altarpiece - obviously much later.⁵⁴¹ Jesus'

⁵³⁵ The flatness of the Palatine graffito, and the use of frontality in Late Antique art, is discussed by Swift (1951), pp. 160-161.

⁵³⁶ Weber (1979), p. 6.

⁵³⁷ C. Smith (1896/7), pp. 203-204.

⁵³⁸ Musée du Louvre, département des Objets d'art: AC 880. See J. Durand in Bibliothèque nationale (1992), cat. nr 37.

⁵³⁹ Légasse (1977), p. 90 & n. 63.

⁵⁴⁰ Mt. 27.27-30 & vs. 35; Mk 15.17-20 & vs. 24; Luke is less specific, 23.11 & vs. 34; John contains the most detail regarding the nature of Jesus robe, being seamless, 19.2-5 & vs. 23-24.

⁵⁴¹ Trexler (1993), p. 110 n. 23.

nudity and its presentation on this gem is therefore of exceptional interest. In view of the pattern of concealment in Christian art, which begins in the fifth century, and in consideration of the miniature scale of this gem, there is little expectation of finely detailed anatomical features and physical attributes such as the genitalia. Yet this and other features appear to have been delineated with some care, in contrast to magical amulets of the Late Antique period which are on the most part crudely designed and hastily executed.⁵⁴²

Aside from the demarcation of such basic features as the head, torso, thighs and arms, close attention has been paid to the rendering of smaller anatomical details such as the knees, feet, hands, the nose and even the fingers, which are shown with several light cuts on the Pereire gem. Similar care is given in the rendering of the muscular definition of the calves and the facial hair at the chin. Whilst Jim Farrant does not show it in his line drawing [*Pl.9c*], a small incision, possibly to denote the region of the genitalia, is discernible both on the surface of the gem and in photographic reproduction [*Pl.9a*]. Quite simply, this would seem to indicate that in treating the body of Jesus, the lapidary is not inhibited in the way that the later carvers of Christian gems and Christian artists were to become with regard to Jesus' nudity. I would argue, moreover, that beyond maintaining historical verisimilitude, and thus highlighting the humiliation of hanging naked on a cross in public, no overt significance is attached to the naked status in the way that Trexler has interpreted for later material figurations.⁵⁴³ In the following two gems only the basic outline and general shape of his naked form is indicated, a generalisation of physical shape that may well relate to the function of the pictorialisations as symbolic evocations of the triumphant human form made divine, as opposed to the realistic delineation of a human figure on the cross. The nudity on the Pereire gem emphasizes Jesus' subjection to a brutal death; it is not the Graeco-Roman concept of nudity utilised to denote divinity. As an iconographic tool then, underlining the horror of his situation on the cross, nudity in this pictorial context can thus be seen to have the effect of affirming the spiritual prowess of the victim, there being no christological qualms about the

⁵⁴² Bonner (1950), p. 10.

⁵⁴³ Trexler (1993), *passim*.

divine or human natures of Jesus being presented: this is merely the man Jesus, upheld for his magical prowess in defeating evil powers and overcoming the brutality of the cross.

The brutal conception of the Crucifixion presented on this jasper is, in the confronting realism of its iconography, wholly antithetical to the triumphal symbolism favoured by Christians in Late Antiquity. Yet this realism should not be seen as incidental to its magical nature; rather, it is integral. Derchain argues that the conflict between realism and the overt symbolism eventually favoured by Christians is further evidence of the gem's early production date. He posits that had the Christian formulae for the visual presentation of the crucified Jesus been circulating at this time, the lapidary would have copied it carefully, the appearance of deities being known through widely circulated forms and the magical efficacy of an image depending on the exactitude with which the image was replicated from the model by which it was known. Devices were created for the unseen forces, not for human viewers. Hence if a deity did not recognise itself in a poorly executed image, it would not come to reside in that image, rendering as void the magical efficacy of the amulet.⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, since literary evidence suggests that Jesus' power was seen - by Christians and so called "non-Christians" - to radiate specifically from the cross, demons were therefore seen to be terrified not simply of Jesus as a man of power who defeated death, but of the *crucified* Jesus.⁵⁴⁵ If this gem was intended to ward off such evil spirits then obviously we would expect an attempt to render the form of Jesus in a way that the demons would recognise: hence they not only name him, but detail the very facts of Jesus' Crucifixion that so intimidated the demons.

Stories of healings and exorcisms performed in the name of Jesus Christ appear with striking frequency throughout the New Testament;⁵⁴⁶ whilst they illustrate the widely held belief in the divine power resident in the mere utterance of the name of Jesus, they also attest to the fact that both during his life and after his

⁵⁴⁴ This is Derchain's reasoning, (1964), p. 112.

⁵⁴⁵ for further comments on this see the concluding comments at the end of Part I.

⁵⁴⁶ For instance, references to the use of Jesus' name to cast out demons appear at: Mt. 7.22; Lk. 10.17; Mk 16.17; Acts 16:16-18, and 19:13. Peter heals in Jesus name: Acts 3: 6 & 16; and Acts 9.34. Signs and wonders are also performed in his name: Acts 4: 30.

violent death, Jesus was called upon by name, not only by his disciples as they performed miraculous acts and exorcisms, but also by practitioners of magic who were not his followers.⁵⁴⁷ [One scholar has gone so far as to argue that since the nature of Christ's death was widely known, any reference to him became a reference to the one who had been crucified. Hence Paul's declaration, "We preach Christ crucified" in 1 Cor. 1:23].⁵⁴⁸ An important part of the anti-demonic weaponry, the name acted both as an independent power and as a means of uniting the magician with the god he invoked.⁵⁴⁹

The use of the name of Jesus in a magical way from the New Testament period until the time of Origen, has been widely documented.⁵⁵⁰ We know that this practice continued, particularly in the desert in the fourth century, where demonic forces were seen to reside.⁵⁵¹ Fourth century saints found the invocation of the name of Jesus efficacious in warding off demons.⁵⁵² St Antony found this so, recommending it in conjunction with the other weapons, namely the sign of the cross, prayer and fasting.⁵⁵³ Significant for this discussion is the fact that by the second century, the name was frequently expanded by references to Christ's death. In his second Apology, Justin Martyr states: "For many demoniacs throughout the entire world, and even in your own city, were exorcised by many of our Christians in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate". He adds that Christians succeeded in curing people in this way when all other exorcists and exploiters of incantations and drugs, had failed.⁵⁵⁴ The belief that such references *enhanced* the perceived power resident in the name Jesus itself was not new, having been current in the Apostolic era: Peter proclaims [Acts 4.9-10] that his

⁵⁴⁷ In Mk 9.38-41 (repeated in Lk 9.49-50), the disciples witness a man, "who is not one of us", casting out demons in Jesus' name. See also Acts 19:13-17.

⁵⁴⁸ McDonald (1994), p. 7.

⁵⁴⁹ Morton Smith (1978), p. 35.

⁵⁵⁰ On the magical use of the name of Jesus see: W. Heitmüller, *Im Namen Jesu: Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament, speziell zur altchristlichen Taufe* (Göttingen, 1903), as cited (and the contents recapitulated) by Aune (1980), pp. 1546-1549.

⁵⁵¹ The Desert was long seen to attract demonic forces, a factor even motivating fourth century Christians to the ascetic desert life. See Coyle (1998), pp. 229-249, & esp. pp. 239-240 where he cites Lev. 16.10, Is. 34.14, Mt. 12.43.

⁵⁵² For example: Hilarion. Jerome, *Vita s. Hilarionis* VI and XXII, PG 23, 31D and 40A.

⁵⁵³ The Greek *Life of St Antony*, supposedly composed by Athanasius of Alexandria around 357. Coyle (1998), pp. 241-242; for the numerous references to the invocation of the Christ's name in the *Vita s. Antonii*, p. 241 n. 49; for the date, p. 231.

⁵⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, *2 Apol.* 6.6: FC 6, pp. 125-6.

healing of a cripple is performed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth “whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead...”. In Justin Martyr’s writing, the use of the phrase “crucified under Pontius Pilate” attained almost formulaic status. This is evinced most clearly in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, wherein the repetition of the words is likened to an exorcistic formula by Eric Osborn.⁵⁵⁵ This formula was employed by Irenaeus,⁵⁵⁶ and Owen Chadwick assumes that it was also known by Origen,⁵⁵⁷ who claimed that Christians gathered power by calling on the name of Jesus, from the recital of the histories about him or from words taken from Scripture which were believed to be effective. Athanasius’ claim that Jesus was crucified on the cross so that he might subdue, “the powers of the air”, continues this notion of Jesus’ spiritual supremacy being revealed on the cross.⁵⁵⁸

As David Aune concludes, clearly underlying the expansion of the name Jesus Christ with the words “crucified under Pontius Pilate” is the notion that his Crucifixion and ensuing victory on the cross, spelled the destruction of demonic powers.⁵⁵⁹ In light of such literary documentation we might confidently suppose that visual imagery of the crucified deity used in conjunction with an invocation of Jesus by name on a gem such as this, functioned in a similar way to exorcistic formulae in the individual’s daily fight with evil, whether that individual’s religious beliefs were avowedly or peripherally Christian. We know that deities were regularly invoked by name on engraved gems.⁵⁶⁰ In Christian and Jewish circles this practice has the outstanding precedent of the Solomonic ring, bearing the ineffable name of God, which was seen to contribute directly to the King of Israel’s renowned ability to control evil forces.⁵⁶¹ The seal ring, reputedly given to Solomon by God himself, was venerated by Christians in Jerusalem and by the fourth century, according to Egeria, was kept in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

⁵⁵⁵ Dial. 30.3; 76.6; 85.2. Osborn (1973), p. 63.

⁵⁵⁶ Irenaeus, eg. *Adversus haereses* 2.49.3, and *Epideixis*, 97, cited by Aune (1980), p. 1548.

⁵⁵⁷ Origen: *Contra Celsum* 1.6; Chadwick (1980), pp. 9-10, with comments on the phrase p. 10 n. 1. Certainly in art, the cycles of christological scenes rehearsed on such objects as pendants, armbands and rings from the late 6th C on, acquired the role of an amulet. Kitzinger (1980), p. 151. Such cycles were often used in conjunction with pious inscriptions and thus seen to have apotropaic function. See Vikan (1984), p. 83; Kitzinger (1988), p. 62.

⁵⁵⁸ *de incarnatione* 25; cited by Osborn (1973), p. 63 n. 61. Osborn’s paraphrase from the original text is quoted here.

⁵⁵⁹ Aune (1980), pp. 1547-8.

⁵⁶⁰ Bonner (1950), p. 10.

⁵⁶¹ Josephus *Antiquities* VIII. 45-49. Vikan (1984), pp. 79-80.

beside wood from the True Cross.⁵⁶² The display of the cross relic and the ring side by side might have provided a natural inspiration for the production of an amulet bearing both the name of Jesus and a visual evocation of his death. Yet the Pereire stone indicates that such a combination of word and image was formulated earlier than the fourth century.

As intimated above, the brutality of the image should be seen as integral to the magical nature of the gem. On this front, namely the visual presentation of Jesus' sufferings for the amuletic purposes of underlining his spiritual prowess, the Pereire jasper may have a companion piece. The combination of Jesus' name with a figuration suggesting his torture prior to Crucifixion may be intimated on a magical gem of the same shape and similar size in the Metropolitan Museum [Pl.17c; Catalogue number 7; and Chapter III, Part 3, C]. This haematite gemstone, showing a naked man with wrists bound in front of him, was interpreted by Bonner as a type of the suffering Christ.⁵⁶³ It has a remarkable counterpart in a second haematite amulet, presently in Köln and dated to the second century: the Köln gem is the same shape as the Pereire, although slightly smaller in size. Symbols appearing within the Köln design on the obverse face are almost identical to those on the Metropolitan stone. If Bonner's interpretation of the Metropolitan stone is correct, both haematites may support the notion clearly presented by the Pereire gem: that the punishment and sufferings endured by Jesus were carefully delineated on magical gems for prophylactic purposes in the second and third centuries AD. There is a critical distinction to be made, and thus an important point to be noted here: whilst magic gems would seem to require the specification of Jesus' suffering, which he endured in the process of his defeat of evil, early Christian art only showed the final triumph, completely rejecting any signs of suffering along the way. Hence Jesus' defeat of evil in his victory on the cross was paramount to both, but expressed visually in opposite ways.

⁵⁶² *Itinerarium Aetherae* 37,3. SC 21, p. 234. It is also mentioned in the *Breviarium*, an early sixth century "guide-book" to Jerusalem: Form A; trans. Wilkinson (1977), p. 59, & for the date, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁶³ Bonner (1950), p. 224.

An extraordinary Coptic papyrus possibly dating to around AD 600 [Pl.13f] confirms that the crucified Jesus was seen as a source of power by magicians as late as the seventh century. Containing an exorcistic spell, the papyrus leaf, now in the British Library [*Oriental Manuscript* 6796 (4), 6796]⁵⁶⁴ includes a drawing of the Crucifixion. The spell calls on the power of the crucified Jesus to cast out unclean spirits. As will be pointed out below, the Coptic image has much in common with the Pereire figuration, indicating that a representation of Jesus crucified was known and circulated in magical circles in Late Antiquity.

Whilst we may be able to suggest why individuals created an object such as the Pereire stone, it is less easy to posit a possible source for the iconography. The Palatine drawing suggests that some kind of prototype for the visual representation of the Crucifixion was circulating by the early third century, but it is impossible to know whether this was Christian, and thus whether the maker of this gem goes directly against such a prototype, or if in fact he creates one. In the latter instance, the magician responsible for devising this design conceivably drew from any personal knowledge of contemporary crucifixions or - at times and places where crucifixion was not used as a means of execution - from literary sources, hearsay and/or imagination. It must be remembered that a plethora of religious beliefs, and indeed a variety of strains of Christianity itself, co-existed in the Roman period. The magical efficacy of the crucified Jesus, in name and visual image, meant that carvers producing amulets for a range of customers could work from Christian prototypes or from memory, interpolating designs they had seen perhaps with their own individual knowledge of crucifixion. Not all customers would have been familiar with the restrained canonical descriptions of Jesus' death; and conceivably, some users of crucifixion images had not the qualms about seeing the tormented body of Jesus that certain of his followers no doubt had. For many individuals, increasingly troubled by the dangers posed by unseen forces in the Late Antique world, Jesus was merely another powerful personage who overcame a horrific death and whose name could be utilised for its efficacy in the defeat of

⁵⁶⁴ Published in Meyer & Smith (1994), pp. 277-278, nr 132 pp. 290-292. This reference was only recently brought to my attention by The Rev. A. Cawallader, St Barnabus Theological College, Adelaide.

evil spirits.⁵⁶⁵ Moreover, the unique nature of the iconography befits the often radical creativity of magical gems, unlike Christian gems whose designs are conservative by comparison.

It is possible to entertain the idea that the carver of this design had some knowledge of the historical facts regarding the process of crucifixion, although by what means, and for what reasons he reproduces them we can only speculate. In the placement of the legs the artisan intimates the presence of a bar or *sedile*, a feature which has some historical veracity in second century literary accounts by Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian.⁵⁶⁶ It was placed in the middle of the upright shaft to provide seating for the buttocks and thus support for the upper body. Yet by forcing the legs apart in an unnatural position and by preventing the corpse from slumping, the seat both increased the naked victim's pain and humility, and prolonged his death.⁵⁶⁷ The gem should be placed at a time after this feature was known and before it was customary to conceal Jesus' nudity. The brutal forcing apart of the bent legs may have some correlation with the description in a Rabbinic source of an unusual method of crucifixion or hanging whereby the knees were forced apart with the soles of the feet together.⁵⁶⁸ Whilst some early Byzantine objects show the thieves crucified realistically in the open position, with ankles joined to the stake by ties,⁵⁶⁹ this presentation is not used for Jesus, and in any case his feet remain apart on the Pereire jasper. Nevertheless, in light of the Rabbinic text, Yadin interpreted the skeletal remains of an adult male found in 1968 in a Roman period burial cave at Giv'at ha-Mivtar, Jerusalem, as indicating that the male was crucified in the open position, reading one of the inscriptions

⁵⁶⁵ Regarding the perception of demons in Late Antiquity and the role of Christianity in raising their profile: Brown (1989), pp. 53-56.

⁵⁶⁶ Légasse (1997), p. 91 n. 72 p 156, cites: Justin *Dialogue* 91.2; Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses* II, 24,2; Tertullian *Ad nationes* I, 12, 4 & *Adversus Marcionem* III, 18. 4.

⁵⁶⁷ Weber (1979), p. 6.

⁵⁶⁸ Yadin (1973), p. 19.

⁵⁶⁹ eg. Monza ampullae nrs. 6, 12-15; Grabar (1958), pls XII, XXII, XXIV, XXVI, XXVIII. See also medallions in Berlin, London and Trèves [plus a mould for medallions in Brooklyn], which preserve the early Byzantine figuration of the bust-cross flanked by two thieves, crucified in the open position: pictured in Balicka-Witakowska (1997), figs 18-20, the mould fig. 17.

found with the body as “Yehohanan son of the one hanged with his knees apart”.⁵⁷⁰

Derchain also mentions the magical Coptic papyrus, which was first published by Angelicus Kropp; for in the drawing of the Crucifixion on the papyrus leaf Jesus is portrayed in the open position with feet wide apart [*Pl. 13f*].⁵⁷¹ This image has received remarkably little attention, and like the Pereire gem, has been omitted from art historical discussions of the Crucifixion in the Late Antique period.⁵⁷² For our purposes the papyrus is highly interesting. Unlike the Pereire figuration, Jesus’ split legs are not bent at the knee but extend in a straight line away from the cross. Intriguingly, the legs of the thieves, despite being partially covered to just below the knee by their long loincloths, appear to hang in exactly the same position as those of the Pereire Jesus. This is indicated by the vertical angle and profile view of their lower legs, which are shown as though the knees are forced apart and the legs rotated in the hip sockets. In the absence of any evidence to suggest that Christians adopted the split-leg position in Crucifixion iconography, the depiction of Jesus on the papyrus, with his straight legs angled diagonally away from the body, and the depiction of the thieves, with their knees apparently apart, would seem to strengthen the possibility raised by the Pereire gem: that this position was favoured by magicians. So, whilst the Pereire figuration may be seen to retain an element of historical truth in the intimation of the presence of a seat below Jesus’ buttocks to force the legs into the open position, in view of the later figuration on the papyrus, the brutal leg position seems to have taken on a specifically magical significance.

Another iconographic feature of the Pereire figuration that appears to have some historical veracity but may also have had specifically magic connotations is the use of fetters to bind the wrists to the cross bar. These are carefully rendered by two clear cuts at each hand. In reality, Jesus was probably nailed to the cross. The chief evidence for this is the explicit mention in the Johannine gospel [20.25] of

⁵⁷⁰ Yadin (1973), p. 19. Haas, who first studied the skeletal remains, initially thought that the male was crucified in the open position, later concluding otherwise. Haas (1970), pp. 38-59.

⁵⁷¹ Delatte & Derchain (1964), p. 284 n. 5, citing Kropp, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte*. v. 3, Brussels (1930-1931) pl. 1.

the marks of nails in his hands.⁵⁷³ The nails are also mentioned in the Gospel of Peter.⁵⁷⁴ In addition, Légasse argues that the prominence of blood in New Testament literature must intimate that blood was shed on the cross and not in the process of scourging. The testimony of Josephus testifies to the use of nails and the shedding of blood during crucifixion.⁵⁷⁵ The nails used to affix Jesus own body to the cross attained a high profile in the fourth century with Constantine, who reputedly wore one in his diadem and another in the bridle of his horse.⁵⁷⁶ Thus, since the nails are absent from this pictorialisation, Derchain argues that the gem must come from a very early tradition, one that was ignorant of the Johannine gospel where the nails are mentioned and one that predates the rise in the notoriety of nails used in crucifixions as relics of magical power.⁵⁷⁷ In the Late Antique period there is no clear mandate for the use of nails in pictorialisations of the Crucifixion. On the Constanza gem discussed below, wrist ties are intimated, as on the Pereire gem, and the two surviving fifth century pictorialisations of the Crucifixion show the hands of Christ nailed to the crossbar. In the late sixth/early seventh century, artists often differentiated between Jesus and the two thieves by representing the latter tied to the cross.⁵⁷⁸ Both the nailing and binding with cords of the hands and feet were known methods of affixing the victim to the cross in Roman times.⁵⁷⁹ As early as the first century however, according to such authors as Pliny the Elder, nails and fetters used in the crucifixion of criminals possessed

⁵⁷² Kropp is the only reference noted by Delatte & Derchain (1964), p. 284 n. 5, and thirty years later by Meyer & Smith (1994), p. 279.

⁵⁷³ The Synoptics are more candid: eg., at Luke 24. 39-40 there is only the implication of nailing in the description of the risen Jesus showing his hands and feet to the disciples.

⁵⁷⁴ Hennecke (1963), v. 1, p. 185.

⁵⁷⁵ Légasse (1997), p. 90, with references p. 155 n. 68.

⁵⁷⁶ see Alföldi (1998), p. 23. Ambrose of Milan's sermon *De Obitu Theodosii* (47 ff.) recorded that on their discovery, Helena sent the nails to Constantine: Hunt (1984), p. 41.

⁵⁷⁷ Derchain in Delatte & Derchain (1964), pp. 284-285.

⁵⁷⁸ This means of differentiation was invariably used in conjunction with contrasting positionings of the arms. On Monza ampullae nos. 12 and 13, the arms of the thieves are tied behind their backs, their feet tied at the ankles thus forcing their legs apart. Grabar (1958), pls XXII & XXIV. Jesus is in the position found on the Santa Sabina panel, with the lower arms extending horizontally from flexed elbows, his legs depicted straight against the upright shaft of the cross with no evidence of nails or fetters.

⁵⁷⁹ Légasse (1997), pp. 90-91. Hengel (1977), p. 31 n. 25. In the skeletal remains of a man crucified in the Roman period, discovered in Jerusalem, a nail remained lodged in the heel-bones: Haas (1970), p. 49ff.

talismanic properties, being used as charms against demons.⁵⁸⁰ So we can only speculate as to whether the attribution of the wrist ties in this pictorial context has magical connotations in addition to a possibly coincidental historical verisimilitude. The [possible] presence of the word “fetters” in the inscription may strengthen either argument.

The height of Jesus’ cross on the gem may also be worth noting. Historically it is well known that notorious criminals or particularly contemptible victims were often crucified on taller crosses so that their bodies could be seen from afar.⁵⁸¹ The conclusion that Jesus’ own cross was made prominent in this way is drawn from Mark’s gospel with the story of the reed and sponge [Mk 15.36]. Légasse supposes that Jesus’ own cross was high, with his feet about a metre from the ground.⁵⁸² Whether historicity is the reason behind the height of the upright shaft on the gem or whether the gem-cutter merely misjudged the size of the stone when carving the figure is impossible to say. It is also worth mentioning that no support for the victim’s feet is rendered, as it appears to be on the cross of the Palatine graffito. According to Légasse, the *suppedaneum* or *hypopodion* was not known until after the first half of the third century, the date assigned to the Palatine graffito.⁵⁸³

In summary, in its shape, fabric, composition, and in the content of the inscription, the Pereire gem can be favourably compared with magical amulets produced in the eastern part of the empire between the second-fourth centuries. The figuration, in conjunction with the invocation of Jesus by name, can also be compared with the sixth/seventh century Coptic papyrus on which the power of the crucified Jesus is called upon. Although the opening invocation of Jesus on the gem is reminiscent of Christian prayer-language, it recalls in a magical way, as further illustrated on the papyrus, as opposed to a specifically Christian way the power of Jesus manifest in his defeat of death on the cross. Exhibiting features characteristic of

⁵⁸⁰ For the primary sources, Hengel (1977), p. 32 n. 26. A ring mentioned by Lucian (b. c. AD 120) *Philops* 17 was made of iron nails drawn from crosses and used as a charm: Bonner (1950), p. 6 n. 17.

⁵⁸¹ According to Weber (1979), p. 6, most crosses in the ancient world measured seven feet in height. Hengel (1977), pp. 40-41, n. 5 with references.

⁵⁸² Légasse (1997), p. 91 & p. 156-7 n. 76.

⁵⁸³ Légasse (1997), p. 91 & notes p. 156.

the syncretistic magical tradition and its material culture that emerged from Hellenistic Egypt and current in the Graeco-Roman world in the second and third centuries AD, the gem's survival rather controversially suggests that an early pictorialisation of the Crucifixion arose in a broader spiritual milieu than Christianity proper. The gem attests to the overt quest for spiritual transcendence at this period, a quest which demarcates similar amulets as mnemonic⁵⁸⁴ rather than Christian devotional devices. Hence Derchain's original speculation that the gem was manufactured by a magician who had learnt about Jesus from sources beyond Christianity proper, an opinion formed in part by the strikingly brutal realism of the representation in contrast to the symbolism adamantly favoured by early Christian artists, remains valid.⁵⁸⁵ The brutality, intimated in the presentation of certain historical realities, is therefore connected rather than incidental to its magical function. This fact, seen in the position of the legs, is borne out on the later magical papyrus. Furthermore, the iconography of the crucified figure, strictly frontal and naked, endorses the early production date and postulated an eastern *locus* of production otherwise suggested by the magical features of the gem. The direct implication of this dating is that the image carried by the gem is the earliest surviving visual representation of Jesus on the cross, as Derchain first posited.

B. The Nott and Constanza Gems [Cat. nrs 2 & 3]

The Nott gem is a transverse oval, probably of carnelian, first published by Garrucci in 1880 amongst the hundreds of Christian monuments illustrated in his comprehensive six-volume *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa*.⁵⁸⁶ It was acquired in Italy between 1817 and 1825 by the Englishman George Frederick Nott. Following his death in 1841, the gem was sold at auction at Sotheby's in 1842 and its whereabouts are presently unknown.⁵⁸⁷ Subsequent appraisal of the figuration of the Crucifixion borne by this gem has been limited to those details gleaned from Garrucci's original but somewhat stylised line drawing

⁵⁸⁴ Henig (1994), p. 219.

⁵⁸⁵ Derchain in Delatte & Derchain (1964), pp. 284-285, regarding his early dating of the stone.

⁵⁸⁶ Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6 (1880) pl. 479 nr 15; entry p. 124. Garrucci describes it as "corniola", which Prof. D. Ceccarelli-Morolli [Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome] believes should probably be translated as carnelian (personal communication).

⁵⁸⁷ The history of Nott's ownership of the gem is traced by Spier (1997), p. 43 n. 53.

[*Pl.10b*]. This shows the design in reverse, presumably being taken from the plaster impression of the gem given to him by an engraver named Odetti.⁵⁸⁸ Despite the impediment to study in the loss of the gem and reliance on the drawing, formative scholars in the field of early Christian art, including Kraus,⁵⁸⁹ Reil,⁵⁹⁰ Leclercq⁵⁹¹ and Dölger,⁵⁹² were aware of its immense value for the study of Crucifixion iconography. A photograph of a nineteenth century cast published by Spier in 1997 has allowed us to further apprehend this import, enabling a more intimate understanding of the original's appearance and an approximation of its size: 1.4 x 1.9 cms.⁵⁹³ The line drawing at *Plate 10c*, taken from the cast, shows what the design may have looked like when viewed on the stone.

As on the Pereire stone [*Pl.9a*], the vertical axis of this gem is dominated by the defiantly upright and naked body of the crucified Jesus, here flanked by the twelve Apostles. The Apostolic figures, arranged uniformly upon an exergual line into two groups of six, converge with diminution of emphasis on the central figure of Jesus, their legs parted as though shown in the act of walking towards him. The two figures at the head of each procession extend an arm to touch the *suppedaneum*, whilst at least two other figures (numbers three and four from the centre on the viewer's left) [*Pl.10c*] extend their right arms in gestures of acclamation. The schematic and crude rendering of their bodies on this diminutive scale does not seem allow for the depiction of clothing - or at least none is represented. A positive inscription, intended to be read on the face of the gem and not in impression, runs horizontally across the field: EHCXPECTOC, an early spelling of the Greek IHCOYC XPICTOC, the final two letters, OC, appearing in the exergue either side of a small lamb. The figure of Jesus is carved simplistically and with no signs of physical suffering. Whilst a nimbus encircles his head,

⁵⁸⁸ Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6, p. 124.

⁵⁸⁹ Kraus (1882-1886), v. 2, p. 241.

⁵⁹⁰ Reil (1904), p. 58. In n. 1 p. 58. Reil cites two late ninth century publications (from the 1890's), by De Waal and Forrer & Müller respectively, in which the gem is also noted.

⁵⁹¹ Leclercq (1907), v. 2, pp. 368-9 fig. 268; see also Leclercq's article "Croix et Crucifix" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3050 fig. 3358.

⁵⁹² Dölger (1910-1943), I, p. 322, n. 51 fig. 40.

⁵⁹³ Spier (1997), p. 39 fig. 12. As far as I can tell, Spier's publication of a photograph was unprecedented. It must be noted that with the present misplacement of the object, any conclusions drawn regarding the gem are restricted, being ultimately dependant on deductions drawn from Garrucci's written testimony, his original line drawing and the photographic reproduction of a ninth century cast.

neither hair nor facial characteristics are rendered. Although his body extends only from the midpoint of the composition to the upper field perimeter, the length of the base of the cross continues the unbending horizontal line of the figure down to the exergual line. Since the transverse bar or *patibulum* of the cross is not visible, it is this defiantly upright and open posture which conveys the sense that the body is mounted against a cross. The arms, to which some muscular shape is given, are rigidly outstretched at right angles to the body. Their length and the size of the hands, stretched open so that the palms face the viewer, are disproportionate to the size of Jesus' body and thus cleverly extend the visual dominance of the unbending figure into a horizontal plane. There, the inflexibility of the arms and their prolonged extension is underscored both by the horizontal line of letters inscribed directly below, and by the rhythmic procession of identical Apostolic figures either side of the cross.

The potential import of the Nott gem for the study of early Crucifixion iconography was substantially augmented when shortly after its publication by Garrucci, it was cited by Smith as a close parallel to a carnelian intaglio he had discovered in a private collection in London in 1895 [*Pl. 10d*].⁵⁹⁴ This second gem, also oval and of transverse orientation, repeats the pattern of a crucified Jesus standing amidst twelve diminutively sized Apostolic figures but with some iconographic alterations, particularly to the figure of Jesus. Allegedly found at Constanza (Kustendje) in Romania with a group of thirty or forty gems dated by Cecil Smith between the first and third centuries AD, the gem was subsequently purchased by Franks and gifted to the British Museum in 1895 where it was exhibited among the early Christian Antiquities [MLA 1895, 11-13,1]. It appeared in Dalton's catalogue of that collection in 1901⁵⁹⁵ before becoming the best known in the small corpus of Crucifixion gems discussed here.⁵⁹⁶

Measuring 1.13 x 1.35cms, the Constanza carnelian is the smallest gem in the group, being fractionally smaller in size and rounder in shape than its more

⁵⁹⁴ C. Smith (1896/7), pp. 202-206; discussion of Nott gem p. 203.

⁵⁹⁵ Dalton (1901), p. 7 nr 43, pl. I.

⁵⁹⁶ Its fame can be seen to arise from its very survival (unlike the Nott), its accessibility for study (being on display in the British Museum and widely reproduced in both photograph and drawing),

elongated cognate, the Nott. In this second figuration Jesus is not raised up high but simply stands against the cross. As the central point of convergence of the Apostolic procession Jesus is shown twice the size of the Apostles, taking up from head to foot and fingertips almost the entire height and breadth of the gem's design face. Further differentiated from the Nott design, Jesus' head and his feet are turned in profile to the left; the head is without nimbus and some facial features are discernible, specifically the jaw-line and nose. A distinctive concession to realism is made in the representation of his outstretched arms hanging below the arms of the *patibulum* as though attached to it by wrist-ties, the elbows and hands sagging in exact replication of Jesus' arms on the Pereire stone. In this instance however, no ties are actually rendered. Regarding the cross itself, the *patibulum* is illustrated and part of the upright shaft is visible between Jesus' legs. On a point of detail, Smith noted that the *patibulum* is not represented in a continuous line above Jesus' arms but by two separate cuts.⁵⁹⁷ These may have been added after the figure of Christ had been carved in the centre of the field. The cross is probably a tau, although a chip to the top of the stone means that we do not know if the artist intended the upright shaft to continue above the cross beam and Jesus' head.⁵⁹⁸ The presentation of the Apostles on the Constanza gem is largely consistent with the presentation on the Nott; however two differences are immediately discernible. Firstly, the lapidary has carved small diagonal lines across the bodies of the Constanza Apostles to give the impression that they are draped in what Smith identifies as a short *himation* or *pallium*, wound closely around the body.⁵⁹⁹ Secondly, no arms or gestures of acclaim are shown as they are on the Nott gem. This absence may result from the depiction of the drapery; however, given the rounder shape of the second gem, and the consequent compression of the Apostles into more densely packed lines, spatial constriction may also account for the absence of the arm gestures. Engraved above Jesus' head and following the upper field parameter is the prominent acronym identifying him

and its clearly Christian epigraphy and conventional iconography for the crucified figure, unlike that of the Pereire jasper.

⁵⁹⁷ C. Smith (1896/7), p. 202.

⁵⁹⁸ C. Smith (1896/7), p. 204; following examination of the gem, Smith concluded that the cross was probably a tau, p. 202. Horsley (1981), p. 140 remains uncertain.

⁵⁹⁹ C. Smith (1896/7), p. 202.

with a fish: ΙΧΘΥΣ, meaning “fish” in Greek but used by early Christians as an acrostic of the phrase “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour”.⁶⁰⁰

Traditionally the dates for the Nott gem have ranged from the third to the fourth century,⁶⁰¹ whilst those of the more widely published Constanza gem have spread across the first to the third,⁶⁰² fourth and fifth centuries.⁶⁰³ The Constanza gem has sometimes been viewed as the later of the two, assigned a date in the fifth century and localised to Syria on account of its Ichthys formula.⁶⁰⁴ In the ensuing discussion, the iconographic, epigraphic and physical characteristics of both gems will be seen to establish them as likely products of the late fourth/early fifth century. As such, the gems may present the earliest surviving depictions of the Crucifixion in Christian art, produced roughly a century after the magic Pereire stone [Pl.9].

1. Jesus and the Cross

Both gems present Jesus as the triumphant Christ, clothing the human form with divinity according to the more detailed formula set forth on the Maskell relief: with body *en face* and erect, the arms outstretched flat and the straight legs placed side by side against the cross. Critically, by having Jesus’ head in profile and his wrists hanging from the *patibulum*, the Constanza figuration seems to present an intermediary stage between that of the Pereire and the later Nott gems. On the latter, where the anticipated structure of the cross is completely absent and where Jesus faces the viewer, the figure’s posture unequivocally evokes a sense of crucifixion and yet dispenses with the possibly earlier pictorial penchant for showing the method of affixing him to the cross.

⁶⁰⁰ The major work on the anagram remains Dölger (1910-1943). The first literary reference to the acronym occurs in Tertullian’s *De baptismo* 1.3. For a summary of the previous scholarship on the acronym and comment see Stroumsa (1992), pp. 199-205.

⁶⁰¹ C. Smith (1896/7), p. 206, & Leclercq (1907), v. 2 pp. 368-9, no later than the third century; Thoby (1959), p. 19.

⁶⁰² C. Smith (1896/7), p. 206, no later than the third century; Brehant (1995), fig. 2, second/third century.

⁶⁰³ Spier (1997), p. 33, dates both gems no later than the fourth century; Finney (1999), “Cross” p. 304, fourth century. See also Finney (1994), p. 112 & p. 141 n. 51, where he ascribes this date to the six “earliest” crucifixion gems. Popescu (1976), p. 89-90, & Horsley (1981), nr 90 p. 140 fourth/fifth century. Milburn (1988), p. 281, AD 300-500.

⁶⁰⁴ Dölger (1928), v. 1, p. 326; Reil (1930), pp. 4-5; Maser (1976), pp. 270-271.

In its very elimination of the wrist ties and the basic framework of the cross, the actual form of the central figuration on the Nott gem is, although visually effective, quite unusual. As C. Smith originally noted, rather than standing against a cross the Nott-Jesus appears to be standing on an abacus or small platform, affixed either at right-angles to an vertical column or high up on the upright shaft of a cross.⁶⁰⁵ It was noted earlier in connection with the Pereire gem that Jesus is thought to have been crucified on a tall cross so that his crucified body could be made prominent. The height of the column on the Nott gem, which effectively elevates Jesus above the Apostles, is probably not a token to this belief. Rather, it is possibly a means of refining the expression of Jesus' celestial sovereignty, indicated by the presence of the Apostles. The height and subsequent display of the victor is augmented by the abacus, conceivably intended as a kind of *suppedaneum*. Such a support for the feet, although having no historic reality,⁶⁰⁶ first appears affixed to the upright shaft of the cross in the Palatine drawing [Pl.1a].⁶⁰⁷ Yet the lower structure of the Nott cross with its *quasi* foot support makes more sense when compared with certain early Byzantine examples which indicate that such unusual iconography received later development. The lower half of Jesus' cross extant on the fragment of a yellow bronze cross at Dumbarton Oaks shows either a flat platform-like *suppedaneum* affixed high up on the vertical post, or the base of Jesus' profile feet as on the Maskell relief [Pl.5a].⁶⁰⁸ The fragment, on which an Adoration, Baptism and part of a Crucifixion scene survive, is probably Palestinian, showing iconographic similarities with the ampullae from the Holy Land and thus dated by Ross to the sixth century. Bearing this iconographic connection in mind, it is interesting to find Jesus standing on a similarly flat platform in the unusual figuration of the Crucifixion on an ampulla in the Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart, where the only further suggestion of the presence of the cross is a *titulus* tangent to the top of the nimbus and the upright post extending above it.⁶⁰⁹ For the Nott gem however, the almost

⁶⁰⁵ C. Smith (1896/7), p. 205.

⁶⁰⁶ Weber (1979), p. 6, comments that in actuality, criminals' feet were not supported in this way but were tied or nailed to the upright shaft.

⁶⁰⁷ Légasse (1997), p. 91 & p. 156 n. 74.

⁶⁰⁸ Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington. Ross (1962), pp. 56-57, nr 65, pl. XL.

⁶⁰⁹ Inv. Nr 1980-205b. Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart (1985), p. 23, Abb. 2.

iconic presentation of Jesus remains conspicuous in the total absence of any suggestion of the shape of the cross apart from the post and its foot support.

Although it has been suggested that the omission of the lateral arms of the cross was a space saving device employed for this miniature format,⁶¹⁰ when juxtaposed with the cognate Stuttgart ampulla and a second counterpart in the Crucifixion roundel on the seventh century silver Perm plate [*Pl.13e*], it appears that it could be a deliberate design feature. In the latter representation, Jesus is shown standing with feet flat on a platform erected at right angles to the base of the cross, but with no other sign of the structure of the cross.⁶¹¹ The absence accentuates the voluntary nature of the sacrifice with the attitude itself becoming more like one of defiance in prayer than submission in death. Thus thematically as well as visually, the figure is strikingly reminiscent of the Early Christian *orant*.⁶¹² The depiction of Jesus' hands on the Nott gem further refines this twofold correlation with the *orant* figure. The Nott Jesus stretches his hands out flat to face the viewer as though in the strength of prayer Jesus is receptive to his fate whilst the hands of the Constanza Jesus, like those of the Pereire, drop limply at the wrists so that the palms face the ground in what now appears from the study of the two gems to be a characteristic of earlier figurations of the crucified. After the Nott gem, the broken-wrist type is emphatically replaced by the open-palm type. Following its appearance in the fifth century on the Maskell relief and Sabina panel, this latter type is shown in Byzantine art from the time of the Rabbula miniature onwards.

In addition to the subtle alteration of the positioning of the hands, with its wider thematic ramifications for later Crucifixion iconography in indicating the acquiescence of Jesus to his Father's will and to the pain of the nails, Jesus' nudity on both gems testifies to a production date at the juncture between the earlier Pereire gem and the later iconographic tradition represented by the fifth century figurations. Indeed, it was on account of Jesus' naked form that C. Smith

⁶¹⁰ C. Smith (1896/7), p. 204.

⁶¹¹ Kent & Painter (1977), p. 90, nr 153. In this scene of the Crucifixion, the two thieves as well as Christ are clothed in *colobia*. At the base of the cross (which rises out of the mound of Golgotha) kneel two figures. See also Ainalov (1961), pp. 257-259.

⁶¹² Moses was seen as the prophet who first declared the sign of the cross by standing in this fashion: Barclay Lloyd (1998), p. 97.

concluded that both were early in date.⁶¹³ According to Smith, the nudity indicated an early Christian comfort with the concept of “heroic” nudity, but also a connection with the New Testament Passion narratives with their implied reference to nudity in the parting of the garments.

In the case of the Constanza gem, where the smaller subsidiary figures are clothed, the conclusion must be drawn that Jesus’ nudity in that composition is intentional and not a casualty of engraving in a miniature context.⁶¹⁴ Whilst there is no such distinction of dress between Jesus and the Apostles on the Nott gem, the nudity makes the same impact, being an forceful statement of divinity rather than a crudely accidental and trivial detail. Although the Gospels do not state the fact of Jesus’ nudity, it was believed in the early period that he was crucified naked, the primary indication being the report that the soldiers cast lots for his garments while he was on the cross.⁶¹⁵ Thoby noted that whilst the Roman practice was to strip the victim, the linen tape placed around the loins and waist, the *subligaculum*, and worn under clothing may have been retained in some circumstances.⁶¹⁶ Only later, in the apocryphal fourth century *Acts of Pilate*, surviving in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and seen to be drawing on the Lukan Crucifixion narrative, is it specified (for the first time) in a Christian document that the soldiers stripped Jesus and re-clothed him in a linen cloth.⁶¹⁷ Yet I do not think that this evidence necessarily illustrates an emergent shyness towards Jesus’ nudity, since by the fourth century his very public nudity on the cross had approximated an heroic, if not profound theological, symbolism. Cyril of Jerusalem describes the process of the stripping as Christ “throwing off the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment and publicly upon the cross leading them in his triumphal procession”.⁶¹⁸ In so doing, Cyril adds to the Pauline understanding of baptism as a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ by deeming the nudity of the baptismal candidates as a symbolic imitation of Christ’s own

⁶¹³ C. Smith (1996/7), p. 204-205.

⁶¹⁴ Horsley (1981), p. 140, notes the deliberacy.

⁶¹⁵ On the stripping see Schiller (1972), p. 83.

⁶¹⁶ Thoby (1959), p. 6; cited by Tinsley (1972), pp. 32-33.

⁶¹⁷ Trans. Hennecke (1963), v. I, p. 459. Légasse (1997), p. 7, citing G.W.H. Lampe’s conclusions about the Acts.

⁶¹⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogae* 2.2. Trans. McCauley & Stephenson (1970), p. 161.

nudity on the cross; for in his nakedness, the likeness of humanity and sinfulness was removed. Aside from a possible historical precedent in the *subligaculum*, this presents us with a striking reversal of the commonly held assumption that in early Christian art Jesus was not shown naked on the cross. Both gems indicate that the concealment of Jesus' genitalia with the narrow loincloth in fifth century Christian art was a subsequent development.

Given Cyril's contemporary theological understanding of nudity on the cross, it is entirely plausible that the nudity of the crucified Jesus on both gems is utilised as a means of making the human form divine; as a divine form, there is no need to enumerate the physical features of the naked human body as there might be in the more realistic portrayal of the magical Pereire Jesus, where victory over realism is utilised to reinforce the spiritual prowess of the victim. In the case of the Constanza carnelian, this symbolism for the Jesus figure transfixed to the cross is pronounced in the contrasting figures of the diminutively sized and clearly clothed Apostles. In the case of the Nott, it is spelt out in the assimilation of the triumphant Jesus to the cross itself, the nimbus and the positioning of his arms and hands, which substantially strengthens the voluntary and triumphal nature of the pose. The two fifth century western images, the Maskell and Sabina reliefs, can now be seen to present a more mature phase of this idea, where the narrative receives greater attention in both figurations but where the figure of Jesus remains symbolically victorious.

In the reflected light of one contemporary theological understanding of his death, Jesus' nudity on the gems can be seen as an intentional vehicle for the expression of his divinity. Nevertheless, away from theology we need to ask: does the naked form accord with other practices of nudity in Christian art in the fourth century? As Wessel demonstrated, the efforts to clothe Jesus at this date correlate to the predicament of Daniel in early Christian art, and it is worth revisiting this analogy.⁶¹⁹ Daniel appeared naked in Christian art as late as the mid-fourth century as evinced on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus AD 359 and the Daniel

⁶¹⁹ Wessel (1967), pp. 333-345, especially pp. 337-339. The following is a summation of Wessel's conclusions.

pendant pictured on *Plate 1*.⁶²⁰ Yet in the course of the fifth century the depiction of Daniel naked seems to have become increasingly offensive, with him being clothed to varying degrees in various provinces until by the sixth century there are no semi-naked Daniels. This situation directly corresponds to the draping of the crucified Jesus, which also begins in the fifth century on the Maskell and Sabina reliefs with the introduction of the loincloth. In both of those western figurations, the narrowness of the loincloth does not deter the presentation of Christ's heroic nudity but it does allow the coverage of the genitalia. Whatever the origin of the motif, introduced out of an acquaintance with the apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* or a knowledge of the *subligaculum*, or in an attempt to conceal Jesus' genitalia, the increasing offence taken at Jesus' nudity provided substantial momentum not simply for its use but for the ensuing adoption of the *colobium*, the full-length, sleeveless over-tunic worn by men in Late Antiquity, in Crucifixion iconography. The inauguration of this type appears to occur in the Christian East in the sixth century, in the Rabbula Gospels [*Pl.7a*].⁶²¹

With regard to Daniel, Wessel concluded that the Old Testament figure's clothing resulted from a change in religious attitude that saw nudity and scant clothing deemed offensive and inappropriate for holy subjects. This presents a fundamental shift from Cyril of Jerusalem's professions in the fourth century about the nudity of Christ on the cross: this state no longer corresponded to the holiness of the subject depicted, with the depiction of Christ in a loincloth appearing improper and unworthy.⁶²² Thus Reil's original conclusion that the naked Christ-type proved offensive through the diffusion of the clothed eastern type remains attractive.⁶²³ On this hypothesis, discussed in Chapter II, the Bishop of Narbonne is likely to have found the earlier existing Crucifixion image in his Cathedral offensive *after* he could compare it with the eastern type.

⁶²⁰ This feature no longer survives but is preserved in a drawing of the sarcophagus from 1773: Wessel (1967), p. 337.

⁶²¹ Jerphanion believed the Rabbula illumination to be the prototype of the *colobium*-clad crucified Jesus, a notion rejected by Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 34, who nonetheless argued for an eastern, fifth/sixth century origin of the type.

⁶²² Wessel (1967), p. 340.

⁶²³ Reil (1904), p. 112.

The shift in the perception of nudity in Late Antiquity which procured the clothed Daniel and the simultaneous growth in revulsion towards the nudity of Jesus on the cross can be seen to have emerged simultaneously with extensive social changes in the conception of nudity. These transpired largely as a result of Christian teachings about the body and a growing awareness in the fourth century for the need to “manage” sexuality. Both John Chrysostom in the East and Jerome in the West testify to the new attitude to nudity, which is linked to the universal vulnerability now attached to sexual shame. For where once the questions of nudity and sexual shame were associated with class and civic status, all men and women, regardless of their social rank, were now taught that they were alike, fabricated of the same elements and subject to the same suffering and vulnerabilities of the body. That is *all* bodies, whether they be poor or rich, were at risk of experiencing sexual desire; hence the need to conceal the body from public view. The fundamentals of this change in attitude are best summed up by Jerome: “He whom we look down upon... the very sight of whom causes us to vomit, is the same as we are...”.⁶²⁴

The seismic change, typified by Jerome’s remark, can therefore be seen to have impacted at a practical level on later Roman codes of upper-class dress. Where once the features of the body were displayed as marks of class and civic status, now bodies were clothed to hide the vulnerability and fragility of humanity.⁶²⁵ Peter Brown describes this change in the following way: “Emperors no longer showed their unchallenged power by posing in the nude, thereby recapturing the heroic ease and readiness associated with the deathless gods. What now lay behind the rustling, gold-embroidered silks and the splendour of the Imperial robes was mortal clay, fragile stuff, gnawed by the same strings of desire... as the flesh that shivered beneath a beggar’s rags.”⁶²⁶ This is especially important, for it means that, as Cecil Smith originally noted, the Constanza gem must have been produced before the concept of heroic nudity was abandoned.⁶²⁷ The changing perception of nudity, outlined by Brown, must also cause us to rethink our assumptions

⁶²⁴ Brown (1988), p. 317, citing Jerome *Letter* 77.6.

⁶²⁵ Brown (1988), pp. 315-317, & 437-438.

⁶²⁶ Brown (1988), p. 438.

⁶²⁷ C. Smith (1896/97), pp. 204-205.

regarding the subsequent desire to robe Jesus first in the loincloth and ultimately in the full-length *colobium*.

First portrayed in the sixth century Rabbula miniature as purple, with vertical gold stripes or *clavi* running downwards from the shoulders,⁶²⁸ this garment was widely reproduced in the late sixth and seventh centuries. It is traditionally seen to indicate Jesus' sovereignty,⁶²⁹ an interpretation that draws largely on Biblical literature. Jesus' enforced robing in "gorgeous apparel" for the prime purpose of mockery is described in the Gospel Passion narratives (Lk. 23.11; and Mt. 27.28; Mk 15.17; Jn 19.2). Yet as with other instances of Jesus' humiliation in these narratives, such as his crowning with thorns, discussed in Chapter II, the mock robing was quickly reinterpreted in Christian literature as a sign of Jesus' kingship. As Cyril of Jerusalem explained,⁶³⁰ the act was in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (63.1-2): "Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? Why is thy apparel red, and thy garments like his that treads in the wine press?". Although we can assume from New Testament accounts that this robe was removed from Jesus prior to the Crucifixion, it is symbolically reinstated in the sixth century iconography. As a pictorial device, the purple and gold robe, with its regal overtones, concealed the human body and seemingly emphasised the divinity of Jesus at a time when debate was still raging over which of Christ's natures, divine or human, died on the cross.

Despite this biblical background, if we accept that nudity was initially utilised by Christians in their iconography as a means of denoting the divinity of a biblical character, so adopting the Roman canon of nudity signifying immortality or superior status, the emphasis on the *colobium* as a symbol of regal status seems misplaced. Given the shift in the perception of nudity in Late Antiquity, manifest in the ritual robing of the Emperor outlined above, it becomes possible to see the

⁶²⁸ The stripes constituted the classic decoration for tunics in Late Antiquity. See Annemarie Stauffer in Bowersock et. al. (1999), p. 381.

⁶²⁹ Schiller (1972), p. 91.

⁶³⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem *Sermon on the Paralytic* 12: Trans. McCauley & Stephenson (1970), p. 217.

use of the *colobium*, whilst having an important correlation with Biblical tradition, as a means of hiding Jesus' mortality on the cross. This interpretation directly corresponds to Kathleen Corrigan's suggestion that the ensuing desire to remove the *colobium*, manifest around the seventh/eighth century,⁶³¹ relates to the association of that garment in some Christian circles at that time with Jesus' mortality. Corrigan explains this in light of an inscription found on a ninth century Palestinian icon from St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai: the inscription on the icon describes Jesus as shedding the *colobium*, "the garment of death", and being covered instead with what is termed the spiritually higher "robe of incorruption", the loincloth.⁶³² This brings us full circle: the garment first adopted to conceal Jesus' mortality is ultimately associated, in some groups at least, with that mortality.

Jesus' nakedness on both gems can thus be seen to conform to wider practice in fourth century Christian art for the depiction of nudity, as well as to theological thought and social practice. Moreover, it may provide a *terminus ante quem* for the gems' production, since in the fifth and particularly during the sixth and seventh centuries Jesus is not shown naked on the cross. Whilst the loincloth appears in the 420's (on the Maskell relief), according to surviving evidence it seems that between the sixth and eighth centuries the full-length *colobium* is consistently worn by Jesus. It is this consistency which prompts the belief that nudity is apparently totally unacceptable to Christian sensibilities for the depiction of holy figures during that time. Even with the appearance of the longer loincloth towards the end of the seventh/early eighth century, there was no visual intimation of the crucified Jesus' nudity beneath that cloth until around the twelfth century, at Hosias Loukas, as will be discussed in the following part of this chapter.

Further to Jesus' naked and triumphant form are the iconographic and stylistic elements provided in the presentation of the Apostles and the inclusion of the lamb in the Nott design, which suggest that both gems are dependant on a

⁶³¹ according to the date assigned to Mount Sinai icon B.32 [where a *colobium* is painted over a loincloth] by Weitzmann (1976), p. 57.

⁶³² As described in the epigram on Icon B.51 at Mount Sinai. Weitzmann (1976), cat. nr B.51. The terms, and their relation to the adoption of the loincloth in Byzantine iconography, are explored by Corrigan (1995), *passim*.

fourth/early fifth century prototype. Although absent from the Good Friday story, the canonical Gospels recording that they fled after Jesus' arrest,⁶³³ the presence of the Apostles at the cross is immediately recognisable as a common motif in fourth century Christian art. More specifically, the Apostolic processions conform to the presentation of the twelve in fourth century sarcophagal schemes where they assemble to venerate the cross. This conformity is seen not simply in the compositional format adopted, but also in the gestures of acclaim made by the Apostles on the Nott and the *pallia* they are shown to wear on the Constanza gem. The inclusion of the lamb on the Nott gem directly beneath the crucified figure at the centre of the exergue, shown walking in profile to the right (left on the cast) on its own ground line, lends additional iconographic support to the belief that the gem is a product of the early Christian period. The lamb's presence and parenthetic placement ostensibly reinforces the notion of voluntary sacrifice and divine victory embodied in the symbolically inflexible stance of Jesus. Its association with the composition above also makes it certain that an *agnus dei* is intended. The lamb is one of the few Christian symbols for which we have definite authority from the Scriptures (Jn 1:29, 10:11, 14; Rev. 5:12), and its appearance here also harks back to the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7: "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter". Denoting the saviour's role as sacrificial victim and the salvific efficacy of his death, the lamb therefore refines the significance of the Crucifixion story presented above and in so doing, follows what Grabar called the method of duplicating imagery, juxtaposing a realistic image of Christ with an allegorical one for the purposes of emphasising a particular nuance in the main image.⁶³⁴ In addition, the lamb will be recognised as a common iconographic additive to scenes of Jesus amidst the Apostles in fourth and fifth century decorative programmes, in funerary art as well as basilical decoration.

2. The Inscriptions

Finally, the content and execution of the Greek inscriptions directly onto the gem, rather than in reverse, collectively indicate that both gems are Late Antique in date and probably eastern in provenance. The Nott letters, which extend horizontally

⁶³³ Mat. 26:56; Mk 14:50; Peter follows alone at a distance in Lk 22:54 and with another disciple in Jn 18:15.

⁶³⁴ Grabar (1969), pp. 136-137.

across the field beneath Christ's arms, are intended to spell the two Greek words IHCOC XPICTOC, "Jesus Christ", with the words run together and misspelt as was common in the early period.⁶³⁵

Nott spelling: EHCO XPICTOC
Should read: IHCOYC XPECTOC

Early Christian authors complained of misspellings, which possibly resulted from the assumption made by such Roman authors as Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius that "Christos" was a proper name, confused with and therefore mispronounced as the common name for a slave, "Chrestos" meaning "useful one".⁶³⁶ The Greek *Christos*, meaning "anointed one" was a translation of the Hebrew "Messiah", the long expected deliverer of Israel. *Christos* is thus a title of Jesus and not part of his name. However, the early Christian confession of *Christos Iesous*, "Jesus is Messiah", saw it emerge as a proper name.⁶³⁷ Although it is unclear as to whether Jesus himself claimed to be the Messiah, his first followers seem to have regarded him as such. Paul, writing to his gentile converts within 20 years of the Crucifixion, uses the title without explanation, indicating to Brandon that the title used in connection with Jesus was familiar and thoroughly established at a very early date.⁶³⁸ The name in this form appeared frequently on Christian gems in Late Antiquity: sometimes the words were split, with one placed on the obverse and the second on the reverse face of a gem,⁶³⁹ or were used independently of each other.⁶⁴⁰ The use of the term in conjunction with the image of Jesus crucified reminds us of the difficulty encountered by the original disciples in explaining the Crucifixion to believers, since the death of a Messiah was scandalous and

⁶³⁵ Garrucci notes the mis-spelling, (1873-1881), v. 6, p. 124. This title appears on other early Christian gems in various spellings: eg. XICPTOC, see Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 6.1, col. 840, nr 176, fig. 5058.

⁶³⁶ Shepherd in Weitzmann (ed.) (1980), p. 102 & p. 111 n. 11, eg. Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4; Tacitus *Annals* 15.44.3; and Tertullian *Apologia* 3.5. See Hengel (1995), pp. 384-385.

⁶³⁷ Hengel (1995), pp. 384-5.

⁶³⁸ Brandon (1965), p. 153 n. 5. He refers to Mk 8.27-30 and synoptic parallels.

⁶³⁹ for example, Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, col. 840 nr 176, figs 5058/5059; IHCOVC inscribed on the obverse with an image of the Good Shepherd, two sheep, and an anchor with two fish; on the reverse, XICPTOC with Horus seated on a lotus and two stars.

⁶⁴⁰ For instance on a sardonyx in the British Museum, showing an anchor, fish and possibly two doves (although due to a chip the presence of a second is presumed) the name Jesus appears twice, IHCOYC & IHCOY(ζ): Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, col. 831 nr 126, fig. 5011; see also col. 847 nr 216, fig. 5093 for a gem on which *Christos*, spelt XPICTOY, accompanys a fish and profile bust.

incomprehensible.⁶⁴¹ Here the image is happily combined with the Messianic title, and with the assembly of the Apostles. As an aside, it is interesting to note that when this composition of the crucified Jesus being adored by rows of people appears again, in the eighth century fresco of the Adoration of the Cross at S. Maria Antiqua, a Greek inscription containing Messianic prophecies from the Old Testament is placed between the groups of adoring people and angels.⁶⁴² The Constanza IXΘΥΣ acronym, although not Messianic, also formed a common inscription on early Christian gems⁶⁴³ and according to Dölger, appeared around the end of the second century.⁶⁴⁴ Again the Greek inscription on the Constanza gem is positive, indicating that the lapidary intended the acronym, and thus the design, to be read and viewed on the stone and not in impression as was the case with seal stones.⁶⁴⁵ Both gems are then probably modelled on the format of seal-devices but worn in ring settings, conceivably for decorative and prophylactic purposes.

3. Veneration Iconography

As far as the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion is concerned, in their presentation of the crucified as the axis of two Apostolic processions the gems have no compositional parallels in the surviving minor or monumental arts of the Late Antique or early Byzantine periods. The utilisation of the format for the veneration of the explicitly crucified body does not occur again until the early eighth century: in Rome, on the triumphal arch over the main apse in S. Maria Antiqua, dating to the pontificate of John VII (705-7). There, the crucified is envisioned as the subject of worship from a dense assembly of angels and figures, and the composition found at the centre of a monumental fresco depicting not Jesus' death, but as mentioned above, the *Adoration of the Cross*.⁶⁴⁶ In the case of

⁶⁴¹ This difficulty is outlined by Brandon (1965), pp. 153-159.

⁶⁴² Nordhagen (1967), p. 388, n. 4.

⁶⁴³ Horsley (1981), p. 140, in discussing the gem cites a late third/early fourth century onyx where the fish acrostic is engraved with Christian symbols.

⁶⁴⁴ For the inscription on gems see Dölger (1928), v. I pp. 262-337, [with discussion of this gem pp. 322-326]. For examples of the sphragistic use of the acrostic see Leclercq "Gemmes" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 6.1, passim.

⁶⁴⁵ This is incorrectly recorded by the author elsewhere as a negative inscription Harley (1999), p. 248.

⁶⁴⁶ Nordhagen (1967). See also *The Frescoes of John VII [AD 705-707] in Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome*, Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia, 3 (Rome, 1968), cited by Grigg (1974), pp. 42-43, n. 20.

the fresco, Nordhagen has shown that it follows well-known iconographical patterns developed prior to that time and popular in Rome for the representation of the Adoration of the Lamb, with the central lamb replaced in the apse by the supreme sacrificial victim, Jesus.⁶⁴⁷ This apocalyptic theme of rows of lambs adoring a nimbed lamb on a rock appears below the main composition over the S. Maria Antiqua arch to underscore and refine it.⁶⁴⁸ The lamb on the Nott gem should be seen to function in the same way, where the iconography overhead also appertains to an adorative rather than historical, narrative-based compositional tradition. Yet the presentation of the twelve can also be seen to have an observably close lineage with the iconographic format developed in Late Antique art for the depiction of the Veneration of the Cross.

The earliest visual manifestation of the format for the Apostolic veneration of the cross, which itself grew out of the theme of Jesus amongst the Apostles,⁶⁴⁹ occurs on the sculpted reliefs of the small group of fourth century Roman sarcophagi known as star-and-wreath in which the entire front of the sarcophagus is devoted to the single composition: the twelve Apostles, shown wearing *pallia* as on the Constanza gem, processing slowly and simultaneously towards the central cross-trophy, the *crux invicta*, which they venerate and with which Jesus is associated and identified. The motif comprises the *chi-rho* enclosed in a victory crown and surmounting the triumphal cross. The acclaim of the cross is accompanied on all the sarcophagi by two standing or seated soldiers, presented quite realistically at the foot of the cross often holding or sometimes leaning on their shields. Stars appear between the heads of each Apostle, and each Apostle is crowned with a wreath representing the Crown of Life [Revelation 2.10]. Hence the name of this group of sarcophagi and the interpretation of the friezes as celestial scenes of

⁶⁴⁷ Nordhagen (1967), p. 390.

⁶⁴⁸ Kartsonis (1994a), pp. 169-172, fig. 15.

⁶⁴⁹ The theme, modelled on Imperial art and such pagan prototypes as the philosophers intellectualising over matters [Matthews (1993), pp. 109-114], emerged in the third century before being popularised in Christian art in the fourth. The presentation of Jesus, standing or enthroned, presiding over the assembly of his Apostles evolved into a variety of themes, all of which found expression on sarcophagal reliefs: Jesus as teacher, judge, *thaumaturge*, heavenly *basileus*, lawgiver. The formulae have been seen to draw on visual language initially developed for the expression of imperial ideology but perfectly suited to the Church's needs: Grabar (1969), p. 42ff; Shepherd (1980), p. 110; Brenk (1980), pp. 39-52; Janes (1998), pp. 118-134. See also Matthews (1993), pp. 12-21, although his revisionism of the imperial derivation theory is not convincing.

adoration.⁶⁵⁰ Seven examples are presently known,⁶⁵¹ the finest and earliest of which are those in Arles⁶⁵² and Palermo [*Pl.2a*].⁶⁵³ A degeneration of the style can be seen on a later example at Manosque, Notre Dame, whereon the stars still appear but the wreaths are omitted.⁶⁵⁴ Intriguingly, either side of the wreathed *chirho* the Manosque sarcophagus introduces the cosmic symbols of the sun and moon, which as we know, became essential motifs in Crucifixion iconography from the early Byzantine period, often flanking the head of Jesus in symbolic and historic figurations of the Crucifixion.⁶⁵⁵ The star-and-wreath group, seen to have had some influence on fourth century city-gate⁶⁵⁶ and columnar types,⁶⁵⁷ is attributed by Lawrence to a Gallic workshop that exported its products to Rome. Nevertheless, it exhibits Asiatic characteristics, in the enumeration of a single scene across the front of the sarcophagus, the rhythmical effect of the procession, and other more specific stylistic features, such as the Syrian form of the stars.⁶⁵⁸

The intimate relationship between the gems and star-and-wreath sarcophagi was first observed by Bréhier and later noted by Reil.⁶⁵⁹ Beyond the general replication of the composition of veneration on both gems, the Nott design reproduces the same gestures of acclamation by the Apostles shown converging on the central cross-trophy on the sarcophagi, and seen on other monuments of triumphal art.

⁶⁵⁰ Lawrence (1932), p. 112. Schiller (1972), p. 7. Kühnel (1987), p. 69.

⁶⁵¹ Lawrence (1932), pp. 112-116, nrs. 90-95, p. 173, lists six examples of the class of sarcophagi, plus a seventh n. 19a p. 105. For the latter, from the cemetery of San Sebastiano, see Deichmann (1967), nr 175.

⁶⁵² Lawrence (1932), p. 173, nr 90, fig. 9; described by her as the “fullest and best example of the type”. See also Gerke (1940), Abb. 22.

⁶⁵³ Dresken-Weiland (1998), nr 143, pp. 49-50 with extensive bibliography, & taf. 51. 1-4; Lawrence’s nr 92, (1932), p. 173.

⁶⁵⁴ Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 5, p. 76, tav. 351, nrs. 1-3; Le Blant (1886), p. 142 nr 204, pl. 50 nr 1; Lawrence’s nr 94, (1932), p. 173.

⁶⁵⁵ See further in Part 2. A.3

⁶⁵⁶ eg. a sarcophagus in Rome: Lawrence (1932), nr 103 & see p. 144, but see now Deichmann (1967), nr 65.

⁶⁵⁷ eg. Deichmann (1967), nr 208.

⁶⁵⁸ Lawrence (1932), pp. 112-115.

⁶⁵⁹ Bréhier (1918), p. 85. Reil (1930), pp. 4-5, specifically cited the Manosque sarcophagus. Reil’s observation of a relationship between the sarcophagi and the gems would seem to be independent of Bréhier’s. This is not the only iconographic correlation heretofore noted between sarcophagi showing the acclaim of the central labarum and engraved gems: Lawrence (1932) compares the fragment of a sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican, showing three birds surmounting the labarum [her sarcophagus nr 75- see Veganzones (1990), fig. 5] with engraved gems published by Garrucci. Interestingly, she also posits a stylistic connection between this sarcophagus and the star-and-wreath sarcophagus in Rome [her nr 91, fig. 16], both probably of the later fourth century.

Moreover, the Apostles at the head of each procession on the Nott reach out with their right arms to touch the *suppedaneum*. This gesture matches that shown on the Palermo sarcophagus for the same two Apostles, who reach out in that instance to touch the wreath with their right hands [*Pl.2a*]. It would seem that in order to express the understanding of the Crucifixion as a triumph over death, the acclaim iconography has been adopted with one simple but critical change: the aniconic representation of Jesus has been replaced with a figural one. In the Nott design, Jesus invokes the shape of the victorious cross with his body; in the Constanza, he is shown standing triumphantly against the cross. Thus facilitating a figurative representation of Jesus crucified at a time when such images were seemingly shunned, and when artists seem to have had no visual precedents or models to work from (as they had for the representation of other Passion episodes, such as the Entry into Jerusalem), the replacement of the cross-trophy with Jesus' crucified body effects an unexpected and yet entirely logical modification of the acclaim iconography utilised on sarcophagi. Importantly, the substitution here posited correlates with what was happening elsewhere in Christian art at this time.

During the fourth and fifth centuries, in funerary art such as the acclaim iconography of the star-and-wreath sarcophagi, basilical decorative programmes and the minor arts, the interchangeability of Jesus and the cross was common place, the cross acting as a stand in for the figure of Jesus without changing the general meaning of the scene.⁶⁶⁰ Hence on the unusual fifth century fragmentary stone relief in Washington, the cross placed outside the open door of the empty tomb is interpreted as a dual reference to the cross of the Crucifixion and the resurrected Jesus himself.⁶⁶¹ Since Jesus came to be understood not as the victim but the victor, living in regal triumph in heaven, the triumphal cross continued to replace him in the fifth century: placed in an archway on small daily⁶⁶² or

According to Lawrence the gems are: Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6, pl. 477: 11, 35; I have been unable to check them.

⁶⁶⁰ as noted by Kühnel (1987), p. 69, who refers to the group as “acclaim” sarcophagi. For the group, Gerke (1940), pp. 101ff. Campenhausen (1929), pp. 39-85.

⁶⁶¹ Washington, Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Acc. no. 38.56. 67 x 57cms). Underwood (1950), p. 91, figs 39 & 40. Kartsonis (1986), pp. 25-26 & 32..

⁶⁶² A bronze weight: Paris, Cabinet des Médailles. Bibliothèque nationale (1992), nr 73, fifth/sixth century.

liturgical objects,⁶⁶³ or enthroned as the object of angelic or Apostolic veneration in monumental decorative schemes, it was a potent expression of the theme of Christ's eternal victory. In the cupola of the Arian Baptistery, Ravenna c. 500, a depiction of Jesus' baptism is encircled by an Apostolic procession which, with wreaths in hand, converges upon the bejewelled and enthroned cross. Just as the cross-trophy on some fourth century sarcophagal reliefs was draped in a purple banner,⁶⁶⁴ imitating that suspended from the transverse bar of Constantine's victory *labarum* and inscribed with the words "by this conquer", so too is this cross, as a replacement for the person of Jesus, draped in purple.⁶⁶⁵

If the crucified figure of Jesus, as it appears on both gems, can be seen to replace the cross-trophy of the acclaim sarcophagi, we need to examine more closely the meaning of this motif in Christian art. As a christological emblem, adopted from Imperial art and reinterpreted under the guise of the Church,⁶⁶⁶ the *chi-rho* monogram enclosed in a victory crown and surmounting a triumphal cross assumed connotations of a symbolic trophy of victory in the early Church. It was clearly understood as an aniconic representation of Jesus as the conqueror of death and according to Villette, was an allusion to the victorious person of Christ.⁶⁶⁷ With the symbolic cross a reference to the Crucifixion, the wreath served to enunciate not just the victory accomplished in the Resurrection but the eternal victory secured for mankind. Regarded in theological terms as an eschatological symbol, denoting the "eternal blessedness of the winner", the wreath is attained by

⁶⁶³ The Dumbarton Oaks Glass Chalice: Washington Acc. nr 37.21, early sixth century.

⁶⁶⁴ eg: fragment of an acclaim sarcophagus, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican; fourth century. Campenhausen (1929), p. 15, abb. 4. Veganzones (1990), pp. 574-575, fig. 5. The drapery is reconstructed by Wilpert on a sarcophagus in Arles [Veganzones, fig. 6] and survives on an acclaim sarcophagus in Rome: Deichmann (1967), nr 65. Similarly, the now destroyed apse mosaic at Fundi had an enthroned and possibly draped cross as its focal point: Goldschmidt (1940), pp. 98 & 100-101. The reconstructions appear in Engemann (1974), regarding the drapery pp. 24-25 & abb. 5.

⁶⁶⁵ Kitzinger (1977), fig. 104. Colour detail of the throne: Janes (1998), frontispiece. On the Constantinian *labarum* and Eusebius, see Storch (1970), pp. 112-114.

⁶⁶⁶ Grabar (1969), pp. 38-39 & 124-125; Brenk (1980), p. 43; Veganzones (1990), pp. 572-575, fig. 4. According to Brenk the laureate cross on sarcophagi of the late Constantinian period is the first scene that reflects the early inter-relationship between imperial art and the iconography of the Church. See also Storch (1970), pp. 105-118. Following Lawrence [(1932), p. 110ff] Soper (1938), p. 188, located the origin of the motif on Asiatic columnar sarcophagi.

⁶⁶⁷ Villette (1957), p. 43f.

Jesus in his defeat of death and evil.⁶⁶⁸ How far this emblem encapsulated the victorious person of Christ is in some ways governed by the context in which it is placed. Hence Schiller argues that when the cross-trophy appears as the central and climacteric motif on Passion sarcophagi [*Pl.2b*],⁶⁶⁹ which it did until around the mid-fourth century, the soldiers are reminders of the tomb and thereby indicators that the motif is to be interpreted as a symbol of the Resurrection; on the acclaim sarcophagi however, the guard becomes part of the concept of the Imperial Christ.⁶⁷⁰ If the figure of Jesus on the gems is to be seen as a substitution for this emblem, without substantially altering the meaning of the iconography, it thus follows that the predominating theme in the miniature context is that of Christ's imperial victory rather than his historic defeat of the cross. This is conveyed in the utilisation of the symbolic form of the body, either in size on the Constanza gem or stance and elevation in the case of the Nott.

A deeper understanding of the emblem as it appears on the acclaim sarcophagi may be achieved in an examination of a rare iconographic variant of the motif which saw the soldiers at the foot of the cross substituted for an abbreviated depiction of Mary's approach to the tomb. Kartsonis has suggested that the cross-trophy motif *per se* functions as a replacement for the open sepulchre, the guardians of the tomb now either side of the cross.⁶⁷¹ This theory seems to be borne out on such early Christian artefacts as the Maskell casket reliefs where the two soldiers sleeping either side of the tomb [*Pl.4b*] exactly replicate the position and posture of their counterparts on the sarcophagal reliefs seated with their shields beside the cross-trophy [*Pl.2b*]. However, it cannot be sustained in such instances where the soldiers are replaced below the arms of the cross by a post-Resurrection tomb-scene, for the tomb would thereby be duplicated. The finest example of this rare substitution of the soldiers for a post-Resurrection scene occurred on a Roman seven-arch sarcophagus from the Palazzo del Duca di Ceri

⁶⁶⁸ Gaston (1969), pp. 169-171. On the victory crown in Late Antiquity see also Janes (1998), pp. 126-8.

⁶⁶⁹ The standard works on Passion sarcophagi remain Campenhausen (1929); Gerke (1949); Lawrence (1932); Soper (1937); Deichmann (1967). More recently, egs. in Dresken-Weiland (1998). See also Veganzones (1990).

⁶⁷⁰ Schiller (1972), p. 5 & pp. 7-8.

⁶⁷¹ Kartsonis (1986), p. 25. Le Blant interpreted the central motif in the Manosque sarcophagus, replete with guards and cosmic signs, as a symbol of the resurrection (1886), p. 142.

in Borgo Vecchio, previously in the Vatican but now lost [*Pl.3c*]. According to Lawrence, this sarcophagus was probably a product either of the city-gate or star-and-wreath ateliers.⁶⁷² It showed the twelve with their right hands raised towards the cross in acclamation, the hands of the two nearest the cross actually overlapping the wreath that encircles the central *chi-rho*, an act replicated on the Nott gem. Beneath the arms of the cross-trophy, the soldiers are replaced by a post-Resurrection scene described in Matthew (Mt. 28:1-10): leaving the tomb, the women are met by Jesus and subsequently take his feet and worship him.⁶⁷³ There may be an additional iconographic correlative on a fragment of the frontal frieze of an acclaim sarcophagus in Aix-en-Provence.⁶⁷⁴ On the continuous friezes of two other sarcophagi where the Crucifixion is omitted, that of S. Celso in Milan and the Servannes sarcophagus in Arles,⁶⁷⁵ both the tomb *and* the resurrected Jesus appear. This evidence supports the likelihood that the cross-trophy on the sarcophagi tended to serve as a twin reference to the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, a combined image of the cross and the tomb.⁶⁷⁶ By extension, being presented outside a narrative context and within the widely understood compositional frame of celestial acclaim, the crucified figures on the Nott and Constanza gems must do more than refer to the Golgotha event.

How far the gems themselves evoke the notion of Resurrection in addition to the obvious reference to the Crucified might be apprehended by a closer examination of the integration of the lamb into the Nott design. As their adaptation of the acclaim format indicates, both gems present the celestial veneration of the crucified and resurrected, this setting being implied on the sarcophagal reliefs by the stars and the wreaths and the symbolic presence of the Apostles, who fled after the arrest. The heavenly setting is also implied when the format is adopted

⁶⁷² Lawrence (1932), nr 60. See also Deichmann (1967), nr 933 with the bibliography. More recently, Veganzones (1990), p. 582-583, fig. 12. Soper (1938), p. 188, claims that the episode of the women leaving the Sepulchre entered Roman iconography on this sarcophagus.

⁶⁷³ See Soper (1938), p. 188. Since it presents two women this is probably not the *Noli me tangere* scene from Jn 20.17 in which Jesus encounters the Magdalene [as described by Kühnel (1987), p. 70]. The scene appears again (without the cross-trophy) on the Servannes sarcophagus, Arlés, with three women. Veganzones (1990), pp. 577-579, figs 7-8; see also the line drawing in Gerke (1940), fig. 71.

⁶⁷⁴ See Wilpert's reconstruction in Veganzones (1990), fig. 11 & pp. 580-581.

⁶⁷⁵ Veganzones (1990), figs 15 & 16 (detail), & figs 7 & 8 (detail).

⁶⁷⁶ Kühnel (1987), pp. 69-70.

elsewhere in Christian art, as will be outlined below. On the Nott gem, the location and broader victory theme is further denoted by the arm gestures of the individual Apostles and the appearance of the lamb. As an allegorical figure of Christ, the symbol of the lamb could appear in Christian art as an isolated image, in conjunction with the Cross, or with the twelve Apostles of the Lamb [Rev. 21.14] (themselves sometimes shown as lambs).⁶⁷⁷ Alternatively, the seated figure of Jesus could itself be shown amidst twelve lambs.⁶⁷⁸ Paulinus of Nola thus claims that in his apse mosaic at Nola, both the cross and the lamb proclaim Jesus as the sacrificial victim.⁶⁷⁹ On the Nott gem, where the lamb appears and the figure of Jesus reflects the form of the cross, this is certainly the case.

For this conjunction of Jesus and the lamb with the celestial acclaim of the Apostles we have several important precedents, in funerary as well as public ecclesiastical art. On the frontal frieze of the famous sarcophagus in the Basilica di Sant' Ambrogio, Milan, sculpted in or near that city during the late fourth century,⁶⁸⁰ both the human figure of Jesus and the lamb appear [*Pl.3b*]: Jesus, raised upon a rock, stands at the apex of a highly ceremonial composition to give the new law to the assembled Apostles; below, in a similarly hieratic and centralised but substantially smaller frieze composition, the *agnus dei* is also raised on a mound and approached in formal procession by twelve lambs. As on the Nott gem, the *agnus dei* appears directly below the feet of Christ. That both scenes on the sarcophagus are taking place in heaven is indicated in several ways. Firstly, in the architectural backdrop of the main frieze, which is meant as a representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the fortified city prophesied in Isaiah [26.1] which appeared in the vision of a new Jerusalem in Revelation [21.2]. Secondly, in the elevation of both Jesus and the lamb on the mount of Paradise: from Jesus' mound flow the four rivers, symbolising the Evangelists and

⁶⁷⁷ for examples see Balicka-Witakowska (1997), figs 37-48.

⁶⁷⁸ eg. fourth century sarcophagus in New York, Metropolitan Museum: Dresken-Weiland (1998), nr 162, p. 65. Regarding the adoration of the lambs motif, and similarly horizontal rows of doves approaching from both sides a cross or monogram, see Arnason (1938), p.193 & passim.

⁶⁷⁹ vs. 10. of the *titulus* in *Epistle 32*: Trans. Davis-Weyer (1971), p. 20.

⁶⁸⁰ Also known as the sarcophagus of Stilicho: Dresken-Weiland (1998), nr 150, pp. 56ff with extensive bibliography, & taf. 60.1.

promising salvation.⁶⁸¹ A similar meaning was clearly present in the apse mosaic of Paulinus of Nola's new basilica of St Felix at Primuliacum,⁶⁸² built c. 402, where the Lamb of God stood upon the mount from which flow the four rivers of Paradise and which probably included six sheep on either side of the central lamb, according to the type in the apse mosaic of S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, dated shortly before 549.⁶⁸³ Hence on the sarcophagus there is also an equation of the mound of Golgotha with Mount Zion, named in Rev. 14.1 as the place in heaven where the Lamb is adored.⁶⁸⁴ A broader thematic connection between the act of Christ giving the New Law on such friezes and the Crucifixion iconography of the gems might also be posited: Christians are saved by the ultimate sacrifice of Christ for their sins; so too, if they keep the Law they may enter the kingdom of heaven.⁶⁸⁵ A celestial gift of grace is thus enacted on the sarcophagus frieze. This brings us to a second important precedent to note for the union of Jesus, the lamb and the Apostles.

As has often been emphasised, the pictorial development of the idea of the Apostles converging on Jesus reached something of a climax in the earliest extant Christian basilical apse decoration: in the basilica of S. Pudenziana, Rome.⁶⁸⁶ A seventeenth century watercolour, pictured on *Plate 11*, records the state of the apse after restoration work at the end of the sixteenth century during which the lower corners of the mosaic were lost; it preserves the original feature of twelve Apostles (ten survive), and the *agnus dei*, probably lost in 1711 during the installation of a new high altar.⁶⁸⁷ A work of the 390s, completed in the pontificate of Innocent I (401-17), the mosaic in its original state operated on three distinct and yet integrated compositional levels. At the base of the mosaic, in the

⁶⁸¹ For the Ambrosian theology on the rock and the gates of Jerusalem, Katzenellenbogen (1947), pp. 255-256.

⁶⁸² Underwood (1950), p. 73.

⁶⁸³ Paulinus' description of the mosaic, written shortly after the dedication of the basilica, is contained in his letter to Sulpicius Severus, *Ep.* 32.10: Goldschmidt (1940), pp. 38-47, & p. 98 on the mosaic. The letter is dated to the year AD 403 or 404: Gaston (1969), p. 10. Reconstructions by Wickhoff and Bandmann are reproduced in Engemann (1974), Abb. 1 & 2.

⁶⁸⁴ Schiller (1972), p. 7. Both Isaiah 16.1, and Rev. 14.1, speak of the Lamb on the Mount of Sion. For the literary sources of the iconography of the sarcophagus frieze, see Katzenellenbogen (1947), p. 253.

⁶⁸⁵ For the salvific efficacy of following the Law, Katzenellenbogen (1947), p. 255.

⁶⁸⁶ Kitzinger (1977), pp. 42-43; Kühnel (1987), pp. 63-64; Matthews, (1993), pp. 98-114.

⁶⁸⁷ Osborne & Claridge (1996), p. 306, nr 142.

first level, Jesus appeared as the *agnus dei*. In the second compositional tier, located directly above the first and occupying the main body of the mosaic, Jesus was shown as the enthroned guardian of the Law, the eternal ruler. As such he was bearded and nimbed and flanked by his senate of twelve Apostles. His celestial council of Apostles was itself set against another architectural evocation of the Heavenly Jerusalem, this time presented in the guise of the Constantinian buildings erected on the holy sites of Jerusalem in the fourth century.⁶⁸⁸ This architectural backdrop formed the third compositional tier. At the central apex of this tier, rising directly behind the figure of Jesus and out of the hill of Golgotha, was the jewelled cross, the symbol of Christ triumphant. Brenk compared the image of the cross in this tier with a passage from St John Chrysostom's second homily on Matthew in which the Heavenly Jerusalem, with Jesus enthroned in glory as King, is surrounded by angels and saints, with the cross rising prominently as the sign of victory, as it does in the mosaic.⁶⁸⁹ Hence is also clear that originally there were three theological levels to the mosaic, with Jesus represented as *Agnus Dei*, Guardian of the Law, and in the symbol of the jewelled cross as Christ triumphant.

Just as there occurred a triple representation of Jesus in the S. Pudenziana mosaic, so the meaning of the cross itself can be seen to be multivalent in that pictorial context: as a reference to the cross of the Passion; to the Imperial monument erected on Golgotha; and as the sign believed to announce the *Parousia*.⁶⁹⁰ Comparing the images on *Plates 10* and *11*, the first and third of these meanings can be read on the gems: the figure of Jesus, and on the Constanza gem the cross itself, can be viewed as references to the Passion; whilst an eschatological notion can be seen to be manifest in the symbolic form of Jesus on both gems. According to Kühnel, the same message of “glorification and promise” encapsulated in the iconography of the acclaim sarcophagi (which symbolises Christ's victory over death, the imperial victory of Christianity, and the promise of resurrection of the dead involved in the Parousia, or Second Coming) is manifest in the S.

⁶⁸⁸ Hunt (1984), pp. 17-18; Ladner (1995), pp. 56-58.

⁶⁸⁹ Brenk (1980), p. 47; he argues that this documents the acceptance by Patristic authors of the “imperial vocabulary”.

⁶⁹⁰ Kühnel (1987), articulates the three roles pp. 68-69.

Pudenziana mosaic where both Jesus and the cross are objects of veneration, and where the dominating cross has three levels of meaning.⁶⁹¹ The tridimensionality can in turn be witnessed on the gems, particularly the Nott where the body of Jesus on the cross is not only made to resemble the cross physically in its stance, but Jesus himself is identified with the cross as he was on the acclaim sarcophagi.

Regarding the possible eschatological significance of the gems' iconography we can also consider a passage from a poem by Paulinus of Nola, who writes that in the Second Coming, Jesus, whilst triumphant, will nevertheless show his wounds:

...Jesus, lives after death in a real body, showing the living wounds of His flesh in order that, when the day comes on which He will at last clearly come as God in open day-light, the rebels shall in their tormented flesh shudderingly recognise, in brilliant state, Him, Whom they crucified.⁶⁹²

This description provides a felicitous literary counterpart for the early visual images of Jesus shown crucified, specifically in the Constanza figuration where he is shown attached to the cross, and developed further in both fifth century figurations but particularly the Maskell ivory, where the nails and the wound in Christ's side are shown perforating an otherwise "brilliant" body.

The acclaim iconography, as noted above, was generally accepted as occurring in heaven. Hence if the central figurations of both gems do not directly evoke the locus of Golgotha, what do they convey? Certainly, both remind us of the fact of the death, yet in such a way that the victory is the predominating theme, as it is in the cross-trophy monogram at the centre of Passion sarcophagi. As the instrument of death, the cross itself took on triumphant connotations in sometimes unexpected ways. In the Resurrection narrative of the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, probably from the second century, a revived cross appears coming out of the tomb, following three men and addressing a voice from heaven.⁶⁹³ The customary inference made from this extraordinary description is that two angels support the risen Jesus, whose head is described as reaching higher than the heavens, as he leaves the tomb. In scale at least, the Constanza gem emulates the conspicuous

⁶⁹¹ Kühnel (1987), pp. 69 & 70; on the mosaic pp. 63-72.

⁶⁹² *Carmen* 27, lines 420-423. Goldschmidt (1940), pp. 56-57.

⁶⁹³ *The Gospel of Peter* 10.39-40. Hennecke (1963), v. 1, p. 186. On this passage and the date of the Gospel see Pearson & Harley (2000), pp. 72-74.

early Christian non-canonical textual tradition, with which the *Gospel of Peter* is consistent, of emphasising the size of the gloriously risen Jesus.⁶⁹⁴ Although the formulation of the Constanza composition is at some remove from this early tradition in time, its presentation of the cross, even with the body of Jesus seemingly tied to it, appropriates a similarly symbolic triumphalism: just as Jesus' body rises victoriously, both in size and posture, so does the cross shown behind him. Advancing this thematic semblance one step further, it may be possible to posit a broader eschatological significance for the gems' iconography.

In addition to the understanding of the cross as a powerful symbol of Christ's Passion and sign of his victory in the fourth century, the eschatological import of the symbol has a fundamental dimension that can be seen to have exerted an influence on the ways in which artists experimented with a visual perception of the crucified Jesus at this date.⁶⁹⁵ Since at least the first century, the cross was believed to be the sign of the Son of Man in heaven and it was accepted that the cross would indicate and indeed herald his second coming, as inferred in Matthew [24.30], Rev. 7.2, and the early apocryphal gospels.⁶⁹⁶ As Gaston noted, this notion of the cross announcing the Second Coming survived into the fourth century, as attested by authors in the Christian East and West, including Cyril of Jerusalem and Augustine.⁶⁹⁷ In the presentation of the New Jerusalem in the S. Pudenziana mosaic, the cross denotes the historic Golgothic site of the Crucifixion, which by the middle of the fourth century was believed to be the centre of the world and the locus of salvation.⁶⁹⁸ Set against this background, the iconography of the gems can be seen to allude to Golgotha, but in a victorious and adorative context, and with triumphal iconography utilised to allude to Jesus' resurrection and triumph over that death. Moreover, the paradigm of depicting Jesus in multiple guises in early Christian art, as Man, Lamb, and/or Cross, seen

⁶⁹⁴ For the texts: Pearson & Harley (2000), pp. 74-75.

⁶⁹⁵ The following summary is drawn largely from Gaston (1969), pp. 172-176.

⁶⁹⁶ Nicholson (2000), pp. 312-314. See also Kantorowicz (1944), pp. 224ff.

⁶⁹⁷ Gaston (1969), pp. 172-174. The anticipation of the end of days intensified in Rome as a result of the Barbarian menace: Kühnel (1987), p. 189, n. 39.

⁶⁹⁸ Cyril *Catecheses* 13.28. Hunt (1984), pp. 18-19. Kühnel (1987), pp. 84, 88. Taylor (1993), pp. 128-129. Gibson & Taylor (1994), p. 59.

on the sarcophagus in Milan [Pl.3a] and the Pudenziana mosaic [Pl.11], is followed on the Nott gem [Pl.10a & c].

A final note needs to be made regarding the deification of the Jesus-figure effected in the iconography on both gems. In the acclaim iconography on the sarcophagi, the wreathing of the cross in the *crux invicta* motif indicates the significance of Christ's victory over death. In the venerative figuration on the two gems, whilst Jesus remains at the axis of each pictorialisation, the significance of his victory is denoted by other iconographic devices, such as frontality and centrality. These devices can be seen to derive from pagan and imperial formats where they were utilised to great effect for the deification of the emperor, who elevated above his retinue, keeping his head erect and fixing his impassive eyes firmly on the viewer, transcended his physical surroundings. An illustration of this is the detail from the Obelisk of Theodosius I in the Hippodrome in Constantinople, c. 390 [Pl. 3a]. Yet more pertinent to the gem's iconography is an earlier example: the frieze on the north side of the Arch of Constantine (AD 315), showing the Constantinian distribution of largesse.⁶⁹⁹ Kitzinger notes that the geometric pattern achieved in the frontal presentation of the Emperor on this frieze, flanked by the rhythmic procession of citizens, makes sense only to the viewer: it is to the viewer that the central figure is turned and to whom the ordered pattern is directed. L'Orange describes the pattern as a "mechanical order".⁷⁰⁰ As he and subsequently Kitzinger observed, this order is imposed onto the scene to create an unnatural regularity.⁷⁰¹ Jesus, raised frontally "like an cult statue to be worshipped", immediately evokes imperial presentations of the Emperor, seen on the Theodosian obelisk; L'Orange thus describes the subordination of the subsidiary figures to the symbolically larger figure of the Emperor, as a "spiritualisation" of that figure, raising the Emperor to quasi-divine status: just as Constantine distributed the largesse to the citizens, who received it with one hand raised in acclamation, so Christ distributes the gift of grace to the Apostles, who assemble beside him.⁷⁰² The same gesture of

⁶⁹⁹ Kitzinger (1977), figs 2 & 4 (detail).

⁷⁰⁰ L'Orange (1965), p. 89.

⁷⁰¹ L'Orange (1965), pp. 89-91, & comparing it with Christian iconography pp. 103-104; Kitzinger (1977), pp. 8-9.

⁷⁰² L'Orange (1965), p. 103; see the detail of the acclaim gestures on the Arch of Constantine pictured in Effenberger & Severin (1992), fig. 16a.

acclaim is retained, yet the Christian paraphrase of this composition, with Christ at the apex, elevates the compositional scheme one step further: whilst the Emperor is shown to be worshipped as God on earth, Christ is worshipped in heaven, receiving or delivering the crowns of victory in a Paradisaical setting. This is made particularly clear on the star-and-wreath sarcophagi where stars and sometimes the presence of the sun and moon denote the heavenly location and signify the universality and eternity of Christ's reign [*Pl.2a*]. The gems follow this pattern. On the Nott gem the devices used include an increased scale for Jesus, who is nimbed, and the setting of his figure up high, above the Apostolic procession. The lamb functions to further underline both the central proximation of the crucified figure and his divine power. On the Constanza carnelian, the primary means of symbolic differentiation is scale, Jesus being twice the size of the Apostles. As was the case for the presentation of the emperor in Imperial art, the oversizing is intended to both impress and stress the invincible nature of Jesus.

The gems can thus provide a stepping stone between the imperial iconography from which they draw upon for the celestial presentation of the deified Jesus amongst his Apostles, and fifth century Crucifixion iconography. The subsequent representations of Jesus in that century, showing him unfolded on the cross and unflinching, can be seen to draw further on the imperial ideology: in his unwavering gaze, travelling out of the image beyond his physical surroundings and as L'Orange describes for the representation of the Emperor, "attain(ing) his goal in a higher sphere". In fact, L'Orange's description of the solemn ritual style developed for the emperor in Late Antiquity is directly applicable to describe the *Christus Triumphans* as he emerges in the fourth century on the gems and is articulated further in the fifth century; so too is Ammianus Marcellinus' description of the living emperor Constantius II, who looks stiffly ahead as though his head were in a vice.⁷⁰³ Hence through his death on the cross, Jesus is shown to secure victory, a victory won for all Christians, and the spoils disseminated to all in the Second Coming.

⁷⁰³ Ammianus Marcellinus *The Later Roman Empire* 16.10; cited by L'Orange (1965), p. 124.

Numerous features establish both gems as likely products of the fourth/early fifth century: Jesus' nudity in each case, the content and inclusion of both inscriptions, in addition to the gems' compositional semblance with the acclaim iconography seen on fourth century sarcophagi and later mosaics (in the inclusion of the Apostles and the lamb) and in the stylistic presentation of the Apostles (with gestures of acclaim as shown on the Nott, *pallia* on the Constanza), and figural proportions. If a uniform, linear development is assumed for the triumphal iconography of Christ amidst the Apostles, there is a strong likelihood that the prototype for the gems sits at the end of the fourth century or early in the fifth century, somewhere around the production date of the sarcophagi. In addition, the gems conform in shape, style and epigraphical content to other engraved gems of the period. Corroborating this posited date are the iconographical features adopted for the presentation of Jesus in the crucified position. Although no other representations of the Crucifixion survive from the fourth century, in the East or the West, these features correspond with the broad lines of development leading to the 5th century type: the nudity, frontality, triumphant stance, and on the Nott gem, the placement of the open palms and the nimbus. The gems can therefore be assigned a production time in the fourth/fifth century with some confidence, as Popescu and Horsley have previously suggested.⁷⁰⁴

Whilst similarities between the two gems make a distinction in date difficult, from the more skilled execution and increased sophistication of the Nott design, which symbolically incorporates the well known early Christian symbol of the lamb and a circular nimbus around the head of Jesus to further his divine power and centrality to the scene, we can infer that the Nott gem is slightly later in date, either from the latter half of the fourth century or possibly the early fifth century⁷⁰⁵ according to similar compositional changes occurring on sarcophagi at this time [more on this below]. In support of this later dating is the altered position of the hands and the change to a frontal depiction of the head on the Nott gem, which seems to pre-empt the development of those iconographic features in fifth century figurations of the crucifixion. Some hesitation may be caused in the absence of the

⁷⁰⁴ Popescu (1976), pp. 89-90; Horsley (1981), p. 140.

⁷⁰⁵ Both C. Smith (1896/7), p 206, & Derchain (1964), p. 110, considered the Nott gem to be later.

gestures of acclaim on the Constanza gem, which might point to a degeneration of the iconography. However, it should also be noted that the Constanza gem retains the *pallia* for the representation of the Apostles, and apparently older iconographic customs such as the representation of Jesus' head in profile view and the depiction of his hands as broken at the wrists. The triumphant iconography articulated on the Maskell and Sabina reliefs [Pl.5] can be seen to develop the more mature and symbolically advanced form presented on the Nott gem, where Jesus' head is frontal and the arms firmly unfolded against the *patibulum* [Pl.10a].

As emphasised earlier, this iconography is not created around the presentation of the Crucifixion narrative. Therefore, it should not be viewed as a transformation of the Crucifixion event from an historical scene to one of adoration by the inclusion of the Apostles at the cross. Rather, the images should be seen as following what was a standard matrix for the expression of heavenly adoration in Christian art during the fourth and fifth centuries. In such formats, as M. Roberts explains, "The hieratical relationships communicated by the juxtaposition and interrelation of the figures takes precedence over any desire to represent a particular historical event".⁷⁰⁶ It would appear from the adoption not only of the hieratic imperial style for the scene as a whole but of the imperial portrait type for the personal representation of Christ that both compositions are dependant to a large extent, conceivably via sarcophagal reliefs, on imperial iconography developed for the hieratic representation of the emperor in Late Antiquity. Subsequently, whilst the cross-stance of Jesus on the Nott gem evokes the Crucifixion, the scene is not of Golgotha and the focus of the gems is not the historically crucified Jesus; it is likely that the focus is the victory of the incarnate deity and that the scene occurs in heaven, where Jesus in his resurrected form is venerated by the Apostles. Invoking both the Crucifixion and Resurrection events in the way that the *crux invicta* motif can be seen to have done, the two gems can be interpreted as presenting abstract visions of the victorious Jesus in his heavenly setting. Moreover, based on the interpretation of contemporary compositions of the veneration of Jesus by the Apostles, as at S. Pudenziana, the figure on the Nott

⁷⁰⁶ Roberts (1989) examines the imposition of synonymic repetition in Late Antique art and poetry: ch. 3, pp. 66-121.

gem may carry an eschatological meaning as a symbol of the Lord's Parousia in addition to the evocation of the crucified and resurrected body, or may at the least derive from a composition that did carry such meaning.

A direct parallel and conceivable source for the gems' design is the acclaim iconography as it appears on the star-and-wreath sarcophagi [Pl.2a]. The gems make a pivotal alteration to that format by replacing the symbolic motif, employed thereon as an aniconic representation of Jesus, with a figural representation without substantially altering the meaning of the scene. Villette's thesis that the *crux invicta* was a replacement for the figure of Jesus is thus borne out on the two gems.⁷⁰⁷ Yet the replacement of the *crux invicta* with the figure of Jesus is also seen on certain seven-arch type sarcophagi, manufactured by a Gallic atelier in the last decade of the fourth century and the early fifth century. Thereon the Apostolic processional from the star-and-wreath sarcophagi makes a return, still shown as a single frieze across the front of the sarcophagi but now divided into seven niches by eight columns. Lawrence cites three examples of this type: one in Arles c. 400; a fragment in Lyon, also c.400; and a later, cruder, example in Saint-Honorat on which not all of the Apostles carry wreaths.⁷⁰⁸ Aside from the compositional parallel in the insertion of the human figure of Jesus at the centre of the frieze, there are two significant points to note. Unlike other sarcophagi contemporary with the star-and-wreath type, such as the level-entablature group whereon Jesus appeared with a beard and long hair, seated amongst the Apostles,⁷⁰⁹ on the Arles and Saint-Honorat sarcophagi he is portrayed *beardless*. Further, on the example in Arles he has acquired a nimbus.⁷¹⁰ Given these adjustments to the original form, including the degeneration illustrated in the now scattered inclusion of wreaths amongst the Apostles, it appears that in spite of the presence of the columns, the friezes exhibit a close relationship with the gems' iconography, most particularly in the case of the Nott gem. Therefore, they may be seen to further refine the date proposed for the gems as late fourth/early fifth century.

⁷⁰⁷ Villette (1957), p. 43.

⁷⁰⁸ Lawrence (1932), nrs. 63 (Arles, fig. 57), 64 (Lyon, fig. 56), 65 (Saint-Honorat, fig. 54)- her atelier V, p. 184,

⁷⁰⁹ such as a sarcophagus of this type in the Louvre: Lawrence (1932), nr 24.

⁷¹⁰ Lawrence (1932), p. 146, nr 63

That the composition appears in substantially similar form on two gems of transverse orientation and like fabric is of particular importance, promoting the likelihood that such a representation of the Crucified and Resurrected Christ was known and dispersed amongst Christian communities at least by the fourth century. The enumerative sequence of Apostles suggested to Derchain a Syrian or at least eastern localisation.⁷¹¹ Admittedly, the composition is clearly eastern in flavour and the Greek inscriptions suggest an eastern location, or at least a knowledge of the language. However, Lawrence's research on the sarcophagi has shown that ateliers located in the West, and in Gaul in the case of the star-and-wreath and seven-arch types, exhibited Asiatic styles in their carving, possibly as a result of Asiatic artisans working in the workshops or sculptors trained in the style. As the later mosaic at S. Pudenziana attests, the enumerative sequence was known in the East and West by the late fourth century. The star-and-wreath sarcophagi were manufactured in a Gallic workshop, productive from around the last quarter of the fourth century. Crude echoes of the composition are also found on sarcophagi in the early fifth century.⁷¹²

The wider implications of the fourth/early fifth century date here proposed for the gems are of great significance. Contrary to the received opinion regarding the emergence of Crucifixion iconography, the gems indicate that literal figurations of Jesus on his cross were attempted by Christians possibly in the latter half of the fourth century, but at that time proved less popular, conceivably in competition with the remarkably successful aniconic version of the Crucifixion/Resurrection. As the foregoing discussion has established, before Christians arrived at a visual depiction of the Crucifixion in its historic/narrative guise, their experimentation with the subject began in the context of triumphal artistic formats already used with success for the expression of the veneration of the cross and thus of contemporary theological perceptions of the event. The replacement of the cross-trophy known in those formats with the figure of the crucified Jesus is not antithetical to what was occurring elsewhere in Christian art at this time, but

⁷¹¹ see Derchain (1964), p. 110.

⁷¹² Lawrence (1932), pp. 159-160.

correlates to developments on the seven-arch sarcophagi and wider developments in Christian artistic expression in the fourth century.

It should also be noted that the fourth century is the date traditionally accepted for the introduction of narrative scenes from the New Testament into the repertoire of subjects engraved onto gems. At this time, the figure of Jesus entered the iconographical repertoire more consistently and explicitly in relation to the concurrent elaboration of New Testament themes sometime after the Peace of the Church. Episodes from the Passion narratives appeared in connection with this expansion of the biblical repertory. The fourth century Constantinian building projects on Golgotha had a perceptible influence on art, as the S. Pudenziana mosaic attests, and Kühnel promotes the fourth century sarcophagi on which the acclaim of the cross occurs as further evidence of this influence. The gems, iconographically related to both the mosaic and the sarcophagi, can also be seen to be contemporary with these monuments, and to have emerged at a time when the new understanding of the holy sites was beginning to impinge on the Church's visual perception of its history.

The active role of basilical mosaic decoration, as part of an all-inclusive ambience of liturgy, including lights, sound, interior decoration, ceremony, vestments, eucharistic vessels and other ceremonial or decorative objects in Late Antique churches, provided an experience of heaven on earth for the worshipper.⁷¹³ The tiny images borne by these two gems reflected in the wearer's eye a facet of that heavenly glory, secured for the Christian by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The triumphal figure adored by the company of Apostles is not so much a trigger to reflection on the event of the cross as an inducement to rejoice in the glory of the cross and the rising of Jesus above it.

⁷¹³ Brown (1980), pp. 17-27.

Some Conclusions

By the time of Justin the power of Jesus was seen to radiate *specifically* from his affixation to the cross, over which he triumphed so spectacularly. This has a crucial bearing on our understanding of the Late Antique Crucifixion gems, magical and Christian. For in consideration of the subsequent pre-eminence of the crucified Jesus, the early appearance of the crucifixion imagery on objects intimately related to divine protection and spiritual guardianship, and in a guise that befits the interpretation of the crucified saviour as all powerful, should not be surprising. It is likely that the crucifixion gems functioned in a similarly formulaic way: instead of a verbal reference to his crucifixion, the artist delineates this Golgotha event through imagery and the naming of the powerful one. Naturally, the imagery formulated by “magicians” and that by Christians exhibits some variation attendant to the interpretation of Jesus as a magician or spiritual leader on the one hand and divine saviour on the other. There is however another facet of the combination of name and crucified body on a seal which should be pointed out, and that relates to the additional eschatological significance which the divine name held for Christians.

The early Christians believed that God marked his followers with a seal, a sign by which he could recognise believers on the day of judgement.⁷¹⁴ Such a mark is mentioned in Ezekiel (9.4-6), where according to the prophet, Yahweh marked the foreheads of his chosen ones with a sign. The Book of Revelation refers to this mark (7:2), and at 14:1 and 22:4 makes clear that it was thought by Jews to represent the divine Name.⁷¹⁵ The mark or seal was the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the tau, and written in the old script as + or X.⁷¹⁶ Since the seal, being the Name, assured believers of salvation on the day of judgement, it was also seen as a seal of protection against the powers of evil. The significance of the seal as a demarcatory device in secular and commercial life was therefore underlined in the spiritual realm for the Christian by the eschatological and ensuing protective

⁷¹⁴ Lampe (1967), pp. 3-18, esp. 14ff.

⁷¹⁵ For the Old Testament concept of the Name as the manifestation of Yahweh and also as an expression of the power by which God accomplishes his works, see Daniélou (1964), pp. 147-163.

⁷¹⁶ Sweet (1979), p. 148.

significance of the Name that they inherited from their Jewish predecessors. This interconnection must surely have been further enhanced by the simple fact that the same Greek word *sphragis* used in the New Testament for a physical seal, such as those on the scroll in Revelation [5: 1-2], was used to denote the spiritual seal of God, such as occurred in baptism [eg. Eph. 1.13].⁷¹⁷

Whilst the spiritual seal of the Name was not necessarily an outward sign,⁷¹⁸ the notion of an external mark did evolve in Christian circles, particularly in connection with the liturgical practices of chrismation and consignation at baptism.⁷¹⁹ It was through the rite of baptism that the Christian died with Christ and was reborn in the victory of the cross; the *sphragis* traced on the forehead at baptism and used generally in prayer as a sign of exorcism or sanctification was that with which the Israelites had been marked in Ezekiel: the + or X. Now out of its Hebrew context the mark was read by Greek speaking Christians not as the name of Yahweh but as the Greek chi, X, the first letter of the Greek name Jesus XPICTOC.⁷²⁰ Although the Name had changed, the concept of the sign as a seal of divine power and acknowledgment of divine ownership was in no way diminished. The sign sealed the Christian as the Lord's, and though invisible on earth, would identify him in heaven as belonging to God.⁷²¹ Subsequently, the initial use of the cruciform baptismal *sphragis* was not as an allusion to Christ's Passion but as Daniélou describes it, "une désignation de sa Gloire divine", the ultimate association with the form of the cross as the instrument of the Passion being made at least by the fourth century, if not earlier.⁷²² Only after Christianity's legitimation under Constantine did the cross come to be used more openly as a

⁷¹⁷ Paul is seen to refer specifically to baptism when he speaks of the seal of the Holy Spirit. In Eph 1.13, he refers to those "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it..."; similarly, 2. Cor. 1.22. For the Pauline concept of sealing and the idea of sealing in Christian belief, see Lampe (1967), pp. 3-18, esp. pp. 15-18. Dölger's study of the meanings and use of the word is fundamental: (1911). See also Daniélou (1956), pp. 54-69.

⁷¹⁸ The Old Testament furnishes evidence of tattooed badges of divine ownership. Lampe (1967), pp. 13-14.

⁷¹⁹ See Dölger (1911). See also Daniélou (1956), pp. 59ff regarding the perceived power of the sign of the cross over demons.

⁷²⁰ Daniélou (1964), pp. 154-5 & p. 330.

⁷²¹ Dölger (1911), pp. 109-111.

⁷²² Daniélou (1961), p.152. Ambrose and Cyril of Jerusalem illustrate the later interpretation, as cited by Daniélou (1956), pp. 66-67.

personal seal motif for Christians. The shape of the cross was traced over the body before the performance of daily activities and religious rituals, a gesture thought to protect against evil as noted in Chapter I. It also appeared on seal stones, often in conjunction with a monogram of Jesus' name.⁷²³ Consequently, the union of the name of Jesus and the cross occurred long before Jesus was depicted crucified.

Given this historical meaning, it seems entirely plausible that both the eschatological significance of the divine Name and its attendant protective role, played a part in the manufacture and circulation of early pictorialisations of the Crucifixion on gems. The already prevalent concept of the Name as a seal of divine guardianship and protection must surely have fortified for Christians the visual impact and prophylactic import of the combination of the crucified yet triumphant Jesus with monograms signifying his name. Hahn's argument that early Byzantine objects carrying *loca sancta* imagery did not merely carry visual representations of the seal of Christ, but were of themselves spiritual seals, connecting an individual with Christ, is an important one and equally applicable to the gems.⁷²⁴

Moreover, consistent with an exorcistic formula or personal seal device, whilst monogrammatic abbreviations were frequently used on early Christian gems, their appearance on the two Christian gems cited here with images of the crucifixion seems to point to a deliberate design feature, and one that was disseminated over several centuries. Rather than being abhorrent images, the Christian gems display designs that in the admixture of iconography and inscription reflect contemporary literary perceptions of the crucifixion as a saving and triumphant event, a perception regularly professed through baptism.

The magical efficacy of the crucified Jesus, in name and picture, was not limited to Christians. If the Pereire stone pre-dates the Christian formulation and circulation of a design model, as Derchain argued,⁷²⁵ then it is apparent that individuals beyond or on the cusp of Christian communities were looking to the

⁷²³ Sulzberger (1925), pp. 337-448, passim.

⁷²⁴ Hahn (1990), pp. 90-93.

⁷²⁵ Derchain (1964), p. 112.

crucified son of God for protection over evil and unseen forces. The Pereire gem in fact redresses the imbalance of physical evidence regarding perceptions of the Crucifixion in Late Antiquity: for whereas the Palatine graffito has been used to illustrate the misunderstanding of the Crucifixion of Jesus by “outsiders”, the Pereire gem indicates that positive perceptions of the event could be held by people who were not necessarily his followers. The image seems to suggest, in conjunction with literary evidence regarding the use of the name of the crucified Jesus, that Jesus was revered within magical as well as Christian circles *because of his violent death*, and not in spite of it. This is a critical point given the previous attempts to explain the absence of crucifixion imagery in the early Church as a sign of the early Christians’ embarrassment over the mode of execution used to kill Jesus.

Part 2 BYZANTIUM

Of the five gemstones previously used to indicate the pre-fifth century appearance of the Crucifixion in Christian art, the remaining two are shown to be Byzantine. The first gemstone, the Lewis jasper, exhibits in its design a composition and iconography that can be shown to be early Byzantine in date. The second gemstone is reputedly Syrian and presents several problems. Against previous opinion, a thirteenth century date will be posited for its production.

A. The Lewis Jasper [Cat. nr 4]

An upright-oval intaglio (1.55 x 1.25cms), this flat green jasper gemstone forms part of the Reverend Samuel Savage Lewis's collection of gems and rings now in the possession of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and on long-term loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum [Lewis 103.571].⁷²⁶ Presently set within a nineteenth century ring mount [*Pl.12c*], the gem was purchased by Lewis from Rollin and Feuarent in Paris on March 16, 1880 for 4 pounds.⁷²⁷ In the same year it came to the attention of another collector of Christian gems in Cambridge, the Rev. Charles King, who was quick to identify the rarity of the image engraved on the jasper. King published the gem in 1881.⁷²⁸

The obverse face of the Lewis jasper features a pictorialisation of the Crucifixion in which Jesus maintains the victorious upright and strictly frontal position witnessed in the Nott and Constanza gems, and which is characteristic of Crucifixion iconography in the Late Antique period, but is now clothed from the waist down. His arms are firmly outstretched from the shoulders to lie flat on top of the *patibulum*, to which they are bound at the wrists. His cupped palms face upwards, flexed firmly back at the wrists. The upright shaft of the cross is not visible, either between Christ's feet, which stand upon an exergual line, or above his head, which is encircled by a cross-nimbus. In a pivotal move away from the pre-sixth century custom for figurations of the crucified, Jesus is clothed from the

⁷²⁶ See Henig (1975), for a catalogue of the gems in the collection.

⁷²⁷ A bill survives. These details provided by J. Spier.

⁷²⁸ King (1881), pp. 3-4.

waist down in what appears to be a long pleated skirt, the hem of which flares above his ankles. He is no longer in the company of his Apostles but is flanked by two figures, who stand in perfect symmetry one on either side of the cross facing inwards towards him. Shown on a substantially reduced scale, these are probably the soldier piercing Christ's side [Jn 19.34 & some ancient authorities at Mt. 27.49] and the bystander who filled a sponge with vinegar before extending it to Christ's lips on a reed [Ps. 69.23; Mt. 27.48; Mk 15.36; Jn 19.29-30].⁷²⁹ Two identical but ambiguous symbols are precisely located one on either side of Christ's head, shown as though the one is upright and the other turned on its side.

As with the fourth century acclaim Crucifixion iconography, the flatly frontal depiction of Jesus on this jasper elevates him as the central focus not only of the viewer's attention, but of the attendant figures also. Therefore, in its adherence to the almost icon-like presentation of the protagonist, this visual conception of Jesus on the cross remains an overtly devotional one. The symbolic language of the inflexible cruciform pose utilised on the Nott and Constanza gems continues to be integral to the expression of the figure's divinity in this figuration and is now underscored by the cross-nimbus, with the wrist ties being the only concessions to the reality of execution by crucifixion disclosed by the image maker. Despite this semblance in symbolic presentation, changes in the compositional schema and iconography alert us to a shift in the underlying narrative and thereby christological implications of this pictorialisation: the identity of the accompanying figures, in conjunction with the partial robing of Jesus' body, signal a fundamental departure from the manifestation of the triumphant Christ in fourth and fifth century pictorial art and the emergence both of a new iconographical type and theological preoccupation. As will be argued below, these changes, and the compositional unit employed, should establish the gem as a product of the late sixth/early seventh century.

1. Jesus

It is well known that during the early Byzantine period there were two basic options for the pictorial representation of the Crucifixion. The first, known as

⁷²⁹ Luke 23.36, does not mention the sponge.

“historic”, followed the fifth century matrix to present the full figure of Jesus standing with arms outstretched as though affixed to the cross, but advanced the fifth century propensity to conceal his nudity by replacing the narrow cloth with a more substantial garment. Normally, this garment took the form of a full-length sleeveless tunic, the *colobium*, which although first popularised in eastern Crucifixion iconography in the sixth century was transferred to the West by the eighth century [*Pl.14a*].⁷³⁰ The long fall of the *colobium* from the shoulders to ankles enhanced the upright and rigid stance of the triumphal figure, and obviously effected a more complete coverage of Christ’s human form at time when the relationship between his divine and human natures on the cross was a contentious theological issue. The representation of Jesus’ crucified in a full-length robe in the magical Coptic papyrus indicates that the historic type was known in Egypt around the seventh century [*Pl.13f*].⁷³¹ Coterminous with the enthusiastic use of the *colobium* in the East by the sixth century was the development by this time of a complex and historical visualisation of the Crucifixion in art, a visualisation that followed the events and details recounted in the Passion narratives. The sixth century Rabbula figuration is acclaimed as the consummate presentation of this mature historical version [*P. 7a*].⁷³² A second option for the presentation of the Crucifixion at this time featured the bust of Christ placed above or at the centre of a cross in a symbolic configuration that was probably introduced as a modification of the historic version [*Pl.8a & c*].⁷³³ Previously interpreted as a euphemistic reference to the Crucifixion at a time when literal representations of the event were avoided,⁷³⁴ the iconography is now seen to illustrate the Veneration of the True Cross at Jerusalem.⁷³⁵ Following Grigg’s thesis, it is likely that the bust-cross originally had nothing to do with the Crucifixion event itself but was utilised within the iconographic framework of the historic version as a means of honouring the cross and emphasising Christ’s

⁷³⁰ Schiller (1972), p. 94, notes that this transfer is witnessed in the eighth century fresco in the chapel of Theodotus at S. Maria Antiqua.

⁷³¹ The papyrus was dated to c. 600 by Walter E. Krum and subsequently accepted by Meyer and Smith (1994), p. 279. The iconography for Jesus and the thieves seems to befit such a general date.

⁷³² Schiller (1972), p. 91, describes it as “fully evolved”.

⁷³³ as argued by Grigg (1974), p. 232-233.

⁷³⁴ Grondijs (1957), pp. 462-463. The view that the motif acts as a substitution for the Crucifixion is still widely held. See Sepiere (1994), p. 93 & n. 11.

⁷³⁵ Vikan (1982), p. 22; & (1990b), p. 102.

victory, which, although fought on the cross, was completed in the Resurrection.⁷³⁶ In those instances where the bust is enclosed in a *clipeus*, and where the cross is shown as foliate, a Paradaisical rather than historic setting for the imagery is strongly suggested.⁷³⁷ For the representation of the full-length triumphal figure of Jesus, clothed, beardless, and having a cross-nimbus, the Lewis gem will be seen to be dependant on the “historic” formula for the representation of the Crucifixion in the late sixth- seventh centuries.

The two types were isolated by Grabar from amongst the nineteen extant occasions on which the Crucifixion appears on ampullae in the collections at Monza and Bobbio,⁷³⁸ the “symbolic” type being the most common,⁷³⁹ the “historic” much rarer.⁷⁴⁰ There are numerous instances of the symbolic type appearing in miniature formats, on engraved crystals in Paris [*Pl.13a*], and Oberlin,⁷⁴¹ a mould in Brooklyn, medallions in Berlin, London and Trèves, on rings in Israel and Trèves, and within cycles of christological scenes on the silver bracelets in Columbia [*Pl.13b*], Cairo, and that formerly in the de Béarn Collection.⁷⁴² Nevertheless, spatial constrictions on smaller objects did not preclude the presentation of the full figure, as the ampullae attest. Further to the “historic” ampullae from Monza [eg. *Pl. 8b*] and Bobbio is a fourth ampulla in Stuttgart, where the *colobium* is of a slightly different form, a Palestinian

⁷³⁶ Grigg (1974), p. 224, and pp. 196, 220-233. There is not space here to unravel the arguments concerning the meaning of the cross-bust ensemble in early Byzantine art. The literature is vast, but see Grabar (1943-1946), v. 2, pp. 187-189, & (1958), pp. 55-58; Morey (1926), pp. 159-163; Lesley (1939), p. 225; Grigg (1979); Warland (1986), esp. 116ff; and especially Balicka-Witakowska (1997), pp. 108-111, including citations of the literature.

⁷³⁷ The *clipeus* was used in Late Antiquity to illustrate the transport of the soul to heaven. Weitzmann (1978), pp. 8-10, suggests that Christians were aware of this significance when they originally adopted the motif. On the interpretation of the foliate cross on the ampullae as the *arbor vitae* and its intimation of a Paradaisical rather than historical setting see Hildburgh (1931), pp. 49-51; Underwood (1950), pp. 97-101; Kühnel (1987), pp. 96-99. On the identification of the True Cross as the Tree of Life: Grigg (1974), p. 32 n. 3; Werner (1990), pp. 182, 195 & n. 100.

⁷³⁸ Twelve from Monza [nrs. 2 & 5-15] and seven from Bobbio [nrs. 3-7, 17 & 18]. Bobbio 19 probably included a Crucifixion roundel, but this is damaged. For the distinction between the “symbolic” [Monza nrs. 2, 5-11, 14, 15, Bobbio 3-6, 17, 18] and “historic” [Monza 12, 13 & Bobbio 7] types see Grabar (1958), pp. 55-58; Wessel (1960b), pp. 45-71; briefly Ainalov (1961), pp. 238-240; Weitzmann (1974), pp. 40-41; and Werner (1990), pp. 195 & 204-205.

⁷³⁹ Wessel (1960b), pp. 47-49, identified three variants of the type. For examples of the type in addition to ampullae see Balicka-Witakowska (1997), p. 106.

⁷⁴⁰ The three historic ampullae in the collections at Monza and Bobbio are said to be made from a single mould: Vikan (1994), p. 345; Grabar (1958), pp. 28-29, 36 & 55-58.

⁷⁴¹ The crystals are published side by side in Warland (1986), Abb. 127 & 128.

⁷⁴² All of these artefacts are published in Balicka-Witakowska (1997), pp. 105-108, figs 17- 20, 23-26 & 27.

medallion also in Stuttgart,⁷⁴³ the sixth/seventh century Aba Moun copper medallion in Paris [*Pl.13c*],⁷⁴⁴ censers in Berlin,⁷⁴⁵ Virginia [*Pl.13d*]⁷⁴⁶ and Vienna,⁷⁴⁷ plus the unusual long-sleeved robes shown on the Perm Plate [*Pl.13e*]. As noted above, a long-sleeved robe seems to be indicated on the seventh century Coptic papyrus [*Pl.13f*]- the marks across the wrists seemingly indicating sleeve cuffs rather than wrist ties as they are shown on the Lewis gem [*Pl.12c*]. In addition, in the figurations of the Crucifixion appearing as one in a cycle of christological scenes on the facets of the hoops of four octagonal gold rings surviving from the period, two of which are shown on *Plate 12e & f*, the full figure of Jesus appears.⁷⁴⁸ Intimately related on iconographic and in many case stylistic grounds, these artefacts bear witness collectively to the presence in the sixth century of an historic version of the Crucifixion in reduced compositional formats that could be rich in narrative detail. The original binary thematic differentiation between the symbolic and historic types, posited by Grigg, did not preclude the absorption of certain pictorial elements from the historic version into symbolic figurations. Such a crossover occurring in the process of modification may account for the unique iconography of Monza ampulla 6, Bobbio 9 and the Berlin medallion whereon details from the mature historical version (the depiction of the parting of the garments in the first case, the lance and sponge-bearers in the

⁷⁴³ Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum: Inv. Nr 1981-165 (medallion) and Inv. Nr 1980-205b (ampulla). For both see Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart (1985), p. 23, Abb. 2 & 3

⁷⁴⁴ Paris, Cabinet des Médailles. Schlumberger (1893), pp. 187-188, who cites the diameter of the medallion as 52mm; Ainalov (1961), pp. 248-250; Vikan (1995a), pp. 379-80 n. 14, posits an iconographic and stylistic link between the amulet and other pendants associated with Egypt. See also Vikan (1991/2), p. 44 n. 59 with related objects. I was unable to view the amulet in the Cabinet des Médailles. The amulet's inscription reads "Emmanuel Cross, help Aba Moun; Mary and Martha; Angel of the Lord". For the rare publication of a photograph see Villette (1957), pl. xxxv.

⁷⁴⁵ Berlin, Staatliche Museen: Inv.-Nr 15/69. Effenberger & Severin (1992), nr 114 pp. 201-202; and Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), nr 563. A second censer in Berlin is pictured in Balicka-Witakowska (1997), fig. 90; and Wessel (1966), p. 18. On the censers from this period (of which there are up to 95 extant) and their date (between the late sixth-early eighth century) see Gonosová & Kondoleon (1994), pp. 274-277, esp. 275-277.

⁷⁴⁶ Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: Inv.-Nr 67.27. Gonosová & Kondoleon (1994), nr 95 pp. 274-277.

⁷⁴⁷ Vienna, private collection. Balicka-Witakowska (1997), fig. 91.

⁷⁴⁸ There are four rings: Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (Christ, sun and moon, two thieves, lance and sponge-bearers); Museum of Palermo, Palermo (Christ, two thieves, lance and sponge-bearers?); British Museum, London (Christ, two thieves); and Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington (Christ, two thieves). See Engemann (1973), p. 20f, Abb. 4-6; Vikan (1984), p. 83, including a bibliography n. 117; Vikan (1990a), pp. 158-61; Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), nr 446.

second, and the lone sponge-bearer in the third), appear not with the “historic” *colobium*-clad Jesus as might otherwise be expected, but the bust-cross.⁷⁴⁹

Considering the existence of the two distinct archetypes for the depiction of the Crucifixion on ampullae from the Holy Land and other artefacts from this date and regional milieu, and in view of the complex relationships enjoyed between the flasks and the contemporary figurations of the Crucifixion in the Rabbula manuscript, on the Vatican panel and icons, Grigg and Weitzmann independently suggested the possible existence of two or three prototypes for the depiction of the Crucifixion within the repertory of Palestinian artisans by the late sixth/early seventh century.⁷⁵⁰ In support of this theory, Weitzmann later cited the existence of three types for the depiction of the two thieves on the Monza ampullae: i. arms held sideways and fastened to the crossbar (numbers 9-11; *Pl. 8a*); ii. hands only thrust to the side (nrs. 6, 8); iii. hands tied behind the back (nrs. 12, 13; *Pl. 8b*). The latter type is also seen on the Coptic papyrus. What is interesting is that only type iii. is associated with Jesus in the *colobium*, a fact confirmed by the magical papyrus, whilst types i. and ii. show the thieves flanking the bust-cross.⁷⁵¹

As Maser apprehended in his comparison of the Lewis Jesus with that of the Rabbula [*Pl. 7a*],⁷⁵² the gem quite clearly follows the pattern of the historic type. But how then should we account for the bareness of his chest and his beardlessness in this figuration, features in direct contrast to the mature historic version represented in the detailed illuminated version?⁷⁵³

The traditional description of the Lewis garment as a long dalmatic or tunic is misleading, implying as it does the presence of a full-length robe on the model of the *colobium*.⁷⁵⁴ In fact, its skirt-like form is distinctly modelled on the gem. A deep incision across Christ’s stomach demarcates a waistband and several

⁷⁴⁹ Mary and John, the two thieves and the sun and moon appear in both ampullae; only the thieves appear with the central figuration on the medallion.

⁷⁵⁰ Grigg (1974), p. 221; Weitzmann (1974), pp. 40-41.

⁷⁵¹ Weitzmann (1976), p. 63. Grabar (1958), pls XIV, XVI, XVIII, XII, XIII, XXII, XXIV.

⁷⁵² Maser (1976), pp. 268 & 271.

⁷⁵³ Initially, King was keen to ascribe prime significance to the fact that Jesus is unbearded on the gem, and this iconographic feature provided the basis of his sixth century dating: King (1881), p. 4.

⁷⁵⁴ King (1881), p. 3; Middleton (1892), p. 84; Leclercq “Croix et Crucifix”, in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3066 nr 3374; Henig (1975), cat. nr 139.

uniformly vertical incisions descending below this line, terminating in angular cuts either side of the ankles, indicate the fall of pleated drapery. Furthermore, the bareness of the chest above the waistband is indicated by two circular cuts on the upper body, which give the appearance of breast-like contours. These contours compare with the bare chests of the thieves as they are represented in the depiction of the Crucifixion on the seventh century “Aba Moun” amulet [Pl.13c]. On the Lewis gem, what may appear to be cuffs at Jesus’ wrists for sleeves are in fact the ties binding his arms to the crossbar: the two vertical lines carved to demarcate the ties can be seen extending from the top of the wrists to below the line of the crossbar. A contrast is provided by the figuration in the Coptic papyrus: as mentioned above the lines at Jesus’ wrists in this image do seem to indicate sleeve cuffs, and there is no waistband, only a hem shown for a longer tunic [Pl.13f].

Although less commonly shown for Jesus in Christian art - nails being used in fifth century western examples, on the sixth century painted scenes (Rabbula and Vatican panel, Pl.7) and on the earliest Crucifixion icons from the East (namely icons B.32, B.36 at St Catherine’s Monastery, Mount Sinai⁷⁵⁵ [Pl.14b & c]) - this method of binding the victim’s wrists is an historically accurate one. On the ampullae, although Jesus’ arms are not shown bound or nailed (note the absence of these in the Coptic figuration also), those of the thieves are often shown tied to their crosses, either with arms at the sides or behind their backs.⁷⁵⁶ The Perm plate shows Jesus and the thieves bound to the upright shaft of the cross with two bands crossing over their chests. On the Aba Moun amulet, all three figures appear as they do on the Sabina panel and some ampullae, with elbows at the sides of the body and the lower arms extended at right angles. However no ties are applied to the body of Jesus; they are only shown around the ankles of the thieves. Essentially then we should be aware that as with the form of Jesus’ robe, there was not complete uniformity between artists and their workshops over the methods used for the affixation of Jesus to the cross, rather there existed scope for experimentation and thus variation. Given this variation and the evident bareness

⁷⁵⁵ For the icons see Weitzmann (1976), v. 1, pp. 57-58 & 61-64.

⁷⁵⁶ eg. Monza 5 (showing the thieves elbows ties at the sides with the lower arm at right angles to the body) or Monza 6 (with the hands tied at the sides) and Monza 12 (arms tied behind the back): Grabar (1958) pls XII, XIII & XXII.

of Jesus' chest, the skirt on the Lewis gem may be a crude rendering of the longer loincloth (*perizoma*) which emerged in Byzantine art.⁷⁵⁷ If Schlumberger's line drawing of the Aba Moun amulet is precise [Pl.13c], the knee-length loincloths with vertical folds worn by the thieves on that medallion are close parallels to the ankle-length Lewis skirt.⁷⁵⁸ Although substantially shorter, the skirts of the tunics worn by the two attendant figures on the Louvre pendant are almost identical in style, with waistband and vertical folds to knee height [Pl.13a]. The Aba Moun amulet is dated to the seventh century with an Egyptian provenance posited by Vikan, and an Egyptian origin for the late sixth/early seventh century Louvre pendant has also been proposed.⁷⁵⁹ The thieves in the magical Coptic drawing also wear knee-length "skirts", raising the possibility of an iconographic connection between our gem and an Egyptian model. That this model had some link with a Palestinian/Syrian type is seen in the close iconographic relationship between the Coptic drawing and the Perm plate, most noticeable in the unusually pointy chin and highly accentuated open eyes (compare those of the thieves) shown for Jesus in each.

An attempt to locate parallels for the Lewis gem on the basis of the form of Jesus' skirt can result in an over-emphasis of this iconographic feature. Although the Lewis Jesus is more fully clothed in comparison with the fifth century Maskell and Sabina figurations, it will be argued here that it is the nudity of the upper half of the body that should be the focus of attention in this image as opposed to the unconventional nature of the skirt. Without becoming entangled in the question of the *significance* of the change from the *colobium* to the loincloth which occurred in Crucifixion iconography around the eighth century in the East, it is necessary to point out that the Lewis gem and its unusually beskirted and consequently bare-chested Jesus presents some interesting evidence on the subject.⁷⁶⁰ Jesus' bare chest, whilst obviously not offensive during and prior to the fifth century, had proven decidedly so by the late sixth century as evinced not only in the uniform

⁷⁵⁷ Maser (1976), p. 268. Tristan (1996), p. 565, also denotes it as such.

⁷⁵⁸ Schlumberger (1893), nr 1.

⁷⁵⁹ Durand (1992), p. 88.

⁷⁶⁰ Martin (1955), p. 196, suggested the revival of the earlier type may have been a conscious reversion to the early Christian model for its presumed historical accuracy. The significance of the change is briefly discussed by Corrigan (1995), pp. 46-48.

adoption of the *colobium* in material figurations of Christ's crucified body in the East by this time, but also in the case of the Narbonne scandal in the West. An overt hostility towards the earlier loincloth type is expressed in Gregory of Tour's sixth century account of the draping in Narbonne of an image of Christ crucified in a loincloth. By the time of Gregory's narration, the story had evolved, from whatever origins it may have had, to become an artfully crafted tale in which the contemporary hostility felt towards the Narbonne image is made strikingly manifest as Jesus' own outrage at his loinclothed likeness: his alarming acts of physical intimidation towards the priest include repeated and heavy blows and a final threat of death.⁷⁶¹ As discussed in Chapter II, the likely scenario is that the Narbonne image was originally produced in the fifth century at a time when the loinclothed Jesus was the norm, and that following the sixth century diffusion of the eastern *colobium* type through western Christian communities as at Narbonne, the type became objectionable.⁷⁶² Yet despite the ubiquity of the oriental *colobium* between the late sixth and eighth centuries, predominating in the East during the sixth and seventh centuries and in the Carolingian West from the mid-eighth century onwards, extant artistic evidence suggests that not very long after its accession in the early Byzantine period there was some indecision as to how Jesus should be arrayed on the cross.

Without conferring undue importance to one art work in the absence of so much material evidence from the period, it would be unwise to dismiss any connection between the appearance of the bare chest on the Lewis gem, and an indication of a cognate representation in the earliest Crucifixion icon in existence. On icon B.32 from Mount Sinai, dated and attributed by Weitzmann to seventh/eighth century Palestine [*Pl.14b*],⁷⁶³ Jesus was intended to be bare-chested, with an original white and blue loincloth now visible beneath the flaking paint of the purplish *colobium*

⁷⁶¹ Wessel (1967), p. 335, also notes the almost legend-like quality in Jesus' triple appearance and his success in bringing about the veiling.

⁷⁶² Reil (1904), p. 112. See also the conclusions of John Osborne *Early Medieval Wall-Paintings in San Clemente, Rome* (New York, 1984), p. 60: cited by Corrigan (1995), p. 58 n. 7. Baldwin-Smith (1918), pp. 205-206; the author details the way in which Oriental craftsman and their art objects infiltrated Marseilles, Narbonne and other ports in Provence at a time of increased commercial and religious expansion in Gaul and Provence and the influx of Syrian merchants, pp. 205-6.

⁷⁶³ Weitzmann (1976), nr B.32, pl. 23, p. ?

that was painted over the top.⁷⁶⁴ Jesus is shown with the cross nimbus and arms slightly rotated at the shoulders so that the hands turn towards heaven as is customary in early Byzantine art and further accentuated on the Lewis gem. Owing to the deterioration of the face, the presence or absence of a beard cannot be determined, and the knee-length cloth remains at odds with the Lewis skirt. Nevertheless, the semblances shared on several iconographic levels should point to the likelihood that the gem was produced after the initial introduction of the *colobium* in the sixth century, possibly at a time when the pictorial motif of the loincloth was co-existent with this type but not yet the most common of the two. By the mid eighth century, the two types could co-exist in the same Church, as at S. Maria Antiqua, the first Church in Rome. A Crucifixion was first painted on the triumphal arch over the main apse during the pontificate of John VII (705-7).⁷⁶⁵ As reconstructed by Nordhagen, this version exhibits no trace of a *colobium*⁷⁶⁶ and shows the “Semitic” Christ, with minimal facial hair, short curly hair extending above the ears, and a cross-nimbus.⁷⁶⁷ In contrast, a second version, executed in the chapel of Theodotus during the pontificate of Pope Zacharias (741-752), preserves the symmetrical eastern type (but without the thieves, the soldiers casting lots or the holy women [*Pl.14a*]), Jesus being presented in the *colobium*, with hair at least to the nape of the neck as he is in the contemporary mosaics of John VII in the Basilica of St Peter, and with a cross-nimbus.⁷⁶⁸ The act of clothing Jesus’ lower body on the Lewis jasper should, I think, denote the gem as a product of the formative stage of the period of transition and experimentation with iconographic choices that took place during the seventh, eighth and well into the ninth centuries in the East. The gem also exhibits a conversancy with the Semitic type, being beardless.

Concomitant to the choice of clothing in early Byzantine Crucifixion iconography was the decision at to whether Christ’s eyes should be open or closed.⁷⁶⁹ On the

⁷⁶⁴ Weitzmann (1976), 57-58, cat. nr B.32, fig. 13.

⁷⁶⁵ Corrigan (1995), pp. 46-47, & p. 58, n. 7.

⁷⁶⁶ Nordhagen (1967), p. 389.

⁷⁶⁷ Belting (1994), pp. 134-149.

⁷⁶⁸ The St Peter mosaic, in which Jesus is also bearded, dates to the Pontificate of John VIII, 705-707: Nordhagen (1967), pp. 388 & 389.

⁷⁶⁹ Corrigan in Ousterhout & Brubaker (1995), p. 47.

Lewis gem, Jesus' head is evoked by a round depression within the nimbus, with one central and two (smaller) outer lines carved at its base. In the original line drawing [*Pl.12b*] the lines were interpreted as eyes and a nose. Yet surely they are too low and of uncharacteristic shape to be meant for such facial features; they may be to define the neck. Certainly the frontal depiction of the upright neck and head matches the representation of Jesus on the Vatican reliquary, the Perm plate and the Coptic papyrus, where the eyes are open. In the absence of any clear indication as to the suggestion of any eyes, let alone whether they are open or closed, the form of the nimbus and the beardless face remain to be examined in relation to the gem's emulation of an identifiable early Byzantine type for the representation of the crucified Jesus.

Both the rounded style of the nimbus on the gem and its ascription to a beardless face is characteristic of early Byzantine miniature work, and as with the penchant to clothe Jesus, points to the design's dependency on an "historic" type. It is well known that nimbi, described by T. Matthews as "visual targets",⁷⁷⁰ were utilised by Christians in art as early as the third century to suggest an aura of light radiating behind the head. As far as Crucifixion iconography is concerned, Jesus was not consistently nimbed in the fourth and fifth centuries. He first has a (plain) nimbus on the Nott gem [*Pl.10a*] and subsequently the Maskell relief [*Pl.5a*]⁷⁷¹ but is not nimbed on either the Constanza carnelian [*Pl.10d*] or the Sabina panel [*Pl.5b*]. A reversal of this discrepancy occurs in the sixth century when the "historic" figure is consistently shown with the nimbus. In various figurations, including the mature reading presented in the Rabbula miniature and the Vatican panel [*Pl.7*],⁷⁷² and smaller objects such as the clay Crucifixion token in Athens,⁷⁷³ the Perm plate [*Pl.13e*] and the octagonal gold/niello rings in Palermo and Washington,⁷⁷⁴ the nimbus is plain. Without viewing the original papyrus, it is not possible to say whether the ring around Jesus' head in the Coptic drawing

⁷⁷⁰ Matthews (1993), p. 96.

⁷⁷¹ see the earlier arguments regarding the later addition of the nimbus.

⁷⁷² By this time Mary (Rabbula) and often both Mary and John (Vatican panel) are nimbed.

⁷⁷³ Athens, Benaki Museum: Vikan (1994), fig. 197.2.

⁷⁷⁴ The Palermo ring shows Jesus robed, nimbate, with two thieves and possibly two kneeling suppliants; Engemann (1973), abb. 5. The Washington ring shows the same figuration minus the suppliants; Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), p. 496 cat. nr 446.

[Pl.13f] is intended to indicate hair or a nimbus: certainly, the ring is not hatched as those shown around the heads of the two thieves are and which is certainly intended to indicate hair. Yet around this date, the cross-nimbus, with rays of light shooting upwards and sideways like the arms of a cross, also became popular. It was standard practice on ampullae for the bearded and long-haired Christ, crucified either symbolically or in historic form. In such situations the *titulus* is sometimes shown tangential to its top.⁷⁷⁵ The cross-nimbus also appears on the gold rings in London and Baltimore [Pl.12d & e], where the historic figure is shown. In later figurations, this feature helped to denote Jesus as the central protagonist, distinct from a plain nimbus utilised perhaps for Mary or John, as occurs in the fresco in the Chapel of Theodotus, S. Maria Antiqua [Pl.14a]. Whilst the Crucifixion does not survive on any other engraved gems of this period, the cross-nimbus for Jesus is known in this medium, appearing on at least seven of Spier's group [Appendix 3.1, nrs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 & 9- including this gem], and on other miniature objects used as amulets at this time, including engraved crystals,⁷⁷⁶ and terracotta amulets.⁷⁷⁷

Turning now to an examination of the form of the cross-nimbus. On the ampullae, the nimbus could extend from one shoulder to the other to form an arch, or could completely encompass Jesus' bust to form a closed medallion or *clipeus*: the open-style is always utilised when Jesus' full body is shown clothed in the *colobium*,⁷⁷⁸ and sometimes when his bust is placed above a laureate⁷⁷⁹ or plain cross,⁷⁸⁰ the closed-style nimbus is used *only* in the symbolic/Veneration iconography, appearing over a plain cross⁷⁸¹ or alternatively at the juncture of the horizontal and

⁷⁷⁵ eg. Bobbio 3 & 4. On the *titulus* see Werner (1990), pp. 183, n. 32, & 195. For the cruciform type with the long haired, bearded Jesus: Balicka-Witakowska (1997), p. 106.

⁷⁷⁶ See the comments of Lieselotte Kötzsche in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), nr 393, p. 437-8.

⁷⁷⁷ The bearded bust with cruciform nimbus appears by itself on an early Byzantine terracotta amulet from Palestine, now in the British Museum: Camber (1981), p. 105, fig. 14.

⁷⁷⁸ Monza 12, 13 & Bobbio 7. See also a Palestinian medallion in Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart, Inv. Nr 1981-165: Kötzsche-Breitenbruch (1984), taf. 27a.

⁷⁷⁹ Monza 9, 10, 11 & Bobbio 6. See parallels in Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum & Berlin, Staatliche Museen: Kötzsche-Breitenbruch (1984), taf. 25b & 28a.

⁷⁸⁰ Monza 2, 5, Bobbio 18 & probably 17 [poorly preserved]. See also parallels in the Detroit Institute of Arts [Lesley (1939), p. 214 fig. 1], and Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington [Ross (1962), p. 71, nr 87, pl. XLVIII].

⁷⁸¹ Monza 6, 7, 8, 14 & 15.

vertical arms of the laureate cross.⁷⁸² The common style of cross-nimbi extant on these early Byzantine objects associated with the Holy Land for the symbolic or historic representation of the Crucifixion has the lines representing the rays of light extending from Christ's head to the inner circumference of the disc: for example, in the pictorialisations of the Crucifixion on the Syrian silver armband from the de Béarn Collection,⁷⁸³ the Baltimore gold ring [*Pl.12e*], also probably Syrian/Palestinian, on the Jerusalem ampullae (where they tend to flare out from Christ's head to the inner circumference of the nimbus), on a mould in Brooklyn, and on medallions in Berlin, London and Trèves.⁷⁸⁴ Aside from the ampullae, Jesus is unbearded in all instances as he is on the Lewis gem [*Pl.12c*]. More specifically, in the case of the Lewis nimbus the circular disc is punctured by three rays, each formed by two short parallel lines.⁷⁸⁵ This circular, perforated style is rarer within the class of cruciform nimbi for the unbearded Jesus; however a parallel can be located in the Crucifixion roundel on the silver armband now in Colombia whereon the bust-cross is flanked by the two thieves; Jesus' nimbus is shown to be cruciform by three dot-like incisions which are made on the cusp of the nimbus so as to cause perforation.⁷⁸⁶ The reduction of the three lines to dots, possibly a result of miniaturisation, can also be seen in the Crucifixion roundel on Bobbio ampulla 18.⁷⁸⁷ A closer parallel however occurs in the Crucifixion iconography appearing on one facet of the London gold ring where the nimbus is an almost exact replica of that shown on the Lewis gem [*Pl.12c & d*]. The full

⁷⁸² Bobbio 3, 4 & 5, where the three rays of the nimbus are formed by the horizontal arms and the upper section of the cross. For the cross-bust motif on ampullae and the variant nimbi see: Balicka-Witakowska (1997), pp. 105-107.

⁷⁸³ Vikan (1991/2), p. 41, nr 18, fig. 7.

⁷⁸⁴ For the mould and medallions: Balicka-Witakowska (1997), figs 17-20.

⁷⁸⁵ Of the early Byzantine crystals authenticated by Kornbluth (1995), pp. 23-32, some have Jesus with a circular nimbus of the rounded style seen on the Lewis jasper (cf. her nrs. 7, 8, 9), whilst some are elongated in shape (nrs. 1, 7 & 23). As far as I can discern from the reproductions in that article, nr 8 (showing an Adoration of the Magi scene), depicts a cruciform nimbus for the infant Jesus.

⁷⁸⁶ Vikan (1991/2), p. 41, nr 11, fig. 10f. This is in disagreement with Balicka-Witakowska who cites the form of the nimbus as plain: (1997), p. 106. Although the plain nimbus is used for the infant Jesus in the Baptism roundel, the Ascension roundel repeats the perforated type from the Crucifixion quite clearly.

⁷⁸⁷ Grabar (1958), pl. XLIX (detail).

figure of an unbearded Jesus that appears on the ring,⁷⁸⁸ with arms firmly outstretched between two thieves and with a nimbus almost identical to the Lewis, constitutes a significant iconographic counterpart to the Lewis figuration.⁷⁸⁹

The positioning of Jesus' palms, facing upwards and flexed back at the wrists, should also be noted. This attitude, which exudes a sense of serene deliberation but in this pictorial context may simply be a compositional necessity due to the constriction of space at the outer sides of the design field, is unparalleled in Late Antiquity. However, it does approximate an iconographic development of the early Byzantine period. In pre-fifth century pictorialisations, the palms have either faced down (as on the Pereire and Constanza gems, *Pl. 9a & Pl. 10d*), or to the front (as on the Nott gem, *Pl. 10a*). The front-facing style can be seen to indicate the victim's receptiveness to his fate, emulating the early Christian stance of prayer adopted by *orant* figures [eg. *Pl. 1b*]. It re-appears in the fifth century on the Maskell and Sabina reliefs [*Pl. 5*] and in the seventh century on the Perm plate and Coptic papyrus [*Pl. 13e & f*]. In the sixth/seventh century, in the Syro-Palestinian Rabbula and Vatican reliquary figurations [*Pl. 7*], on three Palestinian icons preserved at St Catherine's Monastery [*Pl. 14b-d*] and subsequently in the Byzantine influenced eighth century fresco in the chapel of Theodotus in S. Maria Antiqua [*Pl. 14a*], Jesus' forearms are rotated so that the palms no longer face out to the viewer but are angled upwards. This subtle development may be seen to refine further the post-sixth century date previously suggested for the gem in the presentation of Jesus as beardless and bare-chested, and in the form of his nimbus.

2. The Lance and Sponge-Bearers

The late sixth/seventh century date for the Lewis jasper suggested in the aforementioned iconographic features for Jesus receives fundamental support in the identity, iconography, and the compositional unit formed by the addition of the

⁷⁸⁸ The status of Jesus (clothed or naked) is difficult to determine. His bodily form is reminiscent of the Constanza Christ in that the plump shape betrays no physical features, although there is some tailoring of the legs in at the ankles. However, in comparison to the thieves, who have their arms tied behind their backs, the outline of the body is less shapely, perhaps indicating the fall of the sleeveless *colobium*. As noted previously, the three other extant rings in this group, in Palermo, Washington and Baltimore, all show Jesus in the *colobium*.

⁷⁸⁹ There may be a further match in the Aba Moun amulet where the three rays of Christ's nimbus do not perforate the arch but are shown as two-part in Schlumberger's line drawing. Having not examined the amulet itself I cannot be sure.

two diminutively sized figures flanking the cross. The identification of the pair as the lance and sponge-bearers from the Passion narratives can be made with confidence, in spite of a tradition in scholarship to suggest otherwise. The highly stylised line drawing of the gem which first appeared with King's 1881 article has perpetuated several misconceptions about the iconography [*Pl.12b*]: illustrating the design as it appeared in the impression, with the subject appearing in reverse, the drawing fabricated the presence of facial details for Jesus, showing eyes, nose and mouth that are not indicated on the jasper, and omitted important details in the representation of one of the standing figures.⁷⁹⁰ If we observe the photograph of the gem's obverse face to avoid confusion [*Pl.12c*], this incorrectly drawn figure appears on Jesus' left (right on the impression and drawing, *Pl.12a & b*) and is shown gesturing with one arm extended forward and legs parted as though walking towards Jesus. As photograph c. on *Plate 12* attests, the figure is actually carved with both feet touching the exergual line and actively thrusting a shaft towards Jesus' waist. The iconographic feature of the shaft is important and although it appears as an extremely faint line in the cast, it does remain visible on the gem's slightly worn surface. On the basis of the original drawing however, where the detail of the shaft is omitted, the distinctive thrust action was understandably read as a gesture of acclamation. From this conclusion it was deduced that the shaft-holding figure on the opposite side of the cross was the lance-bearer from the gospel narratives.⁷⁹¹

From the endurance of these erroneous conclusions in ensuing descriptions of the gem we can infer that the drawing came to form the sole means of studying the gem's iconography.⁷⁹² This predicament is exacerbated by the fact that the official (and only) image of the jasper permitted by the Fitzwilliam Museum for publication is the photograph of the impression [*Pl.12a*]. Until recently, Henig remained the only scholar to have published the Fitzwilliam photograph, albeit on

⁷⁹⁰ Middleton (1892), p. 84.

⁷⁹¹ This identification was first made by King (1881), p. 4; subsequently Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 3.2, col. 3066, fig. 3374; and Derchain (1964), p. 111.

⁷⁹² The drawing appeared in Leclercq's "Gemmes" article, in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, col. 846, fig. 5090, in addition to "Croix et Crucifix", 3.2, col. 3066, fig. 3374. Derchain (1964), p. 111; and Maser (1976), p. 269, fig. 5. Hence, see now Tristan (1996), p. 565.

a very small scale, and he did not comment on the identity of the figures.⁷⁹³ Examination of the jasper reveals a surprising clarity of modelling in parts of the design. Perhaps more importantly for the interpretation of the design, such examination reveals that two lines, one held by each of the two figures and angled in towards the cross, were originally carved onto the surface of the gem to represent the lance for piercing and the reed for the extension of the sponge, although the sponge is not shown. Incidentally, the length of the implements corresponds to the size of the figures wielding them and not to the scale of Jesus, who is presented twice as large.

According to the surviving evidence, the pictorial debut of the lance-wielding centurion occurs in the fifth century in the West, on the Maskell relief. There he is placed on the right of the cross to pierce Christ's left side, balancing the figures of Mary and John who are paired on the opposite side of the cross in what seems to be an unambiguous elucidation of the Johannine Passion narrative [19.25-26]. Additionally, his first appearance accords with the historical practice of piercing a crucified victim's left side in order to strike the heart.⁷⁹⁴ Yet the seeming compliance with the narrative and with historical practice is deceptive, for already in this formative image the artist has aimed beyond a prosaic attempt at pictorialising narrative detail. His inclusion of the lance-bearer reinforces the presentation of Jesus across the series of four ivory casket-panels as the consummate divine power who defeats the lance and thus death [Pl.4b]. Underpinning this motif of the energetic, defiant Jesus standing against the cross is its pictorial juxtaposition with the figure of the limp, defeated Judas on the left, hanging from the branch of a tree that sags visibly under his dead weight [Pl.5a].

After the ivory, the centurion does not appear again until the sixth century, when his solo role as the perpetrator of the after-death wound is abandoned in favour of his integration into an alliance, of pictorial and theological import, with the bystander who held a vinegar-soaked sponge to Jesus' lips. This pairing first appears in the Rabbula illumination [Pl.7a], with the insertion of the two figures

⁷⁹³ Henig (1978), p. 39, nr 139.

⁷⁹⁴ Légasse (1997), p. 98: the water that flowed from the wound in addition to blood was probably pericardiac fluid, p. 161 n. 116.

between Christ and the thieves. Acclaimed for its unprecedented depiction of the full panoply of characters from the Passion narratives, the vibrantly coloured and expressionistic Rabbula illumination included - in addition to the figures of Christ, the two thieves, Mary, John and the lance and sponge-bearers - not two but three soldiers beneath the cross dividing the garments and three pious women to the far right of the composition [Mt. 27:55,56; Mk 15:40,41; Lk. 23.49; Jn 19.25]. Despite a rare appearance of the sponge-bearer alone on a medallion in Berlin, where he crouches beside the cross-bust in a position more akin to supplication than piercing, the two men were consistently paired in pictorialisations of the Crucifixion at this period.⁷⁹⁵ Whilst the piercing provided a reference to Jesus' divinity and Messianic or exalted status according to Zechariah 12.10 and Revelation 1.7, the sponge-bearer provided a visual reference to the offering of vinegar to Jesus just prior to his death in fulfilment of the Psalmist's prophecy [Ps. 69.22]. Like the piercing, this action has some historical truth, executioners often giving "vinegar" or a drink known as *posca* to the victims to delay their death; hence Légasse suggests that the mention in the Gospels probably derives from an eye-witness account and originally had no specific theological meaning.⁷⁹⁶

Although the two men thus have no narrative and until now no visual connection, their pictorial significance from the sixth century is seen to stem from their ability to visually enunciate the dual reality of Christ's natures, human and divine:⁷⁹⁷ the human thirst being quenched by the sponge; the lance opening the wound that is the source of eternal life [Ex. 17.6; 1 Cor. 10.4].⁷⁹⁸ Moreover, since the offering of the sponge occurred prior to death, and the piercing was meant to confirm that death (cf. Jn 19.34), the simultaneous display of both acts sidestepped the problem of showing the Crucified at a particular moment in time, already such a sticking point for theologians.⁷⁹⁹ Hence throughout the heated christological and Soteriological debates conducted in the years immediately prior, during and after

⁷⁹⁵ Berlin, Staatliche Museen. The two thieves are also present in what appears to be an otherwise standard early Byzantine figuration of the "symbolic" crucifixion. See Balicka-Witakowska (1997), fig. 18, with an identification of the figure p. 107 n. 47.

⁷⁹⁶ Légasse (1997), pp. 96-97.

⁷⁹⁷ Schiller (1972), pp. 93-94.

⁷⁹⁸ Goldschmidt (1940), p. 101.

⁷⁹⁹ Kartsonis (1986), pp. 33-39, regarding the christological issues attendant to the illustration of the death of Christ.

the Iconoclastic period, the presence of the pair in material figurations of the Crucifixion was crucial in alleviating the specification of Jesus' time of death. In accord with the belief that Jesus' right side symbolised his divine nature, the lance-bearer was moved from Jesus' left side on the Maskell relief, to his right in the Rabbula illumination.⁸⁰⁰ In addition to their theologically apposite role, the sixth century division of the pair either side of the cross corresponds to the Syrian/Palestinian predilection for symmetry in the layout of pictorial elements in Crucifixion imagery.⁸⁰¹

The page of the Rabbula manuscript afforded an ideal space and pictorial context for the elaboration of the pictorial narrative; likewise, the frieze-like style of the Vatican panel [*Pl.7b*]. Nevertheless, the cartoon-like conception of the Golgotha scene witnessed in these two instances could be similarly unravelled on the narrow confines of smaller objects, and even on round design spaces or spherical objects, as the Jerusalem ampullae emphatically attest. Furthermore, such smaller surface areas were in no way prohibitive of the full rehearsal of the details. On the small hand-held oil flasks, measuring between 4.6 to 7cms in diameter, not only is the Crucifixion popular as the main decoration on one side, in many instances it is found superimposed above the Resurrection.⁸⁰² This is the case for the figuration on Bobbio 6 where the deployment of a full cast of details, including the centurion and the sponge-bearer, is adroitly compressed into the top half of the design field.⁸⁰³ Whilst the appearance of the lance and sponge-bearers on Bobbio 6 is unique amongst extant ampullae, there is the remarkable instance of the Baltimore gold ring [*Pl.12e*] where on one tiny facet of the ring's hoop the artist shows Jesus flanked by the two men in addition to the thieves and the cosmic symbols of the sun and moon. Intriguingly, the figural proportions and compositional unit of this ring's figuration are strikingly similar to our gem: being miniature in format, the lance and sponge man appear in profile at less than half the size of the crucified

⁸⁰⁰ On the change and its significance, see Gurewicz (1957), *passim*.

⁸⁰¹ Morey (1926), p. 164.

⁸⁰² The diameter of the ampulla with the Crucifixion and Resurrection in Detroit is 4.6cms: Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), nr 524, p. 587. The flasks in the Monza and Bobbio collections measure between d. 6-7cms: Grigg (1974), p. 2.

⁸⁰³ Grabar (1958), pls XXXVII-XXXIX.

Christ, who has a cruciform nimbus and is clothed in the *colobium*.⁸⁰⁴ It is therefore possible to view the Lewis figuration as a cropped version of an image like this or the Vatican panel where the artist has not necessarily selected components from, or simplified the compositional schema of, the image but may well have sliced off the outer sections to leave the core triune figuration of Jesus, the lance and the sponge-bearers. Although preference is usually given to the kneeling soldiers/generic suppliants in such miniature and reduced compositional formats in Palestinian christological cycles, particularly as they survive on the ampullae,⁸⁰⁵ the Lewis gem indicates the coexistence of an alternative format that included the lance and sponge-bearers.

In light of Bobbio 6 and the Baltimore ring, the frequent omission of the sponge and lance bearers in other figurations of the period should be seen not as a result of spatial restrictions *per se*, as Weitzmann suggests,⁸⁰⁶ but of the general inclination of artisans towards the symbolic formula, for smaller objects at least.⁸⁰⁷ The cropping of the historic image to include only the lance and sponge-bearers beside the cross may have an important parallel in the probably contemporary Byzantine rock crystal pendant in the Louvre (late sixth/seventh century) [Pl.13a].⁸⁰⁸ Engraved with a symbolic Crucifixion scene similar to the early Byzantine model found on the ampullae and elsewhere,⁸⁰⁹ the bearded bust of Jesus is shown surmounting a cross, out of which flow the four rivers of Paradise and above and below the *patibulum* of which are disposed four small

⁸⁰⁴ Octagonal gold ring [Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore: nr 45.15] The Baltimore ring is the only one out of the four to feature this fullsome iconography: Vikan (1984), p. 83 & Vikan (1991/2), p. 38, fig. 19.

⁸⁰⁵ The suppliants appear on all nineteen extant crucifixion scenes on ampullae in the Monza and Bobbio collections including the central roundel of Bobbio 18, Grabar (1958), pl. XLIX. On the appearance of the figures and their identity, Grigg (1974), pp. 233-235. See also Vikan (1990b), p. 103.

⁸⁰⁶ Weitzmann (1974), p. 41.

⁸⁰⁷ On the combinations of pictorial elements with the bust-cross see Balicka- Witakowska (1997), pp. 105-108.

⁸⁰⁸ J. Durand in Bibliothèque nationale (1992), cat. nr 37; Warland (1986), Kat. E6, Abb. 127, pp. 117-119; Balicka-Witakowska (1997), p. 104 & n. 20, fig. 16.

⁸⁰⁹ Note the stylistic and compositional similarities between the Louvre crystal and that in Ohio (almost identical in size, being 3.5 x 2cms -the Louvre crystal being 3.5 x 1.8cms), pictured in Warland (1986), Kat. E7, Abb. 128.

crosses.⁸¹⁰ Flanking the bust are the symbols of the sun and moon, in exactly the same positions as the unknown symbols on the Lewis gem. Either side of the cross-bust are two identical male figures, whose identity is extremely difficult to ascertain: standing *en face*, their heads turned in profile to look at each other across the central motif, they raise their arms in the prayerful position affected by Jesus on the Sabina panel. Whilst the positioning of their legs would seem to be modelled on a common prototype utilised elsewhere in early Byzantine art for the representation of the thieves in miniature format,⁸¹¹ it is more likely that they are intended to be the lance and sponge-bearers. In the absence of the poses customarily struck by the latter pair in early Byzantine figurations of the Crucifixion, including the Lewis gem, this posited identity must be seen to be evinced in the knee-length tunics they wear and in the fact that the right-hand figure appears to be holding something (a shield?).⁸¹² The short tunic with girdle represented on the figures of the Louvre crystal was usually worn by slaves or working people, sometimes aristocrats, but also comprised the basis of the military costume.⁸¹³ As such, it is illustrated in the Maskell, Rabbula and Vatican figurations for the lance-bearer, and seemingly on Bobbio ampulla 6 for the sponge-bearer (the soldier-figure with the lance being damaged). The crystal is thought to have an Egyptian or Syrian provenance, which, given the compositional similarities with the Lewis gem, must support the eastern locus of production posited for the jasper.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹⁰ Interestingly, the *patibulum* is similar to that on the Constanza gem, terminating in identical transverse bars. Durand (1992), p. 87, suggests that the four crosses are an allusion to the Evangelists.

⁸¹¹ eg. Monza Ampullae 12-15: Grabar (1958); medallions in Berlin, London, Trèves & Stuttgart, plus a mould in Brooklyn: Balicka-Witakowska (1997), figs 18-20, 22 & 17. Durand in Bibliothèque nationale (1992), p. 87, mentions the semblance; see also Balicka-Witakowska (1997), p. 107, n. 46

⁸¹² Regrettably I am reliant on photographic reproduction for the apprehension of these details. Saints Peter and Paul, when identically proximated beside the bust-cross in early Byzantine art, are also represented in frontal view, turning to view the cross, but wear *pallia*, often extending one hand in acclamation: eg. the sixth century Palestinian/Constantinopolitan gem in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna: Warland (1986), Kat. nr E4.

⁸¹³ A. Stauffer in Bowersock et. al., (1999), p. 381.

⁸¹⁴ Bibliothèque nationale (1992), p. 88: Egyptian, owing to similarities in style and technique with Graeco-Roman magical gems of the third and fourth centuries [eg. L. Kötzsche in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), nr 395]; Syrian, on the basis of its stylistic conformity to Syrian-Palestinian amulets [as Ross classifies two sixth century crystals in Washington, Ross (1962), v. 1, nrs, 114-115]. Durand supports the Egyptian theory.

As demonstrated above, the sixth century date for the insertion of the lance/sponge pair into the Golgotha scene can be understood in light of contemporary theological efforts to elucidate the double reality of Jesus on the cross, of God and man in the Son.⁸¹⁵ As such, the insertion also corresponds to the symbolic pairing, symmetric division and resultant juxtaposition of pictorial components onto the right and left sides of Jesus which begins at this date to enhance the dual reality. The rise of the pair's pictorial notoriety should also be set against the contemporary veneration in Jerusalem of the lance and sponge as relics from the Crucifixion, attested in literary accounts from the sixth century. The *Breviarius* records that the original lance, re-fashioned to form a cross, stood at the centre of the Martyrium, the Church of Constantine, with the reed and sponge being stored within a chamber in that Church.⁸¹⁶ In the later sixth century, the Piacenza pilgrim and her companions participate vicariously in the Crucifixion event not simply by viewing the relics of the reed and sponge but also, rather alarmingly, by drinking water from the sponge!⁸¹⁷ The relics were then, like the cross, sanctified by their contact with Christ's body. It should also be noted that the Patriarchal cross shown on the external lid of the sixth century Vatican reliquary is crossed by two staves which Morey interpreted as representations of the lance and reed.⁸¹⁸ So both the fact of veneration and the rising christological debates concerning the question of which of Christ's natures, human or divine, suffered on the cross, can be seen to have interacted to procure the notable status of the soldier and the bystander at the cross in fuller pictorialisations of the Crucifixion as well as reduced pictorialisations seen on this gem. Moreover, both considerations bolster the proposed date and region of production for the Lewis jasper.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁵ Schiller (1972), p. 94.

⁸¹⁶ *Breviarius on Jerusalem*: Trans. Wilkinson (1977), pp. 59-60.

⁸¹⁷ The Piacenza Pilgrim, *Travels*, c. 570: Trans. Wilkinson (1977), p. 83. Vikan has examined the importance of sight and touch, of physical contact with holy places and objects in the pilgrim experience: (1982), pp. 24-25; (1984), p. 66 & passim; (1990b), pp. 98-99. See also Wilkinson (1977), pp. 40-42, & more recently on the primacy of the visual experience, Hahn (1997).

⁸¹⁸ Morey (1926), p. 151. This interpretation is accepted by Werner (1990), p. 183 n. 30. Considering the veneration of the lance and reed in Jerusalem and the reliquaries relationship with pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Morey's theory is convincing.

⁸¹⁹ Grigg (1974), p. 234, noted that the rare appearance of the lance and spongeman on ampullae was particularly unusual in consideration of pilgrims' interest in the relics of the reed and sponge.

Having confirmed the identity of the attendant men on the Lewis gem, two questions need to be addressed. Can a distinction be made between the two figures; and is such a distinction necessary to further our understanding of the iconography? Unfortunately, the diminutive size of the figures and the simplicity of their forms means that few details of clothing are clearly betrayed for the purposes of differentiation.⁸²⁰ They are near duplicates, in scale, proportion and distance from the cross, both standing on the exergual line and facing Jesus. There is however an important distinction in posture, and a small but perceptible difference in the length of the implements they hold. The figure seen at the right of the cross on the gem stands passively, both arms seemingly brought together across the front of the body to clasp the base of the staff, an action matching the posture of both like characters on the Baltimore gold ring; the figure to the left meanwhile is shown executing a thrusting action, with one arm bent forward and the other back. This action has its own correlatives on Bobbio 6 (for the sponge-bearer, the lance-bearer being damaged), the Rabbula manuscript (for the lance) and the Vatican panel (for both). However, unlike the shaft on the right, which terminates in the hands of its wielder, the lower end of the left shaft can be clearly observed both on the gem [*Pl.12c*] and in the photograph of the cast [*Pl.12a*], protruding behind the figure's hips. Rendered as a very fine line, the shaft extends from behind the body, passing upwards through the torso and terminating beyond the extended arm. This small detail of the elongated shaft is curious. It can be seen in conjunction with a similar thrusting action in the iconography of the sponge-bearer and his reed on Bobbio ampulla 6,⁸²¹ in that of the Rabbula lance-bearer,⁸²² and in that of the lance and sponge-bearers in the Vatican panel.⁸²³ The longer length of the lance has some historical basis: soldiers involved in executions were drawn from auxiliary troops and were armed with longer weapons, useless in battle.⁸²⁴ Thus on the Lewis gem, the thrusting action of the left figure and the length of his shaft can only determine his identity when compared with the second

⁸²⁰ The figure on the left appears to have some kind of projection from his head, possibly headress?

⁸²¹ Grabar (1958), pl. XXXIX: the lance-bearer does not survive on this ampulla so it is not possible to tell whether the lance extended beyond his right hand or not.

⁸²² The sponge bearer extends the reed with his right arm in the Rabbula scene, holding a handled container (a bucket) presumably of vinegar in his left hand.

⁸²³ Although note that the sponge-bearer is not quite as vigorous in his thrust as the lance-bearer.

⁸²⁴ Légasse (1997), p. 161, n. 113.

passive figure, which is more likely to be the sponge-bearer in view of his posture and shorter shaft. What must also be noted is the like positioning of the Rabbula and Vatican lance-bearers to the left of the cross, the post that would become conventional in Byzantine Crucifixion iconography.⁸²⁵ Hence, the semblance in pose and position to the left of the cross, and in consideration of the discernible difference in length of the spear in order for the figure to obtain leverage for piercing Jesus' side, we might suppose the left-hand figure on the jasper to be the lance-bearer, and not the figure on the right as previously proposed by Leclercq and Derchain.⁸²⁶

The posited identification of the lance-bearer on the gem is critical for two reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, is the implication that the gem's iconography conforms to the Byzantine tradition inaugurated on the Rabbula miniature and followed on the Vatican panel, Bobbio ampulla 6, and a bronze censer in Berlin,⁸²⁷ of showing Christ's *right* side being pierced. On the Maskell panel, the only pictorialisation of the Crucifixion prior to the Rabbula manuscript in which the lanceman appears, he is placed on the right of the cross to pierce Jesus' left side and a mark indicating the wound is clearly shown on Jesus' *left* side [*Pl.5a*].⁸²⁸ On the seventh century Perm plate [*Pl.13e*], stylistically resembling the Rabbula manuscript [*Pl.7a*], the centurion also pierces Christ's left side.⁸²⁹ The replication of the standard Byzantine compositional format on the Lewis gem in turn supports the likelihood that the design was intended to be viewed on the face of the stone and not in impression and was therefore carved in positive intaglio. This second fact tells us something about the function of the jasper. Gem engraving underwent a popularity decline in the fifth and sixth centuries, and whilst stones incised with religious imagery were still worn in ring

⁸²⁵ On the placement of the centurion see Gurewich (1957), pp. 358-9.

⁸²⁶ Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 3.2, col. 3066, fig. 3374; Derchain (1964), p. 111.

⁸²⁷ Berlin, Staatliche Museen; see Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), cat. nr 563.

⁸²⁸ Gurewich (1957), pp. 358ff.

⁸²⁹ Having not seen the Baltimore gold ring, I cannot comment on whether the centurion can be distinguished from the sponge-bearer in that portrayal of the Crucifixion: from the line drawing [*Pl.12e*] there seem to be no features that might distinguish one from the other.

settings as decorative devices, they were valued not so much for proficient execution or even the material on which they were engraved, but for their amuletic powers.

3. The Inscription

The Lewis jasper's compositional dependency on early Byzantine models for the representation of the Crucifixion finds further support in the placement of two symbols either side of Jesus' head, although these are not immediately recognisable. King originally recorded their possible identity as the monogrammatic abbreviation of Christ's name, the Greek capitals IC XC, being the first and last letters of IHCUC (Jesus) and XPICTOC (Christ). However, from the structure of the symbols it is difficult to see how they could be identified as such.⁸³⁰ After this, neither Middleton nor Derchain mentioned the symbols in their descriptions of the jasper.⁸³¹ Henig identified them as the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha (Α) and omega (appearing as Ω or ω), the sacred monogram symbolising God the Son as the sum of all things.⁸³² Whilst this interpretation is tempting, as will be outlined below, the symbols clearly do not resemble the Greek letters. Spier, whilst acknowledging the possibility, also suggests an alternative: the sun and moon [Appendix 3, nr 9]. From a summary investigation of Crucifixion imagery as it survives on contemporary artefacts, it appears that both propositions find equal support.

Firstly, were the symbols intended to be read as an alpha and omega, the design of this jasper would conform to the pattern emergent on the Pereire, Nott and Constanza gems of combining an image of Jesus crucified with an inscriptory reference to his name or title, appearing near the top of the design field. The two letters form the well known *nomen sacrum* used for God but more usually Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity: *Alpha* and *Omega*, a pairing that expresses the totality of God's power.⁸³³ Jesus gives himself this title in Revelation 1.8, 21.6, 22.13, where he is the Lamb who shares God's throne and

⁸³⁰ King (1881), p. 4, mentions that the two monograms are "apparently" made up of the letters, suggesting perhaps that this was the information supplied to Lewis at the time of purchase?

⁸³¹ Middleton (1892), p. 84. Derchain (1964), p. 111.

⁸³² Henig (1975), p. 39. Otherwise, the symbols are not mentioned in scholarship on the gem.

⁸³³ See the entry by E. Peretto "Alpha and Omega" in Berardino (ed.) (1992), v.1, p. 26.

his title and who still bears the marks of piercing. Interestingly, the piercing connection would appear to be most apt in this visual context. Whilst “first and last” is used of God at Isa. 44.6 and 48.12, in Revelation it is used only of Jesus, at 1.17 and 2.8 in connection with the Resurrection.⁸³⁴ Since Revelation was read aloud in services, the title and its significance was doubtless known to believers and even at this later date, would not have been lost to the owner of this gem.⁸³⁵ In fact, the letters are ubiquitous in Late Antique and early Byzantine art, being used in the visual arts from the third century onwards, often in conjunction with symbols utilised for Jesus, such as the Good Shepherd,⁸³⁶ or Jesus himself,⁸³⁷ but most frequently in conjunction with monogrammatic manifestations of the cross in its composite form- the *labarum* (chi & rho, first two letters of Christ in Greek), the chi and iota, (first two Greek letters of Jesus Christ), or the *staurogram* (tau & rho) where they appeared below or pendant from the arms of the cross.⁸³⁸ Appearing with the *labarum* on fourth century sarcophagi, the letters stressed the eternity of Christ.

The union of the letters with the cross formed a major decorative motif in miniature and monumental formats in western and eastern art from the fourth century onwards: on coins,⁸³⁹ gems,⁸⁴⁰ funerary inscriptions,⁸⁴¹ mosaics,⁸⁴²

⁸³⁴ Sweet (1979), p. 316.

⁸³⁵ Sweet (1979), p. 12. The apocalypse is in the form of a letter. Liturgical phrases at the end of the book indicate that it was intended to be read aloud, according to Sweet, presumably at the Sunday gatherings of the Christian communities.

⁸³⁶ An upright-oval gem drawn by Garrucci features the central figure of the Good Shepherd flanked by the letters, with the acrostic IXΘYC appearing below the exergue: Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6, pl. 477, nr 3. Pictured also in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, col. 833, nr 143, fig. 5028.

⁸³⁷ Portrait of Christ in the Catacomb of Commodilla, Rome. Mid-fourth century. Ceiling fresco: *in situ*. Grabar (1967), fig. 237.

⁸³⁸ The term “Staurogram” to denote the monogram of the *tau* and *rho* was coined by Dinkler, “Kreuzzeichen und Kreuz- Tau, Chi und Stauros”, *JAC* 5 (1962), 93-112. Cited by Finney (1999), “Cross”, pp. 303-305. Examples of the letters include the bronze cross in the Kuntsthistorisches Museum, Wien: staurogram. E. Dinkler-von Schubert (1995), p. 37, fig. 2. The letters could appear above the arms; eg. on a fragment from a sarcophagus (Lateran Museum) two soldiers stand beneath the arms of the *staurogram* cross, whilst the letters are placed above. Wilpert (1932), pp. 324-352, tav. 238 nr 4.

⁸³⁹ with the *labarum* on the coins of Magnentius, AD 350; see Petrie (1916), p. 103 nr 49.

⁸⁴⁰ See examples in Leclercq “Gemmes”, in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, nrs. 110, 111 & 112.

⁸⁴¹ with the *staurogram*: catacomb of Commodilla, fourth century. Cecchelli (1953), 196, fig. 30m; see also fig. 30n.

⁸⁴² with the *staurogram*: fourth century apse mosaic, Baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples. Cecchelli (1953), fig. 67.

sarcophagi,⁸⁴³ and even incised on a round marble altar top of the early Byzantine period.⁸⁴⁴ Yet for our purposes, it is their popularity in the East at the time of the posited production of our gem that must be observed. In the late sixth/seventh centuries the letters appear on eastern liturgical accoutrements, notably silverware,⁸⁴⁵ and the renowned Syrian glass chalice at Dumbarton Oaks where they flank a large *crux gemmata*.⁸⁴⁶ They are similarly disposed either side of the triumphal cross with the twelve disciples on the unique Munich sardonyx, possibly sixth/seventh century.⁸⁴⁷ Even more significant is the appearance of the letters with the cross beneath the external cover of the Vatican reliquary box; for on the inner cover is the historic Crucifixion painting with which our gem shows stylistic and iconographic connections.⁸⁴⁸ In addition to this example are two cognate bronze amulets, possibly of the fifth/sixth centuries from Syria/Palestine, whereon the letters appear beneath each arm of the *patibulum* with a conflated image of Christ and the cross.⁸⁴⁹ This striking union, of Jesus' body, the cross in conjunction with the letters, occurs again on a clay Byzantine pilgrim token from Tyre (diam. 4.7cms) published by G. Tchalenko. Now lost, the drawing which preserves this object shows a robed Christ assimilated to the cross in the presence of a kneeling suppliant.⁸⁵⁰ Whilst such iconography is more directly reminiscent of the symbolic/venerative genre seen on ampullae, there are several possibly coincidental but nonetheless interesting points of iconographic verisimilitude

⁸⁴³ The left end of the sarcophagus in S. Ambrogio, Milan; Katzenellenbogen (1947), p. 255, fig. 3. For the fragment from the Lateran: Gerke (1940), p. 109, fig. 26.

⁸⁴⁴ The altar table top is discussed at length by Marian Wenzel in Temple (ed.) (1990), cat. 15, pp. 62-66. The letters are incised with the Christogram.

⁸⁴⁵ For examples see Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), cat. nrs. 543 [Silver Chalice, with labarum, c. 500. Boston], nr 546 [Plate of Paternus, Constantinople, c. 518, Leningrad], & nr 550 [late fifth/early sixth C pyxis in Washington, Dumbarton Oaks -provenance unknown].

⁸⁴⁶ Pale green glass chalice. Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington: nr 37.12. Said to have been found in Syria. Only partially preserved, it shows on one face a large *crux gemmata* flanked on the right by an omega and an orant figure and it is presumed that on the left was an alpha and a corresponding figure. Ross (1962), p. 81 nr 96.

⁸⁴⁷ Byzantine sardonyx intaglio, Münzkabinet Munich. The letters flank a large Latin cross, with twelve Apostles arranged in groups either side. Furtwängler (1900), v. 2, p. 307 nr 306; Zazoff (1983), p. 386, Abb. 79e.

⁸⁴⁸ Grisar (1908), p. 116, fig. 60.

⁸⁴⁹ Bronze amulet. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore: nr 54.2666. Vikan assigns a fifth century date: (1995b), p. 575, fig. 8. An almost identical example was published by Bonner (1950), p. 306 nr 318, pl. XVI. The Holy rider appears on the other side of the Baltimore amulet and Vikan notes that the Christ/cross motif appears where on other amulets, the evil eye would appear. Vikan argues for the interchangeability of the cross and evil eye at this period: (1995b), p. 575, n. 42.

⁸⁵⁰ Vikan (1994), p. 345, n. 25 pl. 198.9.

which may suggest a compatibility in date and prototypes circulating in this region at this date: the flared bottom of the robe, a cross-nimbus, and the presence of *alpha* and *omega* at either end of the *patibulum*. The symbols for *sol* and *luna* appear above the arms of the cross, one at either end. Clearly the notion of a crucified Christ is present on all three of these prophylactic devices, albeit couched in symbolic language. On an early Christian rock crystal intaglio from Ohio, showing the cross on a hill and surmounted by a bust of Christ, the letters flank the cross.⁸⁵¹

The purpose of listing so many examples is to underline the frequency of their appearance, particularly in Syro-Palestine in the early Byzantine period. Moreover, it would seem from this foregoing survey that the use of this *nomen sacrum* transcended hierarchical divisions between official art of the Church and the minor arts purchased by the individual believer in the early Byzantine period, particularly in the East. More specifically, the bronze amulets whereon the body of Christ is actually assimilated into the triumphal cross, provide possible near contemporary instances of the use of the monogram in a Crucifixion context and for amuletic purposes. Nevertheless, the form of the symbols on the Lewis gem is ambiguous, neither exactly replicating the form of the Greek letters. A further point of interest is the more frequent inclusion of the letters with the cross rather than the crucified figure of Jesus, usually placed beneath the *patibulum* rather than either side of his head as occurs on this gem. The latter position was usually designated in early Byzantine in figurations of the Crucifixion, whether of the symbolic bust-cross or the “historic” version, for the sun and moon. Hence the second, alternative reading of the symbols in this glyptic context.

As symbols of power in antiquity, the sun and moon appeared in Crucifixion imagery at its most formative stage: in combination with the *crux invicta* on fourth century Passion sarcophagi where they bore witness to the Resurrection and referred to the cosmic sovereignty and eternal reign of Jesus.⁸⁵² According to Lawrence, the use of the symbols with the christological monogram begins on the

⁸⁵¹ Warland (1986), Kat. E7, Abb. 128, & pp. 118-119; for the letters pendant from the cross see also Kat. E3.

⁸⁵² On their resurrection symbolism, Villette (1957), pp. 34ff.

star-and-wreath sarcophagus at Manosque, Notre Dame.⁸⁵³ The symbols also flank the *chi-rho* within an exergue on a fourth century(?) segmental glass bowl now in Rouen; the principal design above the exergue features a depiction of the Sacrifice of Isaac, with the legend VIVAS IN ETERNO running around the perimeter.⁸⁵⁴ In this case, given its juxtaposition with the Old Testament sacrifice, Bréhier believed the *chrismon*/sun and moon figuration to represent the Crucifixion.⁸⁵⁵ Their appearance in the sixth/seventh centuries in eastern Crucifixion iconography was perhaps as a reference to the occurrence of the eclipse at the third hour [Mt. 27.45; Mk 15.33; Lk. 23: 44,45; not mentioned in John] and thus the cosmic significance of the death of Christ, with the sun appearing on Jesus' right to accord with his divine nature and power. They appear as symbols or personifications in early Byzantine art: on the Syriac Rabbula miniature, the Jerusalem ampullae, the Baltimore gold ring, the Byzantine pilgrim token from Tyre, where they sit above the extreme ends of the *patibulum* as they do on the bronze censers of the late seventh/early eighth century,⁸⁵⁶ and as personifications on the earliest surviving Crucifixion icon [*Pl. 14b*]. Most interesting is their appearance in symbolic form on either side of Christ's head on the Louvre pendant [*Pl. 13a*], with which the Lewis gem is compositionally related, and on the Ohio crystal mentioned above.

Ultimately, the identity of the symbols on the Lewis gem remains uncertain. Their proximation accords with the use both of the alpha-omega and the sun-moon pairings in early Byzantine compositional formats for the visual representation of the Crucifixion. Hence whilst we may want to come down in favour of the sun-moon pairing, all that can be said with confidence is that the design unequivocally emulates an early Byzantine compositional pattern. If the letters were being copied by someone unfamiliar with the Greek alphabet, the unclear shape of the symbols may be accounted for.

⁸⁵³ Le Blant (1886), p. 142, nr 204, pl. 50.1. Lawrence (1932), p. 173, nr 94. fifth century?

⁸⁵⁴ Rhenish/Gallic engraved glass from Boulogne-sur-Mer: Finney (1995), p. 166, pl. 6d.

⁸⁵⁵ Bréhier (1918), p. 83, fig. 24.

⁸⁵⁶ egs.: Dalton (1901), pp. 108-109, nr 540; Wessel (1966), p. 19; Gonosová & Kondoleon (1994), nr 95.

4. Contemporary Engraved Gems

Finally, the date here proposed for the production of the Lewis jasper finds critical support in unpublished research by Jeffrey Spier. Spier kindly made his research available to me for the purposes of this study, and it appears in *Appendix 3* with his permission.

Spier has included the jasper in a group of nine gems ascribed by him to a sixth/seventh century workshop located in a provincial Byzantine centre, possibly Syria [refer to *Appendix 3*]. Two of the gems are said to be from Asia Minor, one Egypt or Syria, one Constantinople and one from Jordan. All of the gemstones are jasper (mostly green) or carnelian, they are rather crudely carved and decorated with New Testament scenes. Jesus usually has a cross-nimbus, and an identical match for the form of the Lewis nimbus can be found on a carnelian gemstone in the group [*Appendix 3*, number 4]. Further to the iconographic correlations between the design of the Lewis gem and Crucifixion imagery as it appears on the Jerusalem ampullae, and thus the posited connection with Syro-Palestinian art, are similarities between a gem in this group showing a Doubting Thomas scene and the representation of this subject on Monza ampulla 9.⁸⁵⁷

To summarise: Jesus' long skirt, which reinforces the triumphant iconography; his cross-nimbus; the upturning of his palms; the identity, poses and symmetrical division of the subsidiary figures either side of the cross; the proximation of the two symbols; and the sense of clarity and symmetry in the overall design, are all features appertaining to the Crucifixion iconography emergent in art of the Palestinian and Syrian region from the sixth century onwards. More specifically, the design is composed of iconographic elements, including figural proportions, in a compositional unit and style that is dependant on the sixth/seventh century Syro-Palestinian "historic" formula for the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion found in the Syriac Rabbula illumination, on the Vatican reliquary lid, and those reduced figurations known from cycles of christological scenes decorating contemporary

⁸⁵⁷ Grabar (1958), nr 9, pl. 15.

objects: such as certain ampullae, armbands, the Baltimore gold ring [*Pl. 12e*],⁸⁵⁸ and two censers in Berlin. These objects are intimately related, presenting the same christological *locus sanctus* scenes in similar compositions and styles across parallel centuries of production, from the late sixth to the early eighth century. We know that the christological scenes borne by the objects had links in origin with the pilgrim trade in Palestine, but were taken up and reproduced by artisans in provincial Byzantine centres and in workshops unconnected to the pilgrim trade and the Holy Land.⁸⁵⁹ For instance, Vikan has shown that the armbands are probably not from a single source, specifically cited in Jerusalem or even linked to the pilgrimage trade, but possibly multiple sites of manufacture in Egypt and Syria, with discernible variations not only between regions of manufacture but even within the Syrian/Palestinian group itself.⁸⁶⁰ Small but perceptible iconographic differences, such as the variant nimbus form between the London ring [*Pl. 12d*] and the remaining three in the group, [eg. *Pl. 12e*] can be explained as occurring in the transference of the pictorial prototype onto different and possibly smaller media by artisans of varying technical ability.⁸⁶¹ Hence our gem, with its stylistic and compositional semblance in conjunction with its small but perceptible iconographic deviations, may have been produced in an outlying centre of production, possibly Syria. This theory seems to be borne out in light not only of the date of Spier's family of Byzantine gems, but also their likely provenance.

In view of this evidence it is clear that the fifth century date posited by Middleton and customarily assigned to the Lewis gem,⁸⁶² which effectively brings the gem into the same century of production as the Maskell ivory and the Sabina panel, must be rejected. Although the strong idealisation of the Lewis Jesus in stance and nimbus, the clear affixation of his arms to the *patibulum*, and even the acquisition

⁸⁵⁸ Vikan (1990a), p. 158; (1991/2), p. 39; and in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), nr 446, p. 496. Vikan believes the rings to be products of a Syro-Palestinian workshop and dates them to the mid-seventh century.

⁸⁵⁹ On the close relationship between the ampullae, bracelets and rings: Kitzinger (1988), pp. 61-63.

⁸⁶⁰ Vikan (1991/2), pp. 37-39.

⁸⁶¹ See the conclusions of Rahmani (1985), pp. 179-180.

⁸⁶² Middleton (1892), p. 84; Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3066; Maser (1976), p. 27; Henig (1975), p. 39, [fourth/fifth century on the basis of stone type]; Tristan (1996), p. 565.

of historical elements drawn from the gospel narratives in the presence of the lance-bearer appear to emulate fifth century artistic practice, the Lewis gem presents a more highly evolved type than its fourth and fifth century predecessors. The post-sixth century date originally suggested by King⁸⁶³ finds particular support in the bare chest, a feature which should be seen to preclude a production date earlier than the late sixth century and to link this gem with a later tradition, as Derchain also argued.⁸⁶⁴

Compositionally, the triune figuration as it appears on the gem can be seen to derive from the mature historic type as it is presented on the Vatican miniature, similar reductions occurring on the Baltimore ring and two bronze censers in Berlin, whereon the nimbate Jesus is flanked by the lance and sponge bearers, the two thieves and the sun and moon. Whilst it does not exactly reproduce a known composition, the gem faithfully maintains the core of the originally detailed compositional unit seen on the Vatican panel, exactly replicating the standard early Byzantine placement of the lance-bearer on Jesus' right, the sponge-bearer on his left. In doing so it should also be compared with the contemporary Louvre crystal, produced in Syria or Egypt, which may also preserve this core image of the lance and sponge-bearers either side of the cross in a compositional relationship identifiable as early Byzantine, and including the identically placed sun and moon, but with the symbolic cross-bust at the centre. Iconographically, the gem closely emulates the pictorialisations of the subject on the Rabbula illumination and Bobbio ampulla 6 with respect to the stance and action of the attendant figures. Further, since the carver shows the details of the *patibulum* and the wrist ties he was obviously conversant with a highly detailed presentation of the scene, something akin to the Rabbula figuration [*Pl. 7a*]. In addition, the iconography as it appears on the Lewis gem can be favourably compared with that of the Vatican panel, the Baltimore ring and the Berlin censers, all of which show the historic Crucifixion. Stylistically the gem compares well with the aforementioned sixth/seventh century figurations, but particularly those miniature pictorialisations on the Baltimore and London gold rings with respect to the

⁸⁶³ King (1881), p. 4, was keen to posit a Justinianic date in view of Jesus' beardless face.

⁸⁶⁴ Derchain (1964), p. 111, followed King's Justinianic dating, suggesting a later tradition particularly in view of the clothing.

depiction of the lance and sponge-bearers on the former ring and the form of the nimbus on the latter.

It should also be emphasised that the sixth/seventh century date proposed for the production of the gem implies that the Lewis jasper preserves one of the first reappearances of the bare-chested crucified Jesus in early Byzantine art. In this visual context, the bareness is not introduced to heighten the suggestion of Jesus as a human victim, for the physical form standing against the cross remains strongly idealised. And it does not seem to indicate a reintroduction of the loincloth *per se*, owing to the unusual length of the skirt. What the bareness of the chest in this figuration does suggest, in conjunction with the overpainted loincloth of Sinai icon B.32, is that artists had begun to reduce the covering of the robe prior to their portrayal of Jesus dead on the cross, the first “closed-eye” representation appearing around the end of seventh century. The skirt is not dissimilar to those shown for the thieves in Egyptian pictorialisations of the Crucifixion dating from the seventh century, as seen on the Coptic papyrus, the Aba Moun amulet and the figures on the Louvre pendant. The dating established by the skirt motif is refined in the inclusion of the lance and sponge bearers in this miniature format. Furthermore, in addition to the Baltimore gold ring, the gem provides unique evidence for the existence around the end of sixth/early seventh century of a condensed version of the historical type of the Crucifixion that was also a pithy expression of contemporary Christology. This christological/historical type was an alternative to the more popular symbolic motif of the bust-cross in the presence of the generic suppliants, or possibly the lance and sponge-bearers (in the instance of Bobbio ampulla 6 and the Louvre crystal). Moreover, the sixth century date accepted for the introduction of the lance and sponge bearers provides something of a *terminus post quem* for the production of the Lewis gem, since there are no extant pre-sixth century instances of their appearance as a pair.

Thus, in view of its demonstrated compositional, iconographic and stylistic lineage with early Byzantine artefacts linked to the Syrian/Palestinian tradition for the representation of the Crucifixion (in both historic and symbolic guises), and critically its membership of Spier’s posited sixth/seventh century group of engraved gemstones, the Lewis gem can be seen to have been produced in a

provincial Byzantine centre, possibly Syrian or Egyptian, between the late sixth-early eighth century.

B. The Gaza Jasper [Cat. nr 5]

The final image to be discussed in this section is carved onto the obverse face of an upright-oval jasper intaglio, the fifth gemstone in the corpus and the second in this Byzantine category [*Pl.15*]. Predominantly red but with a distinctive band of yellow running vertically through its body, the flat and irregularly shaped gemstone measures 2.25 x 1.75 x 0.53 cms). Reputedly found in Gaza, Syria, it was purchased by the British Museum from the Reverend G. Chester in 1867 [MLA 1867.OA 9717].

Ostensibly, the compositional unit of the figuration of the Crucifixion shown on this gem re-presents that of the Lewis jasper: Jesus appears in the cruciform pose at the centre of the obverse face, dominating the design in scale and placement, his limbs extending to the extremities of the field; he is flanked by two diminutively sized figures who are seen in profile turning inwards to face him; four or five characters are engraved above his head. The compositional affinity between the two jaspers is enhanced by the fact that these design elements are deployed in each case on stones of oval shape and upright orientation. Furthermore, the gems share an analogous iconographic motif in the cross-nimbus ascribed to Jesus' head.

For all these similarities, the Gaza image is distinguished from the Lewis by several key factors. On a general level, we can immediately note the crudity with which the Gaza design has been executed and copied onto the jasper. The image does not emulate the carefully deployed compositional elements associated with Late Antique Christian gems and seen on the Lewis jasper but is highly schematic and even sketchy in appearance. For example, the two subsidiary figures do not mirror each other in placement either side of Jesus but are positioned haphazardly in the design field, being at irregular distances from him and with no ground line to certify their position within the scene. The asymmetry and roughness of the layout is exacerbated by the absence of a cross from which Jesus is presumably hanging and which may have lent some structure to the overall composition. Beyond the actual layout of the design, the crudity is also evident in the depiction

of the figures. In the case of Jesus, only the basic outline of his body is delineated with smaller details receiving cursory treatment. This is particularly noticeable in the odd number of fingers inscribed for each outstretched hand and in the haphazard placement of the three rays penetrating the poorly shaped disc of the nimbus, in direct contrast to the methodical formation of the Lewis nimbus. The case of the attendant figures is more problematic, the modelling of their postures and drapery being so poor as to prevent any clear reading of their intended stance: are they both kneeling? Moreover, in the absence of any conventional Christian iconographic indications of their status, such as a nimbus, distinctive drapery or especial accoutrements (such as the Gospel book often held by St John in Byzantine art from the early sixth/seventh century,⁸⁶⁵ for example *Pl.7b*), their identity remains ambiguous.

Aside from execution, a second general difference between the Lewis and Gaza jaspers is the use and content of script in the decoration. The execution of the lettering on the Gaza gem complies with the haphazard quality of the overall composition, the characters on the obverse face being carved as a disordered series rather than uniformly assembled either as a horizontal line or one that follows the contour of the upper field parameter, as seen on the Nott and Constanza gems respectively. Furthermore, whilst the Lewis gem is carved on its obverse face only, there are three sections of text on the Gaza intaglio: a) the superscript to the iconography of the crucifixion, comprising possibly five characters b) the arrangement of characters in relatively uniform fashion into three unbroken lines on the reverse face c) the text running in a continuous circle around the oblique surface of the bezel [*Pl.15d*].⁸⁶⁶ As will be elaborated on below, the characters used are not immediately identifiable as belonging to a particular script. Obviously, had the stone been worn in a jewellery setting to facilitate either suspension from a cord or wearing as a finger ring, these symbols on the edge and reverse would have been concealed, thereby increasing any magical quality attached to the script itself.

⁸⁶⁵ This practice first appears on the Vatican panel and on some contemporaneous ampullae [eg. Monza 9, 10, 11]. It is not shown on the Rabbula illumination.

⁸⁶⁶ Bonner (1951), p. 336, nr 54, identified some of the symbols on the bevelled edge as Greek vowels.

Undoubtedly, the most conspicuous difference between the two jaspers is the representation of Jesus, the posture struck here being more realistic than in any of the previous figurations, including the Pereire. The victim has been twisted so that his chest, pelvis and legs are in profile view, his neck line broken, his head now sinking onto the chest, arms angled obliquely upwards, his body curving and his legs bent as though dangling from the hips, the feet angled downwards. Iconographically then, the gem presents a radical departure from the frontal view of Jesus that so dominated Late Antique imagery, where his neck and head were defiantly erect and his arms placed emphatically at right angles to the body. Furthermore, the twisting marks a profound thematic shift: Jesus is no longer the victor standing in triumph but the sacrificial victim hanging heavily in death. The tortured nature of his new posture is exposed in another important departure from the early Byzantine convention witnessed on the Lewis gem: he is naked. This fact appears to be directly contrasted by the clothing of the two subsidiary characters. Further underlining the visual impact of the naked posture is the failure to render the upright shaft and *patibulum* of the cross to which Jesus is presumably affixed, thus allowing the intaglio figure to stand out boldly as though silhouetted against the deep red colour of the gem. The nimbus is also more elongated in shape than the circular Lewis nimbus, a differentiation often noticeable amongst early Byzantine crystals.⁸⁶⁷ A further differentiation comes in the depiction of the attendant figures as kneeling/standing inwards to face the crucified with their hands clasped before their faces in conventional attitudes of prayer or penitence. Unlike the lance and sponge-bearers on the Lewis jasper, the figures do not seem to have a narrative-based connection with the Crucifixion of Jesus. It can be observed that the elements of the design that have been carved across the vertical band of yellow stone in the gem, including most of the left-hand figure and the first letter of the superscript, are perceptibly worn in comparison to the carving on the remaining surface of the red jasper. This poor preservation makes a reading of the iconography for the figure kneeling on the left particularly difficult.

⁸⁶⁷ See the examples published by Kornbluth (1994/5).

1. The Script

As the bibliography that accompanies the entry on the gem in *Appendix I* shows [cat. nr5], numerous scholars have cited the Gaza jasper. Nevertheless, few have discussed the script. Whilst some attempts have been made to decipher the superscript to the iconography on the obverse face, it has not been possible to identify those letters on the reverse and on the bezel as belonging to a particular alphabet. Ostensibly, the script on all of the surfaces is reminiscent of the imitation script that appeared on Late Antique magical amulets. On the strength of this resemblance the gem has been classified as magical and customarily assigned an early production date.⁸⁶⁸ Given the appearance of a Christian image with such lettering, the gem has also been linked to Gnostic sects.⁸⁶⁹

In view of the previous difficulty in identifying the letters, language and text of the gem (with the possible exception of the inscription on the obverse face) I have sought the advice of several scholars who specialise in ancient languages and texts.⁸⁷⁰ A report prepared for this study by Alan Cadwallader has proven invaluable. Before undertaking a detailed examination of the script, Cadwallader comments that some basic observations on languages used in magic may prove helpful. The paragraph that follows draws heavily on his observations.⁸⁷¹

Firstly, as the discussion of the text on the Pereire gem has already noted, magical texts preserved on papyri and engraved gems make use of a variety of languages or words from a variety of languages, as well as letter combinations which have no lexical sense and were presumably designed as performance accompaniments for incantations and spells. Often such texts are interrupted by magical symbols which are unrecognisable.⁸⁷² Secondly, magicians and exorcists in Late Antiquity

⁸⁶⁸ eg. Derchain (1964), p. 111; Milburn (1988), p. 281.

⁸⁶⁹ see Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2. col. 3049-3050, who nevertheless expressed doubts about this interpretation.

⁸⁷⁰ I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following scholars who have kindly looked at the gem for me: The Rev Dr John Roffey, Flinders University; Professor Greg Horsley and Alan Treloar, School of Classics, History and Religion, The University of New England, NSW; Professor Michael Lattke, Department of Studies in Religion, University of Queensland; and especially The Rev Alan Cadwallader, St Barnabus Theological College, Adelaide School of Divinity.

⁸⁷¹ Cadwallader (2001), p. 1.

⁸⁷² Such symbols appear with Greek letters on a magical amulet of the second/third centuries in the Fitzwilliam Museum: Henig (1994), nr 490. For further examples see Kotansky (1994).

are known to have incorporated words from other languages into their incantations. Hence we find the Greek text on a late Roman/early Byzantine amulet for ophthalmia, which opens with a Christian formula, being “interrupted” by a variety of words with seemingly Semitic roots (Babylonian, Aramaic and Syriac).⁸⁷³ In the late second century the thoroughly hellenised Lucian of Samasota thought that some of the words used by exorcists of his time were “Hebrew or Phoenician”.⁸⁷⁴ In many instances there is the certain likelihood that some of these languages or dialects are inaccessible to us.⁸⁷⁵ Thirdly, it seems that some languages were used in antiquity for their perceived magical efficacy even though their meaning had already been lost. For instance, there is considerable evidence of the use (verbally and as part of inscribed texts) of *Ephesia grammata* or “Ephesian letters” as a particularly potent magical language; although these were incomprehensible to later writers, Plutarch reports that they were effective in expelling daemons (*Moralia* 706e).⁸⁷⁶ Fourthly, aggregations of words and sounds, both lexical and alexical, are characteristic of magical formulae, reflecting what Cadwallader describes as “a thoroughly eclectic borderless phenomenon in ancient magic.”⁸⁷⁷ Consequently, as noted in the case of the Ephesian letters, words and sounds which are decreasingly understood are retained in spells. Fifthly, words and letters are frequently found in non-linear connection, for example in papyrological amulets and on engraved gems. Letters and words can be reversed and/or placed almost randomly over a gem face,⁸⁷⁸ intensifying the esoteric nature of the formula. In this regard Horsley drew my attention to the carnelian noted elsewhere by him⁸⁷⁹ on which a Greek magical inscription containing a reference to Exodus 3.14 appears on the obverse face of the gem, with cabbalistic writing of the Hebrew alphabet, in Greek transliteration, on the reverse. All of these points are made as a way of highlighting the difficulties

⁸⁷³ Kotansky (1994), nr 53, eg. lines 5-7, discussion p. 303.

⁸⁷⁴ Cadwallader (2001), p. 1 citing Lucian of Samasota, *Alexander the Soothsayer* 13.

⁸⁷⁵ Cadwallader (2001), p. 1, refers to a lead amulet in the Kelsey Museum (nr 29883-7), the text inscribed on which is apparently the eastern Aramaic dialect Mandaic, but which has never been read.

⁸⁷⁶ See Kotansky (1991), pp. 110-112 & pp. 121-122.

⁸⁷⁷ Cadwallader (2001), p. 1, cites Kingsley (1995), pp. 242-244.

⁸⁷⁸ eg. Jalabert & Mouterde (1959), nr 2486, pp. 205-206.

⁸⁷⁹ Horsley (1992), p. 125.

attendant on studying magical texts; they establish that in many cases it will not be possible to arrive at a definitive or “correct” reading of a given text.

Turning to the Gaza gem itself: as noted earlier, the gem has three sections of text. At first viewing there appear to be five (or even six?) letters on the obverse face running above Jesus’ head and following the contour of the field perimeter. As seen in the case of the Nott and Constanza gems, there is a precedent for the use of the script above an image of the Crucifixion on engraved gems. This pattern is continued in the Byzantine period on glass pastes and crystals, as will be discussed below. Three lines of script appear on the reverse, and Cadwallader observes these can be compared with such lines in carefully folded amuletic material, from papyrus to gold leaf.⁸⁸⁰ It is apparent that certain characters are repeated in the course of the three lines, however it is not immediately clear how the lines are intended to be read. The upright orientation of the design on the obverse face initially suggests a vertical reading. Nevertheless it is not impossible that to view the back, the stone was meant to be turned on its side so that a horizontal reading, either from right to left or even left to right could be facilitated. Given the comments made earlier regarding the use of magical text, it may be that the symbols are not intended to be read in any particular order, but that the meaning resides in the patterns formed by the symbols, like those Greek vowels on the Pereire gem. A second possibility is that the scratchings, even if they are copies of an original text, remain undecipherable anyway. A third possibility is that these signs are purely decorative. Treloar points out [in personal communication] that if this were so, one would expect them to show a more balanced and symmetrical pattern; without this they must have a meaning. That is, they are letters. It should be noted that the random placement of the letters around the bezel and the rather loose organisation of the lines on the reverse face in fact conforms to the general crudity of the carving for the three figures on the obverse. Finally, regarding the use of letters around the bezel: Cadwallader observes that this usage appears in the recommended method and formula for making an amulet in *PGM* V.304-369.

⁸⁸⁰ for examples see Kotanksy (1994).

Working on the view that the characters are based on letter forms, possibly copying an original inscription and not being purely decorative, Campbell Bonner made some advance on the question of which alphabet they might belong to. He suggested that several Greek vowels appeared with indistinct characters on the bezel, yet did not identify which vowels he thought were present. Bonner merely commented that three lines of “non-Greek” characters appeared on the reverse face.⁸⁸¹ The only letters for which attempts to decipher have reaped some rewards are those which are the superscript to the iconography. Morton Smith suggested that these may read “Jesus, M(essiah)” in Hebrew or Aramaic, but again included no discussion of the lettering.⁸⁸² No scholars have since attempted to identify any of the letters or to comment on the script.⁸⁸³ The mysterious lettering is now more usually discounted as indecipherable,⁸⁸⁴ and further investigation has confirmed that for the script on the reverse face and bezel at least, this likelihood remains. For the superscript to the iconography of the Crucifixion on the obverse face however, it appears that some progress can be made.

Following my recent presentation of the gem to several scholars, new light can be shed on the question of the superscript’s meaning. Although Syriac seems a logical possibility for its identity, given the putative origin of the gem, this has proven unlikely.⁸⁸⁵ Comparisons made by Alan Treloar with letter forms of Syrian as well as Georgian, Armenian and Ethiopian scripts all proved fruitless. Morton Smith’s reconstruction of the obverse letters as Aramaic or Hebrew was however found to be defensible by both Treloar and Cadwallader; Morton Smith’s specific mooted presence of the word “Messiah” was not realised in the studies of the gem conducted by either scholar. Importantly, Treloar noted the resemblance of certain letters to Hebrew scripts, and was able to identify the word Jesus.⁸⁸⁶ Yet in attempting to follow Smith’s suggestion of Jesus M(essiah), Treloar encountered difficulties. Cadwallader believes that these could be overcome if

⁸⁸¹ Bonner (1951), nr 54, p. 336-337.

⁸⁸² Morton Smith (1978), p. 62.

⁸⁸³ eg. Finney (1994), p. 111, does not refer to the script.

⁸⁸⁴ eg. Tristan (1996), p. 564.

⁸⁸⁵ Michael Lattke also found no links with Syriac, comparing the gem’s letters with J. Euting “Tafel der syrischen Schrift gezeichnet” in Theodor Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik* (Darmstadt, 1966).

⁸⁸⁶ Treloar consulted P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (1996), p. 488.

there were no more letters for Jesus but rather an abbreviation of Nazareth/Nazarene. In conjunction with Treloar’s own proposal that the script is Semitic, Cadwallader’s hypothesis is significant and is presented here with his kind permission.

Cadwallader points out that wordplays on Christos/Chrestos are already occurring in the New Testament (as mentioned earlier in connection with the Nott gem), and that only John opts to use “Messiah”, which he effectively dismisses by explanation (Jn 1.41): “However, another text of John gained greater currency in Christian circles, and given the wispy veil between magic and religion in ancient times, probably in the realms of magic as well: ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’ [Jn 19.19-20].”⁸⁸⁷ The Latin abbreviation of this title is shown as the *titulus* on the Maskell Crucifixion relief [Pl.5a]. Therefore, as Cadwallader rightly notes, the text would fit the iconography on the Gaza gem most appropriately; and as he discovered, his thesis can be sustained by the letters as they appear on the gem. He writes as follows:

“The actual text of the trilingual inscription must be reconstructed since John’s Gospel only provides the Greek. Hebrew translations of the New Testament or of this particular *titulus* vary, depending on whether they opt for an inscriptional or syntactical rendition. The old work of Alfred Edersheim [*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (Grand Rapids, 1971, reprinted 1983), 2, pp. 590-591] argues that the *titulus* in three languages would likely require approximately the same number of letters. Hence the simple:

ישו הנזרי מלך-יהודי

This retains the articles, though these are likely to be lost along with the final letters in an abbreviated superscript:

יש נז מל יה

The abbreviation of this phrase could well fit the writing on the gem. Just as Morton Smith suggested ' indicates Jesus.

A close examination of the photograph indicates that the incisions of the third letter do not touch the next upright incision, moving right to left. The letter *sîn* (the second letter from the right) whilst crudely cut is nevertheless concerned to have each incision touching another in order to

⁸⁸⁷ Cadwallader (2001), p. 2.

form the letter. This is not the case for the next letter and may indicate that rather than the next upright incision being part of the third letter, it in fact commences a fourth letter. If this is the case then according Rachel Hachlili's chart of the rendition of Hebrew letters [Hachlili, "A Jerusalem Family in Jericho", *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 230 (1978), p. 54] the third letter would comfortably be a *nûn*, the letter quite frequently having a leading tail [further palaeographic tables are found in Y. Meshorer *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (New York, 1982), pp. 162-175]. This would make the next letter a *záyin* -not perfectly to be sure but capably so especially given that the two incisions are present and this would be required for the letter; hence "Nazareth". What would confirm this interpretation is the letter that Morton Smith identified as a *mêm*. He took it as indicating Messiah, but of course it could as easily indicate *mlk*=king. Again this coheres happily with Hachlili's chart.

It is at this point that the flaw in the jasper defeats us, for the expected *lamed* has been lost in the wear (and hint of fracture?) in the stone. However, some slight encouragement is found in the remains of the letter incisions further round to the left- this space could well be reconstructed as י =Jews; the abbreviations י , יי or simply י are all known. All these are possible reconstructions of the mutilated section of the amulet. Of course these last must be speculative. However the iconography, I would submit, is more supportive of this reconstruction than that of Smith's and would give due weight to the separation between the incisions, noted above."⁸⁸⁸

In its formative state, Cadwallader's research makes a fundamental contribution to our understanding of this gem; it would suggest that the gem possibly follows a model seen in Late Antiquity on the Pereire, Nott and Constanza gems, and in Byzantium on a range of smaller objects including engraved crystals, for the appearance of Jesus' name or title with an image of his crucified body. The script on the reverse requires further examination and it is clear that Cadwallader's thesis regarding the superscript on the obverse face should form the basis of such a study.

2. The Iconography

For the interpretation of the gem and its iconography, two possibilities initially present themselves. Firstly, given the commonalities between it and magic gems such as the Pereire jasper (in the appearance of illegible lettering on multiple surfaces, the crudity of carving, the poorly laid out design and unconventional

⁸⁸⁸ Cadwallader (2001), pp. 2-3.

iconography), the gem could be regarded as a product of the Graeco-Roman magical tradition of the second/third centuries. This is the view favoured by previous commentators, including Le Blant, Leclercq, Derchain, Bonner and Morton Smith. The second possibility is that the Gaza Crucifixion is a straightforwardly Christian representation from the Byzantine period, but with amuletic overtones.⁸⁸⁹ Therefore Maser, who noted the semblance of this gem with Wessel's "Ephesian" type, in which the mother-son relationship was established between Mary and John subsequent to Jesus' words from the cross [Jn 19:26-27],⁸⁹⁰ dated the gem to the seventh century.⁸⁹¹ As the opening comparison with the Lewis jasper served to indicate, this date might also be suggested in the gem's compositional semblance with the early Byzantine pictorial type for the Crucifixion emerging in the late sixth century, at which date the compositional division of figures either side of the cross also began and which seems to be in evidence here.

Speaking in favour of the first scenario are the various links the jasper has with those syncretistic gems that served as magical devices in Late Antiquity. As listed above, these links are essentially threefold. Firstly, as Derchain specified, the cryptic "lettering" and its deployment seems to indicate that the gem has a primarily amuletic function,⁸⁹² for as noted with regard to the Pereire stone, the carving of magical signs and especially in places that were completely hidden from general view by the setting of the stone are characteristic of the Graeco-Roman magical tradition.⁸⁹³ Further aligning the gem with this tradition is the crudity of the carving. The third and deciding factor in this interpretation is the brutal realism of the iconography for the figure of Jesus. As the Pereire stone attests, gems of this syncretistic magical milieu were not averse to experimentation with pictorial devices. This factor directly contrasts Christian gems, which generally speaking appear resistant to innovation: both the Nott and Constanza gems, in conjunction with the fifth century material figurations of the

⁸⁸⁹ Kraus noted the gem from amongst the British Museum's collection, including it with the Nott gem in his short article entitled "Kreuzigung": Kraus (1882-1886), v. 2, p. 241.

⁸⁹⁰ Wessel (1960b), pp. 45ff; (1966), p. 33; (1969), pp. 42-44.

⁸⁹¹ Maser (1976), pp. 269-271.

⁸⁹² Derchain (1964), p. 111.

⁸⁹³ Bonner (1950), pp. 12-13.

Crucifixion, illustrate the unacceptability of realism and explicit nudity to Christian sensibilities. Since the “twisted” iconography is so at odds with the *triumphans* type favoured in the early Church, Derchain concluded that the design was conceived by a non-Christian for magical purposes, being manufactured at an early date by a magician. He claimed that like the Pereire iconography which it closely approximates, the Gaza gem borrows a depiction from Christianity and adapts it for magical use.⁸⁹⁴

If we are to accept this theory, which is plausibly argued by Derchain and upheld by subsequent scholars, we are bound to accept the implication that the Gaza jasper bears witness to the presence of a material figuration of the suffering or dying Christ as early as the third century.⁸⁹⁵ As will be demonstrated, this is highly improbable. Nevertheless, the magical label provides a handy loophole, allowing for the declaration of alternative interpretations for the iconography, including Morton Smith’s alarming suggestion that the figure is not a crucified man at all but a flying figure or mystical vision.⁸⁹⁶ In this way an obviously mature iconographic type becomes immune from rational explanation and can be dismissed as a mystical re-reading of little consequence.

Without doubt, the most intriguing aspect of the pro-magical arguments is the way in which proponents have attempted to reconcile the posture of Jesus, which so completely defies the early Christian canon for his representation on the cross, with those characteristics that seem to point to the gem’s association with the Graeco-Roman magical tradition of the second-fourth centuries. This struggle to interpret the twisted iconography and justify its appearance at an early date can be traced to the original commentary on the gem by Edmond Le Blant and ensuing observations by Leclercq.⁸⁹⁷ Le Blant identified the unusual jasper as a product of the heretical basilidian sect, the second century Basilides being one of the principal Gnostic teachers refuted by the Church Fathers. The attribution followed a long tradition in scholarship, present since the seventeenth century, whereby

⁸⁹⁴ Derchain (1964), p. 111.

⁸⁹⁵ Morton Smith (1978), p. 62. Bonner (1951), p. 336 nr 54, pl. 98, proffered no date for its production.

⁸⁹⁶ Morton Smith (1978), p. 62.

⁸⁹⁷ Le Blant’s views are quoted by Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3049.

syncretistic gems that served as magical amulets were correctly identified as belonging to the Graeco-Roman tradition but mistakenly grouped under the broad classificatory heading of “Basilidian” or “Gnostic”; in other words, earmarked as products of heretical offshoots from Christianity, the heretical tag effectively making such problem gems as the Pereire much easier to deal with.⁸⁹⁸ Such gems are now viewed as products primarily of the second and third centuries AD as part of the syncretistic magical tradition that emerged from Hellenistic Egypt.⁸⁹⁹ By chance, the basilidian categorisation was especially apt in the case of the Gaza jasper. In the theology Irenaeus attributed to Basilides, Simon of Cyrene was believed to have been crucified instead of Jesus,⁹⁰⁰ therefore to show the Crucifixion in the Christian guise on this gem, with Christ as victor, would have been tantamount to proclaiming the thing that Basilides was denying: the divinity of the victim. Hence the naked and dead representation of Jesus on this gem seems to accord with the Basilidian theology that the tortured Jesus is not a God but a man.⁹⁰¹ Whilst Leclercq was circumspect about the Basilidian attribution,⁹⁰² the novelty of the depiction on this gem, in its realism and particularly in the carving of illegible script, did seem to him to connect it with Gnosticism.⁹⁰³

As appealing as the Gnosticising/magical scenario might be, it cannot be sustained. Two critical issues necessitate its rejection: firstly, the compositional unit into which the figure of Jesus is placed; and secondly the iconography, both of Jesus and that of his companions. On the first count, the origin of the motif of Jesus crucified between two kneeling or standing onlookers can be traced to the fourth century Passion sarcophagi whereon two seated or standing soldiers flanked the *crux invicta*.⁹⁰⁴ It is important to note that these figures do not strike positions of prayer, but observe the cross or hail it by raising one arm. This motif was not utilised for explicit Crucifixion imagery until the sixth century and then followed

⁸⁹⁸ Spier (1997), p. 35, dates this practice back to the sixteenth century.

⁸⁹⁹ Spier (1993), p. 25.

⁹⁰⁰ Pelikan (1971), p. 84 & p. 90.

⁹⁰¹ Le Blant cited by Leclercq “Croix et Crucifix”, in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3049 n. 1.

⁹⁰² Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3049-3050. Leclercq’s scepticism is more directly expressed in (1907), v. I, p. 370.

⁹⁰³ Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, col. 817, nr 54.

⁹⁰⁴ Gerke (1940) distinguished between an earlier propensity to show the soldiers standing, and Theodosian sarcophagi on which the soldiers are seated. Noted by Kühnel (1987), p. 190, n. 65.

a period of subtle iconographic but radical thematic reinterpretation: in the context of Jerusalem pilgrimage, the soldier-figures were reread in Palestinian art of the late sixth century as generic Christian suppliants kneeling at the foot of the cross.⁹⁰⁵ As suggested earlier, the figures also came to take on the physical posture assumed by the women at the tomb as they were portrayed, in place of the soldiers beneath the *crux invicta* on some fourth century sarcophagi, genuflecting before Jesus. In late Byzantine figurations, the same kneeling position struck by the women at Jesus' feet was taken up by saints, the Magdalene, or even patrons of the art work. The compositional format on the gem will thus be shown to be dependant on a more mature Byzantine formula for the depiction of the Crucifixion as it evolved from the early Byzantine type, a formula used in conjunction with the twisting of Jesus' body into profile view to affirm a new interpretation of the cross event.

In view of this evidence, not only is the jasper's apparent resemblance to Graeco-Roman magic gems soundly controverted by its iconography, so too is the early Byzantine classification cited by Maser. The positioning of the two smaller figures within the design field and their reverential posture, standing/kneeling to face the nimbed Jesus, is deceptively reminiscent of early Byzantine figurations of the Crucifixion known predominantly from the Jerusalem ampullae and associated pilgrim wares, but utilised frequently in other media, including icons. Despite this similitude, which is bolstered by the fact that the gem is said to have come from Gaza, the posture of the figures placed beside the cross is clearly dependant on a much later model and follows the broad lines of iconographic development in the Middle Byzantine period. This proposed dependency is corroborated in the iconography utilised for Jesus, which in the twisting of the body and its sagging into a curve, suggesting the imminence (if not the actuality) of death, presents nearly all the characteristics of a new, specifically Middle Byzantine

⁹⁰⁵ This gradual process of reinterpretation and re-presentation has been documented elsewhere: Grabar (1958), p. 65f, and pl. XIV, whereon the two kneeling figures hold the cloak of Christ between them; Grigg (1974), pp. 224-235; Vikan (1990b), p. 103.

iconographical type.⁹⁰⁶ Yet before this date can be posited with conviction, it is necessary to examine earlier speculations that have grown up around the gem.

a. the attendant figures: some problems of identification

Various problems relating to the interpretation of the two figures have previously arisen and acted to impede an accurate assessment of the gem's design. In a scenario reminiscent of the Lewis jasper's research history, these difficulties have resulted from the fact that the principal means of studying the Gaza jasper has until recently been an inaccurate line drawing [Pl.15e & f].⁹⁰⁷ The drawing erroneously depicts the figure on the right of the Gaza Jesus as a standing woman, clothed in a long robe with her head covered by a *maphorion* or veil. This highly stylised version of the actual design, originally appearing with Longpérier's description of the gem in the ninth century, has been republished by succeeding generations of scholars and as a direct consequence, its errors of interpretation have been perpetuated.⁹⁰⁸ Given the crudity of the figure as it appears on the gem, the artist of the original drawing can be seen to have worked on the assumption that the figure was meant for Mary, thus replicating the traditional head-covering used in conventional depictions of the Virgin in Christian art. Hence the widespread belief that the gem shows a man kneeling on one side and a woman wearing a robe and mantle standing on the other.⁹⁰⁹ Careful examination of the gem reveals that such attire is not rendered in any detail by the lapidary, a fact recorded in the more recent line-drawing by Jim Farrant for the British Museum [Pl.15c].

In 1868 Longpérier correctly observed that in spite of the crudity of the carving, it was possible to recognise a difference in attire between the two figures. On the strength of this distinction the Frenchman posited that a deliberate attempt had

⁹⁰⁶ As outlined by Martin (1955), p. 190.

⁹⁰⁷ Bonner (1951), p. 336, nr 54, pl. 98, published the photograph on a substantially reduced scale. Morton Smith (1978); Finney (1994), p. 112, photo fig. 5.1. Finney (1994), reproduces the same photograph and introduces Jim Farrant's line drawing [obv. & rev, figs 5.2] which appear here Pl.15c & d.

⁹⁰⁸ Leclercq (1907), v. 2, p. 369, fig. 269; & in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3049, fig. 3356; Derchain (1964), p. 111. Maser (1976), pp. 270, fig. 6. Astonishingly, the gem is still studied in some cases from the inaccurate version: Bréhant (1995), fig. 2.

⁹⁰⁹ Milburn (1988), p. 281.

been made to render a man and a woman.⁹¹⁰ His interpretation was followed by Leclercq and Thoby,⁹¹¹ and furnished the basis of Maser's theory linking the gem to Wessel's "Ephesian" type for Byzantine Crucifixion iconography. On inspection, it is evident that the figure to the right is clothed at least to knee level, below which the drapery flares quite distinctly; the head is raised slightly towards Jesus and the left arm is also shown with clarity, extending forward across the suppliant's body to join the right hand. The engraver has actively rendered the head and details of the profile with several incisions, but there is no such evidence to suggest the presence of a veil. It is also difficult to make a firm conclusion about the posture intended for this "female": the only indication that the legs are in the kneeling position are two rather small incisions protruding from beneath the parted hem of the drapery and cut at an angle to the body. A decision about the status of the figure might be made in a comparison with the "male" on the opposite side of the cross, yet whilst the indications that this left-hand figure kneels are clearer with respect to the angle of the legs, further details are difficult to glean: there is little modelling of drapery or facial features, and the positioning of the arms is unclear. These factors are due not simply to the crudity of the carving but also to this "male" figure's poor state of preservation. Whilst the pair may be generic suppliants kneeling at the cross, other scholars, like Maser, have construed their stance as upright and their identity as the Virgin and John.⁹¹² Both readings are not surprising given a) that in Byzantine figurations of the Crucifixion the standing figures of the mother of Jesus and his beloved disciple were customary inclusions either side of the cross, and b) that the line drawing from which the gem was normally studied showed the right-hand figure as a standing Mary. Maser's date and identification of the figures is thus understandable. It is probably not coincidental that Bonner, who was the first to publish a photograph of the gem and probably studied the stone first-hand and not

⁹¹⁰ A. de Longpérier, "Pierre basilidienne offrant la plus ancienne représentation de la crucifixion", *Bull. de la Soc. nat. des antiq. de France*, 1868, v.30, p. 111. Cited by Leclercq (1907), v. 2 p. 370 n. 1. I have not been able to check this reference.

⁹¹¹ Leclercq (1907), v. 2, p. 370. Thoby (1959), p. 19, pl. 13. Jerphanion does not pass comment on the identity of "deux figures plus petites" flanking Christ: (1923), pp. 40-41.

⁹¹² Kraus (1882-1886), v. 2 p. 241; Kraus knew that the gem was in the British Museum [although C. Smith could not find it- (1896/7), p. 203], but it is impossible to say whether or no he studied the gem itself or also used the Longpérier drawing. Derchain also believed the man and woman, who he says are standing, were probably meant for Mary and John. Derchain (1964), p. 111.

in reproduction, did not maintain the traditional Mary-John classification but identified them only as two mourning figures.⁹¹³ Bonner's belief will be shown to be correct.

Let us begin by taking up the possibility that the figures are meant for Mary and John. In spite of the significance attached to this couple in visual representations of the Crucifixion from the early Byzantine period onwards, their popularity and pictorial significance was not immediate. They first appear beside the cross in the first half of the fifth century, on the Maskell relief. There they are paired on the left of the cross, John standing beside Jesus, Mary standing on John's right, their gaze solemnly averted from the *Rex Judaeorum* before them. Appearing on the right side of the cross is the centurion. A century later they appear again: in the Rabbula illumination of c. 586, where their left-sided pairing is balanced by the grouping of three women on the right of the cross. In this prototype the two groups of figures, Mary with John and the women, are shown at the extremities of the composition, with a central figuration formed by Jesus and the soldiers parting garments at his feet, and the lance and sponge bearers standing between Jesus and the thieves.

The left-side pairing on the illumination, as a visual rendering of the words spoken from the cross by Jesus to his mother and the disciple whom he loved (Jn 19.26-27), was cited by Schiller as the initial reason for the abandonment of early Christian frontality: for here Christ's head is turned and his body angled slightly to the right to enable him to look upon the couple.⁹¹⁴ The poignant symbolism of this particular compositional arrangement was not developed, although the Johannine inclusion of Mary and John at the cross was preserved. Towards the end of the sixth century there emerged the alternative and quickly preferred custom of splitting Mary and John to stand on opposite sides of the cross, Mary remaining on the left, John now placed on the right. These were to become their customary positions in Byzantine Crucifixion iconography from the late sixth/early seventh century. The division first appears on the Vatican reliquary, where Mary and John have also swapped places in the compositional schema with the two thieves, the

⁹¹³ Bonner (1951), p. 336.

⁹¹⁴ Schiller (1972), p. 90.

latter now located at the extremities of the scene. This alternative “split” version is thus seen on contemporary artefacts produced in conjunction with the pilgrim trade, where Mary and John are commonly shown in conjunction with the thieves and the *colobium*-clad Jesus, as on a censer in a private collection in Vienna.⁹¹⁵

Since the illuminations in the Rabbula manuscript are no longer believed to be later insertions, it is impossible to say which is the earlier pictorial type of the two, and thus whether the Vatican figuration presents a simplification of the Rabbula type [Pl.7].⁹¹⁶ The most that can be said is that towards the end of the sixth century several prototypes of the Crucifixion were circulating in the East.⁹¹⁷ Wessel posited the emergence at this time of two prototypes, one originating in Jerusalem and the other in Ephesus: the “Jerusalem” type is more detailed, showing Jesus dead on the cross and pierced by the lance in the presence of other characters, such as the spongeman; the “Ephesian” type is distinguished by the fact that it shows only three figures, Jesus flanked by the Virgin on the left and John on the right, as occurred on some censers. This latter type appeared on enamelled reliquaries for the True Cross and on small pectoral and devotional crosses dating from the late sixth/early seventh century⁹¹⁸ as well as icons- namely the seventh/eighth century Sinai icon B.32 [Pl. 14b]. Hence Maser’s belief that the Gaza gem followed this pattern. In fact, aside from the two compositional variants obviously presented by the Rabbula and Vatican figurations, there existed confusions of these, as on contemporary ampullae from Monza [number 9] and Bobbio [numbers 3-6], where the Virgin and John are split but stand in the extreme left and right positions.⁹¹⁹ Yet despite their appearance in the fullest historic versions of the Rabbula miniature and the Vatican panel, they appeared only occasionally in the reduced figurations on contemporary artefacts, surviving on less than half of the nineteen extant occasions on which the crucifixion appears

⁹¹⁵ Balicka-Witakowska (1997), fig. 91.

⁹¹⁶ Schiller (1972), p. 92. On the panel, Morey (1926), pp. 150-157.

⁹¹⁷ Venturi (1901), v. I p. 390. Schiller also believed the miniatures to be later insertions (1972), p. 91. Cecchelli et. al. (1959), p. 27, refute this notion. Similarly Wright (1973), pp. 199-209, who argued that iconographically and stylistically the miniatures accorded with the sixth century date of the manuscript. On the presence of several prototypes, Weitzmann (1974), pp. 40-41.

⁹¹⁸ Wessel (1960a), pp. 95-111. The *colobium* features consistently in these early compositions, and on Constantinopolitan works through the ninth century: Kartsonis (1986), pp. 95-125.

⁹¹⁹ Monza ampullae 12 & 13 show palm trees in place of the Virgin and John.

on ampullae in the Monza and Bobbio collections.⁹²⁰ On contemporary amuletic rings and related objects (including the Aba Moun amulet [Pl.13c],⁹²¹ a clay pilgrim token with the Crucifixion in Athens,⁹²² the Crucifixion roundel on the Perm plate [Pl.13e],⁹²³ the previously cited brass ring in Israel,⁹²⁴ the well-known late seventh century octagonal gold rings [eg. Pl.12d & e] and silver armbands [eg. Pl. 13b], possibly manufactured outside the Holy Land,⁹²⁵ they are omitted from what became the standard figuration: Christ, two thieves, two suppliants, the sun and moon. Although this somewhat surprising scenario of omission is reversed in Byzantine art, the “Ephesus” type cited by Maser did not become the standard formula until after the tenth century.

As with the inclusion of the centurion with the lance and the bystander with the sponge of vinegar, the division of Mary and John either side of the cross would seem to occur at a time when increasing numbers of characters and details from the Passion narrative were included beside the Cross: the soldiers parting Jesus’ clothing,⁹²⁶ intimations of the eclipse at his death in the cosmic symbols of the sun and moon, topographical details in the rendering of the mountains Gareb and Agra,⁹²⁷ several women looking on, in addition to the two crucified thieves seen first at Santa Sabina. The Syrian predilection to expand the iconographic repertory of the Crucifixion by adding these details to produce a rich array of pictorial elements was potentially problematic for the pictorial clarity of the scene. Hence

⁹²⁰ Grabar (1958), Monza nrs. 9, 10, & 11, Bobbio nrs. 3-6. Parallel examples include an ampulla in the Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart [Inv. Nr 1980-205a] with Mary and John, two thieves, two kneeling suppliants, *Sol* and *Luna*, Christ-bust over leafy cross; and a second ampullae in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. For both see Kötzsche-Breitenbruch (1984), *passim*, taf. 25b & 28a.

⁹²¹ the copper amulet shows Christ, two thieves and two kneeling suppliants.

⁹²² Athens, Benaki Museum: nr 13553, d. 4.5cms; (Christ, two thieves, two kneeling suppliants). Vikan (1994), fig. 2, pl. 197.

⁹²³ Leningrad, State Hermitage Museum, d. 22cms; (Christ, two thieves, lance and sponge-bearers, two kneeling figures). Kent & Painter (1977), p. 90. Schiller (1972), p. 92, comments that it is not possible to identify the two crouching figures as pilgrims venerating the cross or soldiers dividing the garments.

⁹²⁴ Bust of Christ over Cross, two thieves, two kneeling figures. Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums: nr 71.356, outer d. 2.4cms, oval bezel 1.6 x 1.5cms. Rahmani (1985), p. 175 nr 10, pl. XLII fig. 3, believes the kneeling figures to be soldiers.

⁹²⁵ Vikan (1995a), p. 380, argues that the rings and armbands were probably produced in other centres for purposes unrelated to pilgrimage. For the series of 15 interrelated armbands see Vikan (1991/2). For the armbands and their date see also Balicka-Witakowska (1997), pp. 104-5.

⁹²⁶ On their omission on the Vatican panel see Morey (1926), p. 164.

⁹²⁷ Weitzmann (1979), p. 41.

the symmetrical juxtaposition of these figures beside the cross in the late sixth/early seventh century may have been devised as a clarifying solution. More importantly, it can be seen to express contemporary theological thought regarding the death of Christ and the relationship between his two natures. For as noted earlier with regard to the Lewis gem, the division of pairs underlines the comprehension of the double reality of Christ's divinity and humanity, with the symbolic value of Jesus' right side being the greatest. The iconography thus illustrated the belief that whilst Christ died a human death, nailed to the cross, he triumphed to emerge as the exalted Lord and eternal ruler, standing defiant with open eyes. The division of compositional elements accentuated this belief: therefore, the good thief (Lk. 23:39-43), the sun, Mary the Mother, and the act of piercing (being a reference to Christ's Messianic (Zech. 12.10) and exalted status (Rev. 1.7) and the wound itself a source of divine power) appear on the left, Jesus' right side; the bad thief, moon, the sponge bearer (quenching the human thirst) and John appear on the right.⁹²⁸ Corrigan notes that the pointing John, appearing on the Vatican reliquary [*Pl.7b*], Monza ampullae 9, 10 [*Pl.8a*], 11, and Bobbio 4 and 5, emphasises John role as witness to the reality of Christ's death and suffering, and a reference to John 19:35.⁹²⁹ The central proximation of the crucified Jesus was cleverly reinforced by the precision with which the pictorial elements were symmetrically split and by potential iconographic devices such as his clothing, size, posture, arm position, nimbus and even facial expression. So for instance, the painter of the Vatican panel portrays the body of Jesus with deliberate emphasis on rigidity, the arms fractionally longer and straighter than those of the thieves, his head rigidly erect rather than turned, his eyes staring intently at the viewer rather than averted, his body clothed in the *colobium* and not a loincloth, and his cross standing upon the mound of Golgotha and surmounted by the title-board. The distinctions are even more pointed on the tiny scale of the ampullae. On Monza ampulla 13,⁹³⁰ Jesus, wearing the *colobium*, is larger than the thieves, his head is erect and encircled by nimbus, his legs are straight and his arms extended at the

⁹²⁸ Schiller (1972), pp. 93

⁹²⁹ Corrigan (1995), p. 49.

⁹³⁰ Grabar (1958), pl. XXIV.

elbows; the thieves in contrast turn their heads, wear loincloths, have their legs tied at the ankles, their knees thus bent, and their arms bound behind their backs.

It is evident that the “complex” Crucifixion image that emerged in early Byzantine art co-existed with simplified compositional schemes. In time, the pictorial fixtures that had been the two thieves were relegated to the extremities of the composition or into the background, as seen on Sinai icon B.36 [Pl.14c],⁹³¹ until ultimately they were eliminated from the composition altogether, as on the mid-eighth century wall fresco at S. Maria Antiqua [Pl.14a] and Icon B.51.⁹³² Simultaneously, the figures of John and the Virgin took the reverse journey, from the extremities into positions of prominence in the foreground, either side of the cross. The increasing importance of Mary and John and the concurrent reduction in the status of the thieves was seen not simply in the moving of the pairs from the background to foreground, extremity to centre, but also in the respective increase and decrease in size. To take Sinai icon B.36 as an example: the foreground figures of Mary and John actually overlap the partially visible thieves, who are shown in the background on a reduced scale.⁹³³ Three soldiers pictured at the foot of the cross are shown on an even smaller scale than the thieves.

Whatever the origin of the threefold image, procured by a gradual slimming down of the fuller narrative scene, as a study of Crucifixion icons would reveal, or an independent reduction formulated for miniature objects such as pectoral or devotional crosses,⁹³⁴ it was not immediately the predominating type. The simplification to three essential protagonists appeared on a range of objects in the

⁹³¹ Weitzmann (1976), pp. 61-63, pl. XXV.

⁹³² Weitzmann (1976), p. 82.

⁹³³ the thief behind John no longer survives on this icon, although the left arm of the *patibulum* of his cross is visible on the same level as the cross of the second thief, therefore we assume that both thieves were symmetrically placed, as noted by Weitzmann (1976), p. 62.

⁹³⁴ Schiller (1972), p. 94, proposed that the reduction of the earlier schema to consist of a three-figured Crucifixion scene on cult objects was possibly an independent development engineered for the concentration of the image for liturgical purposes.

ninth century, from historiated reliquaries,⁹³⁵ rock crystal intaglios,⁹³⁶ and icons,⁹³⁷ but was more generally accepted in the tenth century, becoming according to Weitzmann “almost canonical” for Crucifixion icons of the Middle Byzantine period.⁹³⁸

Despite their overwhelming popularity in Byzantine art, there are two important factors which argue against the identification of the kneeling/standing figures in this visual context as Mary and John. Firstly, their presentation does not accord with the customary manner of depiction in Byzantine art which is to present Mary and John as standing, nimbate figures. This formula begins in the late sixth/early seventh century, continues on the earliest crucifixion icons from Mount Sinai (which date up to the second half of the ninth century)⁹³⁹ and persists into the Middle Byzantine period, as seen on the reverse face of an unpublished green chalcedony in the Benaki Museum probably dating from the tenth/twelfth century [Pl.16a]- Christ healing the *Haemorrhoid* is shown on the obverse.⁹⁴⁰ Like the Gaza jasper which it probably predates by a century or so, the Benaki gem is an upright-oval and carved in positive intaglio; and although Jesus appears bearded, alive and robed in the triumphal *colobium*, Mary and John remain standing rigidly *en face*. By and large this orthodoxy is maintained, even in those instances in which the Virgin is shown to be swooning. In a rare portrayal of Mary bending over to embrace the cross and place her cheek on the nailed feet of the dead Jesus,

⁹³⁵ Notably the Fieschi-Morgan Staurotheke. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art: 10.2 x 7.4 cms. The early ninth century date, convincingly argued for by Kartsonis (1986), pp. 94-95, is now generally accepted. See Evans & Wixom (eds) (1997), nr 34, figs 34a, b & c. It continues the tradition of the living, *colobium*-clad Jesus flanked by the Virgin and John, both on the cover of the sliding lid and the underside within a cycle of four scenes.

⁹³⁶ *Crucifixion* 846-869, rock crystal intaglio. British Museum, London. M&LA 55,3-5,I. See Kornbluth (1997), figs 19-20.

⁹³⁷ Icon B.51, St Catherine’s Monastery, Mount Sinai; second half of the ninth century. Weitzmann (1976), v. I, pp. 57-58 & 82.

⁹³⁸ Weitzmann (1978), p. 70. See also Schiller (1972), p. 95, who details the evolution of the three-figured Crucifixion type in early Byzantine art using Crucifixion icons from Mount Sinai as illustrations of the iconographic simplifications.

⁹³⁹ Icons B.32 (seventh/eighth century), B.36 (eighth century), B.50 (first half of the ninth) & B.51 (second half of ninth century), in Weitzmann (1976) v. I, pp. 57-58, 61-64, 79-82, & 82-82.

⁹⁴⁰ The Benaki Museum, Athens: nr 13527. Vikan’s previous dating to the sixth/seventh century is too early [Vikan (1984), p. 81, n. 106], the style of the Crucifixion suggesting a Middle Byzantine date as Spier notes [Spier (1993), p. 44, n. 111]. Compare the iconography for Jesus on the Oriz Enkolpion, possibly Constantinopolitan and tenth/eleventh century in date: Sarah Taft in Evans & Wixom (1997), nr 120, p. 170. I am grateful to Gary Vikan for providing me with a photograph of this gem, and to Jeffrey Spier for sharing their views on the gem with me.

in the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion on the painted lid of a reliquary box in the Vatican (probably tenth century), her feet remain on the ground.⁹⁴¹ Elsewhere, on a Carolingian rock crystal intaglio Crucifixion and on a much smaller thirteenth century Venetian glass paste, both in the British Museum, although the Virgin and even St John are shown in profile, stooping with at least one hand extended to the face in identical attitudes of grief and *not* supplication, they both remain on their feet.⁹⁴² A potential precedent for the depiction of Mary and John as kneeling may exist in early Byzantine art. On the late seventh/early eighth century bronze censer in Virginia, two kneeling figures flanking the *colobium*-clad Jesus have been identified as Mary and John.⁹⁴³ Yet unfortunately, like the figures on our gem, their identity is ambiguous. Similarly, Dalton queries whether the two figures devoid of nimbi and standing either side of the cross on a related censer in the British Museum are meant to be Mary and John.⁹⁴⁴ Hence it is not impossible that in such early figurations of the crucifixion, the figures present a conflation of the kneeling suppliants with Mary and John.

A second factor working against the identification of the two figures as the Virgin and the Evangelist in this instance is their placement. As discussed above, by the time the pair had become an essential iconographic component in crucifixion imagery, custom dictated their individual placement: Mary being on the left, John on the right of the cross. Were the figure clothed in a long robe on the right of Jesus on the Gaza gem taken to be Mary, this canon would be reversed. A resolution to this serious iconographic anomaly might be found if it could be ascertained that the lapidary intended the design to be viewed in impression; for in

⁹⁴¹ Vatican, Museo Cristiano. Cormack (1989), "Painting after Iconoclasm", pp. 4-6, figs 34, 35; Cormack dates it to c. 920. Kazhdan & Maguire (1991), p. 19, fig. 36, describe the image as tenth century in style.

⁹⁴² London, British Museum: rock crystal intaglio, M&LA 55,3-5,1 [the Saint-Denis Crucifixion, pictured in Kornbluth (1997), p. 57 fig. 20]; red upright-oval moulded glass cameo, M&LA 54,7-22,19. Unpublished?

⁹⁴³ Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 67.27. Anna Gonosová dates the censer to the late seventh/early eighth century with a possible Egyptian provenance: Gonosová & Kondoleon (1994), nr 95, pp. 274-277. Whilst Gonosová does not specify the identity of the figures, A. St Clair entertains the possibility that they are Mary and John, in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), nr 564, p. 627.

⁹⁴⁴ Dalton (1901), pp. 107-8, nr 540. Dalton suggested this identity, but with some apprehension. On a related seventh C censer in Berlin, Longinus stands on the left of the cross and Stepaton on the right; Christ wears the *colobium*, Sol and Luna and two thieves. Staatliche Museen, Berlin: Inv.Nr 15/69. A. Effenberger/ H-G Severin (1992), pp. 201-202, nr 114. Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), p. 626, cat. nr 563.

the impressed design the female figure would appear on the correct side. Yet the function of the stone as a seal is unlikely. In the first place, the twisting of Jesus' figure to the viewer's left *precisely* reproduces the iconography of the dead Christ on the cross emerging in the Middle Byzantine period (853-1204)⁹⁴⁵ and would thus appear to have been copied and carved directly onto the face of the gem, where it was intended to be viewed. In the second place, amulets tended to be carved directly onto the stone as is also the case in the Benaki Crucifixion jasper. Whilst the kneeling attitude of the figure/s does not preclude their identification as Mary and John, as the case of the Virginia censer attests, nor even the absence of the otherwise requisite nimbi, as the case of the standing figures on the British Museum censer attests, it seems improbable that an artisan working in the period would confuse their canonical positioning unless he was attempting to reproduce an unfamiliar prototype or, more likely, unless the figure itself was not in fact modelled on a representation of Mary.

If the figures are not Mary and John, can they be identified as generic suppliants? This scenario is more likely, but not for the reasons one might immediately suppose. Although the figures are proximated in the positions occupied in early Byzantine art by the two suppliants kneeling beside the cross, the compositional semblance is deceiving. The iconography utilised in this visual context is clearly independent of that formula. Firstly, the kneeling figures, the most popular characters for inclusion in material figurations of the crucifixion in early Byzantine art, are consistently male in appearance. Secondly, they strike a characteristic gesture, genuflecting with one arm extended towards the cross. In contrast, they kneel and extend both arms towards the cross on this gem.

As mentioned above, the pictorial formula of Jesus, the two thieves and the genuflecting pair (often with the sun and moon) was prolifically reproduced between the late sixth-early eighth centuries, appearing as an isolated scene on ampullae, pilgrim tokens, medallions, jewellery,⁹⁴⁶ and in cycles of christological

⁹⁴⁵ Weitzmann (1978) sets the chronological limits of the Middle Byzantine period at 853-1204, p. 11.

⁹⁴⁶ In addition to the examples cited earlier [which included the Perm Plate, the Abamoun amulet and the London and Baltimore gold rings] the formula can be seen on an ampulla and a Palestinian medallion in the Württembergisches Landermuseum, Stuttgart [Kötzsche-Breitenbruch (1984) taf.

vignettes, as on Monza ampullae 2, Bobbio 18 [Pl. 8d]⁹⁴⁷ and the silver armband in the Comtesse R. de Béarn Collection.⁹⁴⁸ Traditionally, the pair were believed to have been modelled on the soldiers parting Christ's garments⁹⁴⁹ as those historic figures appear on the Rabbula manuscript and which were themselves possibly descendants of the soldiers beside the *crux invicta* motif on fourth century Passion sarcophagi [Pl. 2b].⁹⁵⁰ In specific instances, most famously that of Monza ampulla 9, this identification is clear: the figures clasp a piece of fabric in their left hands and stretch it between them in front of the cross; their right arms are raised before them. Wessel determined that the other ampullae, whereon the fabric is absent, simply portrayed degenerate forms of the soldiers as they appear on Monza 9.⁹⁵¹ Whilst this seemed a satisfactory resolution, the theory was difficult to sustain. As Grigg noted, the consistency with which the suppliants are chosen for representation by image-makers on ampullae, appearing in all nineteen instances in which the Crucifixion appears on flasks in the Monza and Bobbio collections and invariably at the expense of seemingly more significant characters such as the lance and sponge-bearers or Mary and John, makes it unlikely that in the many instances where the divided-garment is missing the pair functioned merely as degenerate soldier figures.⁹⁵² Moreover, their representation in poses of adoration raises further doubts about this classification.

Following Celi's interpretation, the pair began to be read as pilgrims venerating the relic of the cross, the same pilgrims who purchased such ampullae at the Holy Land.⁹⁵³ Vikan showed that when portrayed unequivocally leaning forward to touch the cross/relic, the figures can be seen to emulate the physical act of worship

26a and taf. 27a respectively] and a clay pilgrim token in the Benaki Museum, Athens [Vikan (1994), pl. 197, nr 2].

⁹⁴⁷ Grabar (1958), pls V & XLVII.

⁹⁴⁸ Piccirillo (1979), p. 248, nr 2, pl. 27 centre. Vikan (1991/2), fig. 7. Present whereabouts unknown.

⁹⁴⁹ Wessel (1960b), pp. 50-51; Engemann (1973), p. 26 n. 150.

⁹⁵⁰ Brenk (1980), p. 43. See also Schiller (1972), pp. 7-8.

⁹⁵¹ Wessel (1960b), pp. 50-51.

⁹⁵² This number includes the ampullae with medallions- Monza nrs. 9, 10, 11, & Bobbio nrs. 3-6; Grigg (1974), pp. 233-234.

⁹⁵³ Celi compared the pair with an analogous figure on a medallion bearing an image of St Simeon Stylites the Younger. Celi is cited by Morey (1926), p. 161 & Lesley (1939), p. 228, who both follow the attribution. Also Grabar (1958), pp. 56-57; Schiller (1972), p. 90; Kühnel (1987), p. 95; Dijk (1999), p. 430.

that formed such a fundamental part of pilgrimage.⁹⁵⁴ Beyond pose, Vikan also demonstrated that the depiction of the pair as foreigners emulates the iconography used on some ampullae for the depiction of archetypal travellers venerating the Christ child: the Magi. The Magi iconography itself can be seen to copy the representation of barbarians in imperial art offering largesse to the emperor, as on the relief from the Theodosian Obelisk, c. 390 [*Pl.3a*].⁹⁵⁵ Hence the figures beside the cross do not form part of a historical reconstruction of the Crucifixion scene, but can be understood as simulating the pilgrim's "seen and experienced reality" at the shrine of the True Cross.⁹⁵⁶ The accretion of specific details on Monza 9, unmatched by other ampullae (except the substantially damaged Bobbio 6) thus prompted Grigg to posit that the soldiers casting lots for Christ's garment were original inclusions in the repertory of the image-makers, and only later reinterpreted as pilgrims.⁹⁵⁷ Since this process of iconographic and thematic transformation was gradual, their identity remains unclear in some instances.⁹⁵⁸ In other instances, the absence of the customary act of veneration makes it more likely that they are meant to be soldiers.⁹⁵⁹ Hence by the late sixth/early seventh century in Palestine/Syria, there were at least two prototypes for the representation of the Crucifixion: one that retained the identity of the soldiers (as on the Rabbula and Monza 9) and one that displayed the move to redraft them as pilgrims, as evinced on those ampullae where the influence of the mimetic activity of pilgrims at the holy sites is apparent.

Vikan's posited correlation between the Magi and the early Byzantine kneeling figures is instrumental for our understanding of early Byzantine and subsequent figurations of the Crucifixion. As far as the stance of the Magi are concerned, the depiction of them as genuflecting before Jesus is rare.⁹⁶⁰ From the fourth to the sixth century it is customary to see them depicted in the process of walking

⁹⁵⁴ Vikan (1990b), p. 103; see also Vikan (1982), pp. 23-24.

⁹⁵⁵ See the photograph in Brown (1989), fig. 100.

⁹⁵⁶ Vikan (1982), p. 23ff, but especially (1990b), pp. 103-106.

⁹⁵⁷ Grigg (1974), p. 225.

⁹⁵⁸ Schiller (1972), p. 92.

⁹⁵⁹ On the Israel ring in the Department of Antiquities and Museums: Rahmani (1985), pp. 175-176, who classifies the figures as soldiers on this basis, although the lack of arms may simply be due to the crudity of the incision work. For a similar ring in Trèves, Universität, Sammlung des Fachbereichs III: Balicka-Witakowska (1997), p. 105, fig. 27.

⁹⁶⁰ One Magus genuflects on Monza Ampulla 1, Grabar (1958), pl. 2.

towards the Mother and Child.⁹⁶¹ The act of genuflection before the cross carried out by pilgrim figures in early Byzantine art has a closer affinity, iconographically and thematically, with postures of adoration portrayed on certain fourth century Christian sarcophagal reliefs and on imperial sculpture for the ceremonial giving of largesse. In the latter instance, as mentioned above, the pose appears on the lower frieze of the relief from the Obelisk of Theodosius I: the Emperor appears with his retinue in the main frieze above [Pl.3a]. A continuation of this hieratic style is seen on various “City-Gate” sarcophagi showing Jesus delivering the Law to the Apostles, including that in Milan [Pl.3b], Ancona Cathedral⁹⁶² (dated by inscription to 390), and Paris.⁹⁶³ On such sarcophagi Jesus is flanked by the deceased, usually represented as a man and woman and shown on a smaller scale than the Apostles: the deceased genuflect low to the ground in order to touch Jesus’ feet or the hem of his robe. The same pose is struck again by the women at the tomb in abbreviated post-Resurrection scenes when they appear on fourth century sarcophagal reliefs. For example, on the seven-arch columnar sarcophagus from the Palazzo del Duca di Ceri in Borgo Vecchio, this scene appeared beneath the arms of the *crux invicta* in place of the soldiers: below the left arm of the cross, the woman beside the cross genuflects and extends her right hand towards Jesus, seemingly touching the cross [Pl.3c]. This act is repeated in the post-Resurrection tomb scene on the lower frieze of the Servannes sarcophagus (right of centre), where three women worship the resurrected Jesus by genuflecting deeply before him, two of the women extending at least one arm in acclaim.⁹⁶⁴

The pose is also used in some pictorial instances for the *Haemorrhissa* as she touches Jesus’ robe.⁹⁶⁵ Eusebius, discussing the bronze statue of the *Haemorrhissa* erected in Caesarea Philippi obviously before or during his lifetime, describes the woman as: “resting on one knee and resembling a suppliant

⁹⁶¹ See examples in Schiller (1971), figs 245-259.

⁹⁶² Dresken-Weiland (1998), Ancona & Milan, nrs. 149 & 150.

⁹⁶³ Lawrence (1932), “City-Gate” Type, pp. 173-174; this sarcophagus is earlier than that at Ancona, p. 158.

⁹⁶⁴ The woman closest to Jesus can be seen to grasp his garment with her right hand (the left hand is not visible). Does the middle woman extend her left hand to her head? These actions deserve closer examination. See the photograph in Veganzones (1990), fig. 8 (detail), p. 578.

⁹⁶⁵ Mt. 9.20-22; Mk 5.25-34; Lk. 8.43-48. See the sarcophagus (showing the *traditio legis*) in Verona, San Giovanni in Valle; Dresken-Weiland (1998), nr 152, taf. 64.1.

with arms outstretched.”⁹⁶⁶ Revised in the Palestinian context in the late sixth century for the adoration of the cross by pilgrims, as seen on the ampullae [Pl.8] this gesture mirrored the humility of Jesus who according to Paul [Phil 2:5-11] humbled himself in death on the cross. As Deshman notes, this scriptural passage was later used by the Carolingian liturgist Amalarius of Metz c. 775-c.850 to explain the act of prostration before the cross which was part of the veneration liturgy on Good Friday.⁹⁶⁷ As the fourth century imperial and Christian examples attest, the source of the Byzantine *proskynesis* is much earlier than the late sixth century pilgrims flasks suggest. In essence, whilst the proximity of the kneeling figures beside the cross in early Byzantine figurations of the Crucifixion may derive from the earlier fourth century composition of the soldiers beside the cross-trophy, as has been suggested here, the physical act of adoration in a Christian context can be linked to fourth representations of the Holy Women at the Tomb.

Having traced the iconographic lineage of the kneeling figure as it appears in early Byzantine art, it is obvious that the iconography of the two figures on our gem is not dependant on that type. The poses stuck on this gem are different: the figures do not genuflect but kneel, with both hands now brought across the body and clasped away from the face in prayer. This act is Byzantine in flavour, possibly having an early visual precedent on the Servannes sarcophagus, but more directly replicating a later, specifically thirteenth century type of the kneeling penitent at the foot of the cross. An example of the act appears on a Venetian votive cross [Pl.16d]. This act is not related to the early Byzantine gestures for Mary and John beside the cross as they are represented in the Rabbula illumination and subsequent material figurations where Mary is invariably shown with hands clasped before her face and covered by her *maphorion* - as she was on the Maskell ivory relief. This gesture is one of grief, not of supplication, as noted with respect to the act as it appears on the Venetian glass paste in London. Likewise John is more usually shown with one arm raised in a gesture of attestation, the other holding the gospel book. The supplicatory/penitential motif as it re-emerges in the Middle Byzantine period, and which the figures of this gem seem to emulate, was

⁹⁶⁶ Eusebius *HE* 7.18; Trans. Williamson & Louth (1989), p. 234.

⁹⁶⁷ Deshman (1989), pp. 47-48.

a particular favourite amongst the Franciscans from the second half of the thirteenth century for the depiction of St Francis.⁹⁶⁸ Later, it became popular for the presentation of the great sinner and penitent at the cross, Mary Magdalene.⁹⁶⁹ In material figurations of the Crucifixion in the Late Medieval period it was also utilised for the depiction of donors, as the votive cross pictured on *plate 16d* illustrates: dated to 1383, the donor kneels in prayer at the base of the cross below the crucified figure of Jesus.⁹⁷⁰ This practice of including the donor in the scene signalled the introduction of ordinary faithful Christians into narrative representations of the Crucifixion at a time when increasing numbers of biblical characters were also included.⁹⁷¹ So although the figures on the Gaza gem are linked thematically to originating types of the faithful deceased, the Holy Women and in turn the early Byzantine pilgrim, their appearance in this visual context more directly resembles the later, Franciscan, penitential type. In so doing, although flanking the cross in the way that Mary and John were shown to do, the figures are more likely to have been modelled on penitential figures like the Magdalene. Underwriting this proposed model is the twisted iconography of Jesus, which appeared almost simultaneously with the penitential figure in the Middle Byzantine period and which is critical in indicating a Middle-Byzantine source for the Gaza gem.

b. the twisted and suffering Jesus

In each of the two possibilities for the dating and eastern localisation of the Gaza jasper cited above, a deciding factor in their rejection was the posture affected by Jesus. Prior to the fifth century it would seem that if an image of the Crucifixion was circulated outside and within Christian communities, as the Palatine graffito, Pereire, Nott and Constanza gems now reveal in addition to the Maskell and Sabina reliefs, only a living crucified figure was known. Standing upright and rigidly frontal against the cross, this figure was designed to stress the spiritual power of the deity who ultimately transcended suffering and death, and in the

⁹⁶⁸ Derbes (1996), p. 192, n. 55 & p. 200 n. 109, with reference to the possibly tenth century Vatican reliquary discussed above.

⁹⁶⁹ For example, a fresco by Giotto: Schiller (1972), p. 154, fig. 508 & p. 258.

⁹⁷⁰ Spier (1997), pp. 58-59, cat. nr 41.

⁹⁷¹ Schiller (1972), pp. 153-154.

Christian context, the voluntary nature of his sacrifice. According to Schiller, the stance was a straightforward illustration of the certainty of resurrection,⁹⁷² an interpretation that would be felicitously underscored on the Lewis gem where the two symbols shown either side of Jesus' head read as the alpha and omega title, with its scriptural evocation of the Resurrection. Even on the Pereire gem, where the brutality of crucifixion is evoked by means of leg and arm position, the figure is alive, the carriage of the torso, neck and head remaining deliberately erect in accordance with art of this period. On the Gaza gem the twisted posture, in conjunction with the carriage of the arms and hands and the pronounced curvature of the spine, is in complete opposition to the Late Antique compositions seen on the gems, to fifth century western art and early Byzantine art from the East. The deviation from frontal presentation to twisted, profile view cannot be viewed as a superficial experimentation with posture but illustrates the impact of a much deeper theological development on Crucifixion iconography, with the pictorial emphasis now focused on the sacrificial death and its sacramental import.

In the case of the Pereire jasper, the magical nature of the gem could justify the shocking brutality intimated in Jesus' open position on the cross. In this case however, magic cannot be used to reconcile the twisted posture with those physical features which might otherwise point to a Late Antique origin for the Gaza gem. When extricated from its visual context and analysed on its own merits, the twisted body of Jesus as it appears on this jasper is not enigmatic but strikingly conventional: it precisely replicates the defining characteristics of the mature Middle Byzantine type, dating from around the mid-ninth century to the early thirteenth century, in which Jesus is shown dead, his eyes closed, nimbed head bowed and the body, usually clad in a larger size loincloth or *perizoma*, sagging markedly. The type is illustrated on a Byzantine icon of the twelfth or thirteenth century in the Hermitage Museum [*Pl.16b*]. Given that intense artistic experimentation and theological cogitation, carried out over several centuries, preceded and finally procured the dead twisted type in the Middle-Byzantine period, it is highly implausible that the Gaza gem could have been produced in the Late Antique period.

⁹⁷² Schiller (1972), p. 98.

The iconographic transition from the alive, triumphant Jesus to the dead, twisted type did not begin in the East until around the late seventh century, the date generally nominated in connection with the composition of the *Hodegos* of Anastasius of Sinai.⁹⁷³ It is this work which is seen to have provided the necessary intellectual and devotional environment for the evolution of the dead Jesus on the cross in art. Since so few monuments survive from eastern art, the process can be seen to have begun in Palestinian Crucifixion iconography across the seventh to the ninth centuries, with the gradual introduction of new details to heighten the suggestion of Jesus as a human victim. This process is observable on a series of Palestinian Crucifixion icons from St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai [Pl. 14b-d].⁹⁷⁴ The research of Weitzmann in analysing the iconography and dating the icons has thus proven critical to the formulation of a time-frame for this transition. Since many of these details are present in the iconography of the Gaza gem, for a post-Iconoclastic date to be posited with any conviction it is necessary to outline this process of change in some detail.⁹⁷⁵

It is well known that prior to the eighth century, when the theology of the Passion and death of Christ on the cross remained incomplete, the intellectual and theological climate was not conducive to the representation of Jesus dead on the cross. An essential impediment to the formulation of such iconography was the inability to address the question of how the Cross and Passion affected the definition of Jesus' divinity and humanity: on the one hand, the christological doctrine required the perfect union of his two natures, with the precept that the divine remain immutable and immortal even in death; on the other, the doctrine of redemption or soteriology required that he die on the cross.⁹⁷⁶ For both artists and theologians the immediate problems were at what point Jesus died on the cross

⁹⁷³ Martin (1955), located the first appearance of the type on certain late ninth/early tenth century ivory reliefs: esp. pp. 189-90, with summary of previous literature, p. 192, 196. However, see now H. Belting and C. Belting-Ihm, "Das Kreuzbild im Hodegos des Anastasius Sinaites", *Tortulae. Römische Quartalschrift*, Suppl. 30 (Freiburg, 1966), 30-39, cited by Schiller (1972), p. 96 n. 17, & Kartsonis (1986), p. 41 n. 2. On Anastasius of Sinai see Kartsonis (1986), pp. 40-67; also Kartsonis (1994a), pp. 164-166.

⁹⁷⁴ Schiller (1972), pp. 95-96; Kartsonis (1986), pp. 67-68, & see (1994a), pp. 166-168, discussing the earliest two icons; Corrigan in Ousterhout & Brubaker (eds) (1995), pp. 45-62.

⁹⁷⁵ Maguire (1974), pp. 126-7, gives a brief overview of the iconographic changes that occurred up to the twelfth century.

⁹⁷⁶ Pelikan (1971), pp. 226-277.

and which of his natures suffered? So troublesome was this question that despite an effort by Apollinaris to confront it in the late fourth century,⁹⁷⁷ a thrashing out of its intricacies was avoided until the time of the sixth Ecumenical Council in the seventh century.⁹⁷⁸ Not surprisingly, the formative experimentations with pictorial representations of the Crucifixion produced in the meantime avoided any reference to the death of Jesus, utilising instead the *triumphans* iconography which recalled the Passion of the human nature whilst implying that the divine nature did not suffer.⁹⁷⁹ In the impassive face and open eyes, and in the suppression of any references to his physical suffering and mortality, this iconography symbolised Jesus' victory over death and recalled the miracle of Redemption. It is remarkable that in so successfully circumnavigating doctrinal traps, effectively accommodating christological and soteriological concerns,⁹⁸⁰ the iconography simultaneously reflected certain contemporary interpretations of the cross as a triumph, coherently exploring what Kartsonis describes as the "multifaceted historical, christological, soteriological, and sacramental realities" of that event.⁹⁸¹

Presumably prompted by advances in the debate regarding Christ's Passion and death on the cross, the early emphasis on Jesus as the triumphant Saviour eventually yielded to intimations of his humanity. This is attested on the earliest crucifixion icon in existence, Icon B.32 at Mount Sinai, dated by Weitzmann to the seventh/eighth century [Pl.14b]. Ostensibly conforming to the Palestinian pre-iconoclastic tradition for the representation of the Crucifixion, it depicts an upright Jesus, wearing a purplish *colobium* and with his arms stretched out horizontally, between Mary and John. Yet several compositional changes have been made to accentuate his humanity,⁹⁸² including the inclination of Jesus' head, first intimated on the Rabbula manuscript, and the more profuse streams of blood emanating from the wounds in his hands. The poor state of this icon's preservation makes it

⁹⁷⁷ For a summary of his teaching, Bettenson (1967), pp. 44-5.

⁹⁷⁸ Kartsonis (1986), p. 37.

⁹⁷⁹ Kartsonis (1986), pp. 37-38.

⁹⁸⁰ Regarding the doctrine of the two natures: Pelikan (1971), pp. 256-277; Shepherd (1980), pp. 107-8; Kartsonis (1986), pp. 33-39.

⁹⁸¹ Kartsonis (1994a), pp. 166-169. See also Schiller (1972), pp. 96-99.

⁹⁸² For a detailed description see Weitzmann (1976), cat. nr B.32, pp. 57-58.

impossible to tell whether Jesus' eyes were painted as open or closed. However, as mentioned earlier the deterioration of the surface paint does make it possible to view the original underdrawing: preserved beneath the *colobium*, which depicted Jesus in a loincloth, flakes of flesh coloured paint are still visible over the chest.⁹⁸³ Essentially, what we have in this icon is not a subtle deviation from the old trusted “triumphant” model, but the crafting of a new framework on which more graphic changes could later be developed. Aside from the initial desire to have Jesus clothed in the loincloth, with his head inclined and wounds bleeding freely, such changes included the depiction of the *suppedaneum* as a flat square base, as it is in such later Byzantine figurations as that on the cover of the Fieschi Morgan Staurotheke (early ninth century), Sinai Icon B.50 (first half of ninth century-*Pl.14d*), and in a miniature in the Khludov Psalter (mid-ninth century).⁹⁸⁴ Earlier uses of a foot support in Palestinian art, as on the Vatican panel [*Pl.7b*] and an ampulla in Stuttgart (c. 600),⁹⁸⁵ show it as a single bar, a style repeated on the mid-eighth century Palestinian Crucifixion icon B.36 where Jesus' heels fall over the back of the bar [*Pl.14c*]. The flattening of the base was not merely a stylistic alteration: it facilitated a greater pronounciation in the parting of the feet than was achieved in earlier figurations and enabled a more substantial base for the upward compression of the legs, creating a concertina-like effect on the knees as the body slumped from above and the foot support provided resistance from below. In this way, the momentum for more dramatic iconographic modifications were initiated by the eighth century.

By the first half of the eighth century, increasingly graphic alterations to the figure of Jesus began to infiltrate compositions. According to Weitzmann, an icon produced around this time indicates that the trend to show Jesus dead on the cross was manifest in art during the Iconoclastic period and not after: Icon B.36 from St

⁹⁸³ Weitzmann (1976), p. 57.

⁹⁸⁴ The staurotheke and Psalter are Constantinopolitan: Evans & Wixom (1997), cat. nrs. 34 & 52 respectively.

⁹⁸⁵ Previously in the Rabbula illumination the feet point down, slightly parted and each attached by a nail but with no foot support. On the Vatican panel the feet protrude only slightly beneath the hem of a very long robe, parted and nailed individually but with a foot support. On a Palestinian ampulla in Stuttgart, c. AD 600, they are split and shown in profile view standing flat on a foot support (which itself rests on a Golgothic mound)- see Balicka-Witakowska (1997), fig. 22. The feet are parted on the S. Maria Antiqua Theodotus Crucifixion fresco (2 nails) but there is no *suppedaneum*.

Catherine's Monastery is the earliest monument we know in which Jesus is shown with eyes closed, marking his death and the end of his human agony [*Pl.14c*].⁹⁸⁶ Still clothed in the *colobium*, his arms remaining straight and nailed, Jesus' head now tilts markedly and is crowned with thorns. Pronounced streams of blood flow from all wounds, with water flowing from his side.⁹⁸⁷ The iconographic changes preserved on this icon coincided with an eruption of the theological conflict during the Iconoclastic controversy (726-843) over who suffered and died on the cross: God, the human Jesus, or both. Therefore the iconographic changes were permitted not so much for historical accuracy as theological exigency, their emphasis on the physicality of Christ's death effectively endorsing the suffering of his human nature. The icon thus indicates that by the mid-eighth century in the East, images of the Crucifixion served to enunciate particular theological viewpoints on the definition of the person of Christ. The closed eye motif for instance, which symbolised the death of Jesus, proved important to opponents of Monophysitism, who wished to emphasise the physical death and thereby the dual nature of Christ, as well as to those of Iconoclasm, who sought to justify images of Jesus on the basis of his Incarnation, also proved in a physical death. In addition, the simultaneous accent on bleeding wounds gave expression to the sacrificial and sacramental significance increasingly accorded the death by Christians. As Belting comments: "Such panels do not, therefore, simply narrate an episode from the Passion of Christ, but take up the discussion of the God-man as the Crucified."⁹⁸⁸

Weitzmann has shown that the pivotal icon in the transition from the alive to dead Christ is the Mount Sinai icon B.50 [*Pl.14d*], produced sometime in the first half of the ninth century. Having all of the attributes of a Middle Byzantine iconographic type, with closed eyes and the *colobium* of the earlier icons now openly replaced by the short loincloth, the icon sits at what Weitzmann denoted as the iconographic "crossroads" of the Early and Middle Byzantine periods.⁹⁸⁹ Further underlining the sacramental significance of the Crucifixion at this date are the four streams of blood emanating from the wound which indicated to

⁹⁸⁶ Weitzmann (1976), p. 63.

⁹⁸⁷ Weitzmann (1976), v. I, cat. nr B.36, pp. 61-64. Weitzmann (1974), p. 40.

⁹⁸⁸ Belting (1994), pp. 120-121 & 139-142, quotation, p. 139.

⁹⁸⁹ Weitzmann (1976), v. 1, cat. nr B.50, pp. 79-82. Kartsonis (1986), p. 108.

Weitzmann a symbolic meaning regarding the four rivers of Paradise and the salvific efficacy of the blood.⁹⁹⁰ Nudity has also become more realistic and thereby more suggestive of humanity than the symbolic nudity rendered in the indistinct plasticine-like Jesus figures on the fourth/fifth century “acclaim” gems [Pl.10]. Aside from its length, the light blue fabric of the loincloth has become transparent enough for the colour of the flesh beneath to be apprehended and is slit over the right leg to reveal the upper thigh. The form and suggestive transparency of the cloth marks a critical step towards the explicit display of Jesus’ nudity. Nevertheless, some hesitancy about the naked form remains, as attested in the late ninth century Homilies of St Gregory of Nazianzus (folio 30verso, ms. gr. 510) where an underdrawing of a loincloth on the dead Jesus is overpainted with the now old-fashioned purple *colobium*.⁹⁹¹ Kazhdan and Maguire suggest that the objection here must be to Jesus’ nudity rather than his death, since the accompanying depictions of the Deposition and Burial on the same page are left unaltered.⁹⁹² Broadly speaking however, the attempted revival of the loincloth around the ninth century, whilst conceivably indicating a surrender to the shame associated with Jesus’ nudity, can possibly be attributed to the interaction of various influences: historical, as a conscious reversion to the fifth century type on the basis of perceived historical accuracy;⁹⁹³ literary, with written accounts referring without shame to Christ’s nakedness on the cross;⁹⁹⁴ or theological,⁹⁹⁵ associated with refinements in the theology of the death. Alternatively, as Corrigan maintains, the significance of the choice may well have remained undecided at this date.⁹⁹⁶ What is clear is that in the ninth century there was some indecision as to how the crucified should be portrayed. If orthodox beliefs were to be reflected, showing the union of his two natures, should he have open or closed eyes, be upright or slumped on the cross, clothed or naked?

⁹⁹⁰ Weitzmann (1976), p. 81.

⁹⁹¹ The Gregory of Nazianzus, Paris cod. gr. 510, late ninth century. Noted by Martin (1955), p. 191. See also Kartsonis (1986), pp. 141-146, esp. 143; Cormack “Painting after Iconoclasm” in Cormack (1989), pp. 5-6; Corrigan (1995), p. 47, fig. 17.

⁹⁹² Kazhdan & Maguire (1991), p. 11

⁹⁹³ Martin (1955), p. 196.

⁹⁹⁴ Kazhdan & Maguire (1991), p. 11.

⁹⁹⁵ Corrigan (1995), p. 45-62.

⁹⁹⁶ Corrigan (1995), p. 49.

This new closed-eyes motif persists in the second half of ninth century on Icon B.51 where blood is again in evidence flowing from the side wound, the *colobium* is substituted for a short loincloth, and the head is crowned with thorns.⁹⁹⁷ An inscription, written on the icon itself, also reads: “Who would not be confounded, be in fear and tremble, seeing you, O Saviour, dead on the cross; who rent the garment of death, and are covered with the robe of incorruption.” With its intimation of a private devotional relationship between the viewer, possibly a monk, and the image viewed, the inscription suggests to Schiller one reason why from the eighth century in the East, Crucifixion images increasingly emphasised Jesus’ human death over his triumph.⁹⁹⁸ Interestingly, it is following the development of this suffering type in the ninth century that the Crucifixion image, as testimony to the death of Christ, arises as the principal theme of Christian art.⁹⁹⁹

From the tenth century onwards, the image of the dead, loinclothed Christ predominated. Just as the increasingly old fashioned *colobium* type continued in later Byzantine works, successfully maintaining the triumphal rigidity of Jesus’ body even when he was paradoxically shown dead,¹⁰⁰⁰ so the loincloth-type facilitated the pictorial expression of theological realities concerning the death by exposing his body to radical experimentation. Thus during the tenth century, the body was shown to sag to the left.¹⁰⁰¹ The fusion of this pivotal detail with those of the bowed or declined head, the closed eyes and bleeding wounds, procured the formula that was to be standard in Byzantine art. The curving also heralded the downward collapse of the once outstretched figure, and this in turn initiated a sequence of further iconographic developments: the falling of the arms by various degrees out of their horizontal position to form a Y shape; the resultant buckling of the legs, accentuated by the foot support below; and the distortion of the fingers, with the thumbs made to point upwards by the downward thrust of the

⁹⁹⁷ Weitzmann (1976), cat. nr B.51, pp. 82-83.

⁹⁹⁸ Schiller (1972), p. 96. Corrigan (1995), p. 45, supports the idea that the icon was made for the private devotion of a monk.

⁹⁹⁹ Schiller (1972), p. 99.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Kartsonis (1986), p. 108.

¹⁰⁰¹ A poem by Constantine of Rhodes in the tenth century, describes an unclothed and dead Christ shown hanging on the cross in a mosaic Crucifixion image from Constantine’s Christ of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople when it was renovated in the ninth century: Schiller (1972), p. 98; see also Martin (1955), pp. 191-192.

dead body hanging from the nailed palms.¹⁰⁰² The latter development can be seen to be a progression from earlier hand-types, seen in the fourth/fifth century (Nott gem [Pl.10a] and Maskell relief [Pl. 5a]), and sixth centuries (Rabbula manuscript and Vatican panel, [Pl.7]), where Jesus' palms and fingers are outstretched and invariably nailed, but as yet undistorted. Each of these modifications betray the keen effort to accentuate Christ's human suffering and since all of the modifications are apprehended on the Gaza jasper, down to a possibly coincidental but nevertheless prominently contorted thumb on Jesus' left hand, it should be clear that the gem was modelled, however crudely, on this Middle Byzantine type. The fact that the eyes are not discernible is not an impediment to this conclusion, neither is the lack of a *suppedaneum*.

In the eleventh and twelfth century this type received further elaboration when the head began to slump more markedly onto the shoulder, rather than being bowed or gently declined. At this time also, a more significant step seems to have been taken towards the visual suggestion of Jesus' nudity on the cross. In the crucifixion mosaic in the narthex of the Katholikon, Hosias Loukas c.1025,¹⁰⁰³ where the curve of the body has become more pronounced, not only do the folds of fabric falling from the central knot of a diaphanous loincloth allow the subtle suggestion of the genitals, the translucency of the fabric allows the thighs to be seen. Although intimated in this eleventh century mosaic and on a late eleventh/early twelfth century icon from Mount Sinai [Pl.16c], the diaphanous cloth only becomes more common after the twelfth century.¹⁰⁰⁴

The gradual increase of emphasis on Christ's suffering in Crucifixion images was no doubt nurtured by the reverence of the crucified which emerged in spiritual writings in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁰⁰⁵ Yet the impetus for the visual emphasis has been linked more directly to the founding of the Franciscan order in the thirteenth century and to the subsequent development of Franciscan theology, which stressed Jesus' humanity and inspired a more intimate and

¹⁰⁰² Schiller (1972), p. 99.

¹⁰⁰³ For the mosaic see Schiller (1972), fig. 342, and note the later eleventh century mosaic at Daphni (fig. 341), with which the former image can be compared.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Derbes (1996), p. 200, n. 107.

¹⁰⁰⁵ notably with Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153): Schiller (1972), p. 10; Derbes (1996), p. 17.

emotional pity for the crucified.¹⁰⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, the new suffering Christ, known as the *Christus Patiens* type, was developed especially in the West where during the early thirteenth century it gradually displaced the *Christus triumphans*.¹⁰⁰⁷ A critical development by the end of that century was the masterful accentuation of the body's curve to intensify the pathos and humility of the victim. Where the Byzantine type shows a continuous curve, seen in the Sinai icon [Pl.16c] and emulated in Italian art by such artists as Cimabue,¹⁰⁰⁸ the Syrian line is broken at the neck and knees.¹⁰⁰⁹ It is the Syrian type that we see on this gem, which was said to be from Gaza: the frontal hips do not curve to the right but are twisted so that the pelvis and legs are seen on an angle, the legs falling in profile, slightly bent with the feet angled downwards.

Now whilst the Gaza Jesus can be seen to emulate a post-twelfth century twisted body, the figure is naked, and for this there is no precedent in pre-fifteenth century Christian art.¹⁰¹⁰ Even the *Sendlinger Altarpiece* of 1407, cited by Trexler as the only instance of an explicitly naked Jesus in Medieval art, has a transparent *perizoma* draped around Jesus' loins in the fashion seen at Hosios Lukas in the eleventh and fairly well established in art by the late twelfth century. E. Fisher's study of Michael Psellos' Oration on the Crucifixion, describing an image of Mary and John flanking a dead and naked Jesus on the cross, reveals that such images with the translucent cloth were understood by their Byzantine contemporaries to represent the naked Jesus.¹⁰¹¹ Explicit references to the suspension of Jesus naked on the cross pervade Franciscan literature, with writers and subsequently artists finding increasing preoccupation in the actual process of stripping.¹⁰¹² In view of the *Sendlinger* image, where the penis is visible, there is no doubt that the nudity

¹⁰⁰⁶ On the subject of Franciscan spirituality and the growing empathy for Christ's suffering on the cross as effected in art: Derbes (1996), pp. 16-24.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Derbes (1996), p. 16. The earlier iconographic type of the *triumphans* was not redundant, continuing alongside the suffering *Patiens* type until the end of the Macedonian Period. Kartsonis (1986), p. 68 n. 87.

¹⁰⁰⁸ For the icon and a crucifix of the *Christus Patiens* type painted for San Domenico 1270-5, attributed to Cimabue, see Derbes (1996), figs 13 & 12 respectively; and on Cimabue and the assimilation of Byzantine imagery, pp. 27-34.

¹⁰⁰⁹ On the representation of Christ with the twisted body, Millet (1916), pp. 406-416.

¹⁰¹⁰ Trexler (1993), p. 110 n. 23.

¹⁰¹¹ Fisher (1994), pp. 44-55.

¹⁰¹² Derbes (1996), pp. 30-32; on the stripping of Christ in Italian painting, pp. 138-142. See also on this theme, Schiller (1972), pp. 83-85.

was increasingly explicit beneath the *perizoma*. Nevertheless the loin-covering, however transparent, was not discarded, and this is I think an important point.

Given this contemporary understanding of Jesus' nudity on the cross and the persistent retention of the *perizoma*, the fact that the carver chooses to clothe the substantially smaller penitential figures on the Gaza gem would seem to me to suggest that Jesus' nakedness is intentional in this case and not purely a result of artistic ineptitude. As it appears in this miniature glyptic context however, there is a danger of reading too much into the iconographic feature of his nudity. Both the nudity and the absence of the cross in this composition could be explained simply as a casualty of the carver's close attention to the form of the body, which accurately replicates the conventional Middle Byzantine type. If the artisan had been hastily reproducing a design with which he was unfamiliar, as the ambiguous identity of the kneeling/standing figures suggests, it is conceivable that in his effort to reproduce the basic outline of Jesus' twisted posture, he unconsciously omitted the detail of the *perizoma* and the cross. Admittedly this is not a wholly satisfactory explanation. Yet in the event that the iconographic model for Jesus had him clothed in a diaphanous cloth through which the pelvis and upper thighs were visible, as it seems was customary from the twelfth century at the time when the twisted type underwent marked development, such preoccupation with the outline of the body seems even more likely. And the crudity with which the design has been carved does lend some credence to these speculations.

Which brings us to the question of a model for the Gaza gem. Despite its contradictory stylistic, iconographic and epigraphic features, the jasper could be a Medieval copy of something like the Venetian moulded glass cameos in Washington,¹⁰¹³ London,¹⁰¹⁴ and Madrid¹⁰¹⁵ which bear similarly conventional thirteenth century Byzantine figurations of the Crucifixion in identical miniature

¹⁰¹³ Washington, Dumbarton Oaks Collection: acc. no. 58.22; 3.2 x 2.6 cm; red/green. Ross (1962), v. 1, pp. 90-91, nr 109, pl. LVII. Said to have been found in Constantinople, Ross believes it is produced in imitation of jasper.

¹⁰¹⁴ London, British Museum: M&LA 54,7-22,19; diam. 3.25cms; red. I am grateful to Christopher Entwistle, British Museum, for checking the measurement for me. This and other "pastes" were omitted by Dalton from his catalogue of early Christian Antiquities from the Christian East (1901), "on account of their presumably western and Medieval origin", p. 136.

¹⁰¹⁵ Madrid, Museum Valencia de Don Juan; 2.9 x 2.7cms; green. Wentzel (1957), p. 60 fig. 17, & p. 67 cat. nr 53.

formats.¹⁰¹⁶ The Gaza jasper shows the Syrian style of the twisted iconography, with the line broken at the neck, knees and ankles, whilst the Venetian images maintain the continuous curve. Inspired by Byzantine cameos carved from semi-precious stones or possibly seals,¹⁰¹⁷ the glass cameos show the twisted Jesus clothed in the *perizoma*, his nimbed head slumped onto the chest, the arms angled in a V shape above the head, and placed between two figures. On each of the three examples cited, a short reference to Christ's name appears at the top of the design field in the form of the Greek capitals, IC XC, the common monogrammatic abbreviation of IHCUC XPICTOC, *Iesus Christos*. Thus in size, compositional format (including the placement of the inscription) and iconography, the extant cameos present conspicuous parallels for the Gaza jasper.

Manufactured as amulets or mementos for the pilgrim trade in the Holy Land, the glass cameos testify to the continuing use and circulation of Crucifixion amulets through the East and West in the thirteenth century. Whilst the difficulty in making out the identity of the letters in the superscript on the obverse face of the Gaza jasper might be denoted as the copyist's attempt to reproduce the general pattern of word and image set on such talismans, this does not explain the appearance of similarly enigmatic lettering on the reverse face and the bezel. For this practice we must look to other Byzantine prototypes. The use of imitation script for magical purposes was not confined to the early centuries of the Late Antique period, there being clear evidence of the continuation of a magical tradition in early and Medieval Byzantium,¹⁰¹⁸ and of the combination of Christian symbols with explicit magical inscriptions in the Byzantine period to effect what

¹⁰¹⁶ The pastes belong to a large series, nearly all portraying biblical subjects with either Greek or Latin inscriptions. Vickers (1974), p. 18, numbered the series at 171. Although their origin has been disputed, their manufacture probably passed from Constantinople to Venice during the thirteenth century when Constantinople fell under western rule. Ross (1962), pp. 88-91, argued for an eastern origin. Wentzel (1957), pp. 50-67 & (1963), pp. 11-24, nominated a Venetian origin, based on the preponderance of motifs found only in the West. Vickers (1974), p. 21, accepts Wentzel's stylistic arguments for a Venetian origin, pointing out the particularly byzantinising of Venetian art in the thirteenth C.

¹⁰¹⁷ Ross (1962), p. 88, believed that the larger size of the lettering on the pastes betrayed their modelling on seals rather than cameos; he cites Galavaris (1959), pp. 269-270, who argued that seals may preserve monumental imagery or images on objects from the minor arts, such as icons, manuscripts or enamels.

¹⁰¹⁸ In the early Byzantine period we know that crystals were used as amulets: see L. Kötzsche in Weitzmann (1979), pp. 437-438, cat. nr 395; Kornbluth (1994/5), nr 7; Spier (1993), p. 41.

Maguire terms a “christianised magic”.¹⁰¹⁹ Corrupt inscriptions appear on Byzantine engraved gems, such as the much larger bloodstone intaglio in New York (5 x 3.5cm),¹⁰²⁰ and in conjunction with imagery these ensured an object’s effectiveness in shielding the wearer from demonic forces. Of course the Greek inscription script on the possibly Egyptian bloodstone does not approximate the puzzling nature of the lines of script on the reverse face of the Gaza gem. Nevertheless, the placement of imagery amidst a Greek inscription that itself runs in continuous lines across one face of the gem onto the other does indicate the stone’s likely use as an amuletic device, specifically to aid women. On one side Jesus is shown (with cross-nimbus) healing the *Haemorrhissa* and on the other a female *orant* stands between two stylised palm trees; the letters tell in abbreviated form and with some inaccuracies, the story of the *Haemorrhissa* as narrated in Mark 5:25-34. Previously dated to the sixth/seventh century, Spier believes the bloodstone is related materially and stylistically to Middle Byzantine cameos.¹⁰²¹ The appearance of a second image of the *Haemorrhissa*, this time with an image of the Crucifixion on the probably tenth/twelfth century green chalcedony in the Benaki Museum [*Pl.16a*] naturally prompts some speculation as to the possible retention by the Crucifixion motif in this miniature context of its original prophylactic appeal, witnessed on the Pereire gem.¹⁰²² The Benaki Crucifixion preserves the customary three-figure Byzantine composition, with the *colobium*-clad triumphant Jesus rather than the *Patiens* type with which it co-existed in the Middle Byzantine period; Jesus is distinguished by the cross-nimbus as became customary in eastern and subsequently western Crucifixion iconography after the seventh/eighth century.¹⁰²³ Whilst the Benaki gem bears no inscription that might indicate specific talismanic properties or function, the marriage of the two subjects on this one object is intriguing.

¹⁰¹⁹ Notably on the armbands: Kartsonis (1994b), p. 101; Vikan (1982), pp. 41-43, & (1991/2). Kitzinger (1980), pp. 151-156, & (1988), p. 61. Maguire “Magic and the Christian Image”, in Maguire (ed.) (1995), pp. 60ff.

¹⁰²⁰ New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art: inv. 17.190.491. See L. Kötzsche in Weitzmann (ed.) (1979), p. 440, nr 398.

¹⁰²¹ Spier (1995), p. 44, n. 111.

¹⁰²² The *Haemorrhissa* is standing on the Benaki gem as opposed to kneeling as was customary.

¹⁰²³ The distinction is made on the ampullae, but first occurs in painted form on Mount Sinai Icon B.32 [Weitzmann (1976), pl. xxiii] and the Theodotus Chapel fresco at S. Maria Antiqua.

From the foregoing analysis, it is obvious that the carver's deviation from a frontal view of Jesus on the Gaza gem is significant and cannot be justified on the grounds of magical or Gnosticising experimentation. Whilst the iconography of Jesus alone corresponds to theological and spiritual interests current after the tenth century in the West,¹⁰²⁴ but particularly fervent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the cumulative impact of the compositional, iconographic and epigraphic modifications on the gem cited at the outset of this discussion is to denote a fundamental shift away from the historicism and triumphalism of the Lewis gem, where Christ rises above the lance-thrust, towards a manifestly Middle Byzantine emotionalism. Considering the combination of script and image on the obverse face, with lines of lettering covering the reverse, the Gaza crucifixion amulet may be intended to copy an object like the New York bloodstone but featuring a representation of the Crucifixion similar to the type preserved by the Venetian pastes, where a monogrammatic version of Jesus' name (Jesus Christ) appeared in Greek at the top of the design field. This would seem to be supported by Cadwallader's reading of the superscript on the obverse face as an abbreviation of the *titulus* erected on the cross and documented in John 19.19-20. The precise replication of Middle Byzantine iconographic types, in the figures of Jesus and the two penitents, and the obvious knowledge of the classic Byzantine three-figure compositional scheme, replete with inscription, underlines the gem's likely dependence on a twelfth or thirteenth century model. This putative dating does not tell against the use of a Semitic language, especially given the general provenance asserted for it. What it may do is reduce the level of competency in forming the letters, producing the difficulty now encountered in deciphering the script.

Whilst the threefold figural group had become canonical in Byzantine Crucifixion scenes by the tenth century, the replication of this compositional unit does not guarantee the identity of the figures as Mary and John in this pictorial context. Given the placement of the figures, which conversely conform to the classic Byzantine pattern, and their posture, which does not appear in Byzantine art for the representation of either Mary or John, it becomes possible to posit the

¹⁰²⁴ As manifest in sculpture, Beckwith (1969), pp. 150-152.

conflation of the prominent iconographic pair with the penitential figural types that had begun to appear beside the cross in the Middle Byzantine period. Bonner is thus shown to be correct in thinking that the pair were two mourning figures.¹⁰²⁵ If the figure on the right is a woman, she neither occupies the accepted position nor affects the customary attitude for the Virgin Mary and is therefore more likely to have been modelled on a female figure of Mary Magdalene. Hence the conclusion that the figures are generic penitents occupying the positions customarily assigned to the Virgin and John. A Late Antique¹⁰²⁶ or early Byzantine dating for the gem must therefore be rejected in favour of a Middle Byzantine, possibly thirteenth century date. More specifically, the Syrian type used for the body and the supposed provenance of the gem [Gaza] suggest a Syrian model.

Some Conclusions

The Lewis, Benaki and Gaza jaspers can be viewed as a series that illustrates aspects of the evolution of Crucifixion iconography over the early to the Middle Byzantine periods and some of the simultaneously occurring theological developments across that time span. As the earliest of the three, the sixth/seventh century Lewis jasper stands at the beginning of the Byzantine period proper: Jesus is still perceived as triumphant, elements of the Gospel narratives are incorporated and the robe is introduced. Despite developments directly after this time towards the depiction of Christ as dead, his human nature shown as suffering on the cross, the retention of the *colobium* in figurations of the Crucifixion well into the Byzantine period secured the longevity of the rigid body as an iconographic fixture, even when Christ is shown to be suffering or actually dead.¹⁰²⁷ Although Byzantine crystals document this change, whereon Christ is shown in the loincloth, the tenth/twelfth century Benaki jasper documents the persistence of the *colobium* type, with the head of Christ turned and dropped slightly to look on his mother. Thereon the Virgin and John appear in what has now become the popular

¹⁰²⁵ see note above-

¹⁰²⁶ Leclercq (1907), v. 1 p. 369, and Morton Smith (1978), p. 62: pre-third century. Finney (1994), p. 141 n. 51, dates it to the fourth century seemingly on the basis that new biblical subjects were introduced into gem engraving at this time.

¹⁰²⁷ Kartsonis (1986), p. 99, notes that the *colobium* type continued to be widespread at least until the end of the Macedonian period (867-1056).

formula for the rendering of the crucifixion event. The Gaza gem documents the next iconographic step, with the twisted body of Jesus shown naked and hanging in death. This type is a post-Iconoclastic one, arrived at only after an intense and careful process of both artistic experimentation and theological discursion on Christology and the place of imagery in Christianity. The gem itself, although puzzling, seems to indicate the continued use of Christian imagery for prophylactic purposes into the Middle Byzantine period.

Part 3

PROBLEMATIC AMULETS

There are three amuletic devices that have been mentioned in the past by scholars in connection with the subject of the appearance of Crucifixion imagery in Late Antiquity. The following discussion focuses on the iconography exhibited on these objects and draws on this evidence to illustrate the ways in which the amulets can or cannot be considered to be relevant to the discussion of Crucifixion iconography prior to the fifth century.

A. Orpheus Bakchikos Seal-Cylinder [Cat. nr 6]

This haematite seal-cylinder has attained a remarkable level of notoriety in scholarship over the past century. Originally from the collection of E. Gerhard, it was held in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin prior to its apparent loss during the Second World War. Without the original to view, the usefulness of the details gleaned from the rare photograph of an impression made from the gem [*Pl.17a*], line drawings [*Pl.17b*]¹⁰²⁸ and the past analysis of scholars,¹⁰²⁹ remains limited.

From the text on this cylinder [ΟΡΦΕΟC ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟC] one can assume that the image of the crucified figure incised below is meant to be Orpheus. As such, it is the only known representation of a crucified Orpheus.¹⁰³⁰ The figuration is highly unusual in that instead of Christ being represented as Orpheus, as was common in early Christian art, Orpheus is represented as Christ.¹⁰³¹ Hence much debate and discussion has been prompted by this enigmatic artefact. The syncretism of Orphic, Christian and pagan elements, with the representation of Orpheus in the

¹⁰²⁸ The drawing reproduced in Eisler (1921), pl. XXXI, was executed by A. Becker from plaster impressions taken from the seal [*Pl.17b*]. Becker's drawing was re-used by Boulanger (1925), where it became known to Leclercq ["Orphée", in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 12.2, col. 2753 nr 22 & col. 2754 fig. 9249]. It appears in Mastrocinque (1993), fig. 1. Drawings in Marquès-Rivière (1938), fig. 32, and Guthrie (1952), fig. 19 [showing the design as it would appear both on the face of the seal and in impression], seem to be poor copies based on the Becker original.

¹⁰²⁹ It appears that Eisler studied the seal from the impressions, which were supplied to him by O. Wulff, Director of the Early Christian and Byzantine collections at the Kaiser Friedrich Museum as it was then known. After Furtwängler (1896), nr 8830, Wulff (1909), I, p. 234, nr 1146, tav. 56 and Eisler (1921), scholars seem to have been reliant on this drawing; although Hinz (1973), Abb. 114, reproduces the photograph.

¹⁰³⁰ For representations of Orpheus in art of the early Church: Leclercq "Orphée", in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 12.2 (1936), cols. 2735-2755, [Berlin seal col. 2753 nr 22].

¹⁰³¹ Guthrie (1952), pp. 265-266.

attitude of Christ, a decidedly Christian motif with a pagan inscription, has seen the gem classified both as pagan¹⁰³² and more commonly as Gnostic.¹⁰³³ Whilst the seal was generally accepted as being authentic in the early part of the twentieth century, variously dated between the second and fourth centuries,¹⁰³⁴ there are now doubts about its authenticity.¹⁰³⁵ Leaving aside the arguments regarding the Orphic-Christian relationship, concentrating instead purely on the representation of the crucified figure, it is worth commenting on several iconographic peculiarities that should alert us to the fact that the seal cannot be classified as Late Antique.

It has been observed that a later date within the Late Antique period should be considered for the production of the seal given the delayed appearance of images showing Jesus on the cross in Christian art.¹⁰³⁶ Yet it is not simply the rarity of such images at that time that makes a later date more plausible; rather, it is the categorical absence of depictions of Jesus hanging in the fashion shown here prior to the Middle Byzantine period. The fact of the seal's unmistakable divergence from Late Antique pictorial types was underlined by Hinz when he juxtaposed photographs of the Palatine graffito, the Berlin seal, the Pereire gem and a Jerusalem ampulla on two facing pages.¹⁰³⁷ The Palatine and Pereire figurations, produced at roughly the same time but in differing religious/social milieus, were nonetheless uniform in their presentation of the victim rigidly *en face* with head turned in profile to his right. As we know, this frontal type continued into fifth, sixth and seventh century Christian art. In contrast, the crucified figure on the seal is twisted into profile view, his legs bent, arms sagging, head slumped onto the chest. As noted with regard to the Gaza gem, such deviation from frontal view is significant, and in conjunction with the additional changes in positioning of the limbs and head, points to a later iconographic type. Indeed, the body position replicates something like that of the Gaza Jesus and the Middle Byzantine

¹⁰³² Eisler (1925), pp. 338ff.

¹⁰³³ eg. Murray (1981), p. 37 & p. 147 n. 1.

¹⁰³⁴ For the literature and previously posited dates of production for the seal see the meticulously referenced article by Mastrocinque (1993), p. 16 n. 2, and *passim*.

¹⁰³⁵ Zahn & Reil (1926), p. 62-68; and more recently the intimation by Elsner (1998a), p. 746 n. 41.

¹⁰³⁶ see Eisler's comments accompanying his pl. XXXI, Eisler (1921). Boulanger (1925), p. 146.

¹⁰³⁷ Hinz (1973), figs 113-116.

figurations discussed in connection with that jasper. Given this clear semblance, the iconography of the crucified Orpheus on this seal unequivocally betrays the artisan's knowledge of and dependency on a Middle Byzantine (or later) type. Moreover, the cross itself is highly unusual and cannot be compared with any extant Late Antique or early Byzantine types. For the representation of two extremely large nails at the base of the cross, there are no parallels from Byzantine or earlier artistic traditions. The seal-cylinder can, therefore, be eliminated from comparative material.

B. Crucified-Ass Amulet [Cat. nr 7]

The second amulet in this section suffers from similar problems with regard to assessment as its present location is also unknown. Only one article has been devoted to its iconography, and that was published in 1947 by Sergio Bettini.¹⁰³⁸ Bettini noted the use of the Late Antique triumphal iconography for the representation of the ass-headed figure on this bone amulet as opposed to the later iconographical developments which saw the visual articulation of the dead body on the cross.¹⁰³⁹ Yet whilst exhibiting some characteristics of the alive-triumphal Late Antique and early Byzantine type for the crucified Jesus, this artefact does not present a happy stylistic or iconographic match. The most obvious feature to betray a later iconographic model for the figure is the placement of the arms, which are angled obliquely upwards. Such practice is wholly unknown in the early Byzantine period becoming popular only later, when the body of Christ was shown to slump down for the purpose of accentuating his suffering, indicating his body hanging heavily in death. This iconographic development, the early stages of which can be seen on such ninth century artefacts as the Byzantine Crucifixion crystal in London,¹⁰⁴⁰ precipitated the eventual adoption of the Y-shaped cross, particularly popular in Germany during the fourteenth century, whereon Christ's arms were fixed to the rising arms of the Y. Critically, the Y-shaped cross was invariably a foliate cross, in the form of a tree, and in the case of this amulet a

¹⁰³⁸ Bettini (1947).

¹⁰³⁹ Bettini (1947), p. 64.

¹⁰⁴⁰ British Museum M&LA, 55,3-5,1. Pictured in Kornbluth (1997), figs 19 & 20.

tree-cross is suggested.¹⁰⁴¹ Whilst foliate crosses were known on the Jerusalem ampullae,¹⁰⁴² the Y shaped arms rendered here do not appear in the early Byzantine period.

Another iconographic peculiarity comes in the positioning of the legs. The oblique angle of the arms, raised to follow the arms of the cross, is usually found accompanied by some bending or even twisting of the legs to further accentuate the sagging of the body. Yet here they remain side by side, placed flat against the upright/trunk of the tree in the Late Antique fashion. One concession to the later, Middle Byzantine iconography, seems to be the positioning of the feet. These are seen in profile, turned out as though the legs are rotated at the hips, with the soles curving over a roundel in the trunk of the tree. The turning out of the feet in this way seems to begin on the Vatican reliquary figuration (late sixth/early seventh century, *Pl.7b*), where Christ's separately nailed feet are just observable below the hem of the *colobium*. This placement continues in eastern crucifixions during the eighth century, particularly it seems in conjunction with the use of the *suppedaneum*, whereon the parting became more pronounced; for example on icon B.32 from St Catherine's Monastery (seventh/eighth century, *Pl.14b*)¹⁰⁴³ and the slightly later icon B.36 (mid-eighth century, *Pl.14c*).¹⁰⁴⁴ It became a standard iconographic feature in the ninth century, such as on the Fieschi Morgan Staurotheke, but not necessarily in conjunction with the foot-support. It also appears in the West, in the fresco in the chapel of Theodotus in S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, mid-eighth century where it is probably emulating an early Byzantine type imported to Rome by Greek artists during the flowering of the Iconoclastic controversy in the eighth century [*Pl.14a*].¹⁰⁴⁵

Any firm conclusions regarding this amulet are particularly difficult given that the whereabouts of the object has not been confirmed and the only published photograph is that appearing in Bettini's original article. Again, speaking purely in

¹⁰⁴¹ For the Y-shaped cross and associated iconographic developments, see Schiller (1972), v. 2 p. 134.

¹⁰⁴² eg. Monza nr 10: Grabar (1958), pl. xvi. See also the article on palm-tree crosses by Hildburgh (1931), who cites such ampullae n. 4, p. 49.

¹⁰⁴³ Weitzmann (1976), pl. XXIII.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Weitzmann (1976), pl. XXV.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Schiller (1971), p. 100.

terms of the iconography: despite the amulet's apparent replication of the early Christian triumphal type and seeming illustration of the charge of onolatry levelled at the early Christians, the amulet's confusion of this iconographic type with Middle Byzantine iconography disallows its categorisation as a Late Antique artefact.¹⁰⁴⁶ Given the artist's apparent knowledge of both early and later iconography for the representation of Jesus on the cross, it would seem to me that it cannot be dated before the introduction of the Y-angled cross-arms in the Middle Byzantine period.

C. Haematite Amulet [Cat. nr 8]

Whilst it does not display a Crucifixion as such, this amulet [*Plate 17c*] is interesting from the point of view of the brutality that it might be seen to convey. Although it has not been documented elsewhere, Bonner entertained the possibility that the design engraved on this gem evoked Christ's sufferings prior to the Crucifixion at the hands of Roman soldiers.¹⁰⁴⁷ This interpretation hangs on the reading of the reverse inscription. Bonner took the first letter to be a chi and suggested that the second letter replicated the unusual form of the rho as it appeared in some Egyptian papyri. He thereby came up with the hypothesis that the two letters form the early Christian abbreviation for Χριστος. Hence in light of its conceivably Christian or "crypto-Christian" meaning, Bonner included the gem in his discussion of Palestinian, Syrian, and Christian amulets in his pivotal work *Studies in Magical Amulets*. He also mentioned it in connection with objects he classified under "aggressive Magic".¹⁰⁴⁸

Further emphasising the theme of Jesus' suffering, indicated in the binding of the figure's wrists, Bonner noted that certain symbols engraved on the gem looked like nails, whilst others resembled the astrological symbols of the sun and moon. We know that the latter symbols appeared with the *crux invicta* on some fourth century sarcophagi¹⁰⁴⁹ and were common inclusions in Crucifixion iconography after the sixth century [eg. *Pls. 7a, 8b & d, 12e, 13a & d, 14a,b,d*].

¹⁰⁴⁶ Morton Smith seems to imply that such a categorisation is possible: (1978), p. 62.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Bonner (1950), p. 224.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Bonner (1950), p. 224 & p. 112.

¹⁰⁴⁹ eg. the star-and-wreath sarcophagus at Manosque: La Blant (1886), p. 142 nr 204, pl. 50.

If Bonner's theory regarding the presence of the name of Jesus with pictorial evocations of Christ's suffering is correct, the gem would provide an important associate for the Pereire stone [Pl.9], whereon Jesus is also named and his sufferings emphasised for magical purposes. Significantly, whilst the Metropolitan haematite is smaller than the Pereire jasper, both gems are the same shape; that is the flat, upright-oval shape with wide angled bezel common to magical gems of this period. Moreover the design of the Metropolitan gem is replicated on an upright-oval haematite amulet in the Institut für Altertumskunde, University of Köln. This second haematite measures 2.55 x 1.98 x 0.38cms and is dated by Zwierlein-Diehl to the second century.¹⁰⁵⁰ The only immediate iconographic difference between the Köln and Metropolitan haematites is the presentation of the standing naked man: on the Köln gem he is not shown with his wrists bound, but with his arms at his sides. Greek letters appear on the bevelled edge, whilst the pair of characters identified by Bonner as the chi rho on the Metropolitan gem appear again on the reverse face, but this time accompanying three other symbols. It is impossible to come to any firm conclusions about the two magic gems within the parameters of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is important to document their overt physical similarities with the contemporary magical Pereire gem, and to note the possibility, as suggested by that stone, that Christ's sufferings were rehearsed on amuletic objects, in conjunction with the evocation of his name, for magical purposes in Late Antiquity in direct contrast to the antithetical Christian focus away from such suffering.

The gem entered the Metropolitan Museum in 1910 as part of the Murch Collection of Egyptian Antiquities.¹⁰⁵¹ In 1935, pieces in the collection that were considered classical were transferred to the Greek and Roman department, where this gem now resides. As far as the Museum is aware no research has been done on the gem since Bonner's catalogue of Graeco-Egyptian Magical amulets appeared in 1950. It is presently considered to be Gnostic. As this brief discussion

¹⁰⁵⁰ Zwierlein-Diehl (1992), nr 28a, pp. 96-99, line drawing Abb. 3 & 4, photographs taf. 19.

¹⁰⁵¹ Mace (1911), pp. 7-28. I am grateful to Joan Mertens at the Metropolitan Museum for providing me with this reference and the following information on the gem.

suggests, it should be seen to belong to the genre of magical engraved gems documented by Delatte and Derchain, Philipp, Zwierlein-Diehl and Kotansky.¹⁰⁵²

Summary

The purpose of listing these three gems at the end of this Chapter is to attempt to lay aside certain evidence that has previously complicated discussions of Crucifixion iconography as it relates to engraved gems in Late Antiquity. Clearly, the nagging question of the Orpheus seal-cylinder and the Montagna crucifix, whilst resolved only from an iconographic perspective and therefore open to further comment, has nonetheless received some partial resolution. The Metropolitan haematite, whilst also receiving summary treatment, does indicate that there may be further evidence to support the notion, posited in the discussion of the Pereire gem, that it can be seen to reflect a broad Late Antique attitude to the Crucifixion.

¹⁰⁵² see note 521 for the references.

CONCLUSION

The chronological limits set for this study were c. AD 200-c. 600, the limits specified for the Late Antique period. In the course of examining the iconography of the five engraved gems, these perimeters have been unavoidably widened as care has been taken to demonstrate which gems can be classified as Late Antique and which cannot. This process, whilst necessitating the examination of later iconographic developments, has enabled a close re-examination of the development of certain iconographic motifs and compositional elements. Aside from the representation of Jesus and his clothing, these include the introduction of specific characters into the scene, the positioning of those characters and changes in their presentation.

Critically, the iconographic study of the engraved gems and amulets has revealed that of the five stones previously cited to assert the pre-fifth century appearance of the Crucifixion in art, only three can be dated to before the early fifth century: the Pereire, Constanza and Nott gems. Of the five gems, the putative late sixth/early seventh century date for the Lewis gem is the least controversial, finding critical support in the gem's iconographic and compositional semblance with previously dated early Byzantine artefacts from the Syria/Palestine region and provincial centres, and significantly, in the inclusion of the gem by Spier in a group of engraved gems designated by him to a sixth/seventh century Byzantine workshop in the same regional milieu.

Despite the effort to assign a date befitting the mature iconography it displays on its obverse face, the Syrian Gaza Crucifixion jasper remains highly problematic in terms of the script engraved on its three surfaces and the relationship of that script to the image. Although this thesis has attempted to resolve some of those issues, and acknowledged that more work can be done on this, there remains the possibility that the inscription on the reverse face and the bezel may constitute

deliberately disguised text. Importantly, on the iconographic evidence presented by the gem I have suggested that contrary to previous opinion the Gaza jasper reveals a dependency on Middle Byzantine iconographic models for the representation of Jesus and the figures beside him; and in view of this dependency, that the gem cannot date earlier than the thirteenth century, the date at present designated for the formulation of those models. For instance, the deviation from a frontal view of Jesus in the image on the obverse face of this gem: as has been demonstrated here, the profile view of his body, with its arched torso, flaccid limbs and drooping head, denotes the artisan's knowledge of a mature iconographic type, specifically a thirteenth century model. Significantly, apart from the figure of Jesus, this date is attested in the stance and positioning of the attendant figures.

Whilst the issue of the text has not been (and may not be) completely resolved, some new points have been raised: Cadwallader has proposed that the superscript to the iconography on the obverse face may be the abbreviated Hebrew form of the inscription recorded in Jn 19:19-20: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". This fits the pattern, begun on the Pereire gem, continued on the fourth/fifth century Greek acclaim gems, and revived on the thirteenth century Venetian glass pastes, of combining an image of the crucified Jesus with an invocation of or monogrammatic reference to his name. It appears that the gem might yield further information on the use of magical script with religious imagery for amuletic purposes in the Middle Byzantine period; the gem indicates that at this later date, the division between magic and Christianity was no less ambiguous than in Late Antiquity.

The elimination of the Lewis and Gaza gems from the discussion of Crucifixion iconography in the Late Antique period has made possible a more accurate assessment of the development of Crucifixion iconography up to the sixth century. For as the preceding Chapter has attempted to show, the engraved gems surviving from Late Antiquity, namely the Pereire, Nott, Constanza and Lewis gems, yield information that has significant bearing on our understanding of Crucifixion iconography between the years AD 200-600. Essentially, they enable the iconographic development for the subject to be more clearly delineated.

In conjunction with the previously documented material and literary evidence outlined in Chapter II, the gems enhance the developmental paradigm commonly recorded in scholarship for the Crucifixion image. This paradigm has usually begun somewhat tentatively in Rome with the Palatine graffito; it progresses through the fourth century on Passion sarcophagi where there is an expansion of the subject of the Passion in art but still an acute absence of the Crucifixion; in the West it moves to the fifth century with the Maskell and Sabina figurations, before proceeding to the East in the sixth century where there occurs an apparently sudden flowering of Crucifixion imagery. According to Gerke's reading, the development as it is recorded in this way yields two types for the representation of the Crucifixion: firstly, the symbolic treatment of episodes from the Passion, seen on the sarcophagi, where the triumphant cross is upheld at the apex of the narrative instead of the Crucifixion or Resurrection; secondly, the illustration of the Passion in narrative rather than symbolic form. The second type still has its emphasis on triumph, but with the episodes now retold in stational rather than episodic fashion so that the path to victory acknowledges the unavoidable place of suffering. Represented by fifth century Roman images, particularly the Maskell ivory, this second type includes the Crucifixion in its narrative. The Brescia casket preserves a progressive step between the two: the Passion narrative on its lid is expanded to include additional episodes, and the episodes themselves are padded out, yet the Crucifixion is still absent. Both models survive in western art only.

Aside from augmenting this paradigm, the Pereire, Constanza and Nott gems effect a fundamental transformation of its western orientation. From the evidence discussed in Chapter III it is reasonable to infer that despite an absence of extant pictorial renderings in other contemporary media, pictorialisations of the Crucifixion were possibly known, at least in miniature format, as early as AD 200. The second-fourth century dating and general localisation of the Pereire gem proposed here controversially suggests that an image of the Crucifixion was attempted in the East, in magical circles, by the second or third centuries, shortly after the execution of the Palatine graffito in Rome. The date assigned to the Pereire gem is according to the general date assigned to magic gems produced in the East. Unfortunately it is impossible to be more specific: so it remains unclear

as to whether the image pre-dates that of the Palatine or not. Of itself the Palatine graffito indicates that a visual conception of the Crucifixion was known in the Latin West by the early third century. More important is the combined evidence of both images; they attest to the attempt at a visual conception of the Crucifixion very early on, and roughly around the same time in the East and the West. This presents some problems for the argument that the Crucifixion is absent from early Christian art because Christians were unable to formulate a pictorial type, for which they had no precedent. In view of the graffito and the Pereire gem this proposition is untenable, since those outside the Christian Church proper, including magicians, were clearly able to compose a model.

The Pereire gem also attests to the formulation of an image in the East by around the second/third century that highlighted the shocking brutality of the cross for the purposes of accentuating Jesus' spiritual prowess. This iconographic evidence concurs with contemporary magical practices documented in literature where the power of Jesus is seen to be connected specifically to his ability to overcome his death on the cross. From the evidence available to us, although the Pereire gem reveals some knowledge of the prayer-language of the Church, using an invocation of Jesus' name that is reminiscent of ecclesiastical language, this brutal image seems to have been rejected by the early Church. Intimations of brutality did not enter Christian art until the Byzantine period. The absence of the split-leg iconography in Christian art, seen on the Pereire gem and a variant on a later Coptic papyrus, might also indicate that the open position of the legs was one favoured by magicians. In place of a brutal image the early Church opted for a totally different image to fulfil the same function: it highlighted Jesus' imperviousness to suffering for the purpose of highlighting his spiritual prowess.

Together, the three Late Antique gems indicate that at least two design models for the representation of Jesus on the cross were circulating in the East prior to the fifth century. The earliest model is magical, arising in a broader spiritual milieu than the confines of the Christian church proper. It is preserved on the Pereire gem, making that image the earliest surviving representation of Jesus crucified, as distinct from the parody of the Crucifixion preserved in the Palatine graffito. The second and later model is Christian and is characterised by its symbolism. It is

preserved on the intimately related Nott and Constanza gems. Both models present Jesus naked on the cross. The proposed late fourth/early fifth century dating suggests that prior to the introduction of the Crucifixion into specifically Roman Christian narrative art of the fifth century, a composition was formulated in the East. In so far as the acclaim-iconography is not based on the Gospel narratives of the Crucifixion, the composition itself bears no resemblance to the images as they appeared in the fifth century. Both the Maskell and Sabina figurations bear some relation to the narrative in the inclusion of characters in the scene. Nevertheless the upright triumphal figure of Jesus himself as he is portrayed in the fifth century works, plus the emphasis on nudity, appears to continue and develop the type set forth on the Christian gems.

The late fourth/early fifth century date suggested for the two acclaim gems places them at a critical juncture in the maturation of artistic expression in the early Church. During the third century, as Christian communities began to experiment with figurative rather than symbolic or typological expressions of Christ's divine power, the human figure of Jesus began to enter Christian iconographic programmes more consistently and explicitly. With no iconographic tradition for the expression of Jesus as a victorious figure, this was achieved predominantly through the utilisation of visual formulae and subjects already developed for the expression of imperial ideologies and perfectly suited to the Church's needs. Primary amongst these formulae was the appearance and subsequent development in the fourth century of the theme of Christ amongst the Apostles, which drew on the imperial iconographic and thematic model of the god-emperor seated amongst his retinue. Christians elaborated on this theme in light of their own emerging concepts of Jesus as the true philosopher, teacher, law-giver, King of heaven, or divine conqueror of death. The Nott and Constanza gems attest to the formulation of a visual reference to the crucified Jesus, rather than to the Crucifixion event *per se*, through the adaptation of this same imperial model. In the guise of supreme conqueror of death, Jesus was shown on sarcophagi receiving the celestial acclaim of, and invariably the crown of martyrdom from, his Apostles. An alternative to this popular composition, well-known from a series of fourth century sarcophagi, was the replacement of the central and predominating figure of Jesus with the

symbolic monogram of the cross-trophy. This replacement thus effected an early visual representation of the veneration of the cross. The two Christian acclaim gems preserve a further, closely related, compositional variant: the assembling of the Apostles to venerate the crucified Christ. Continuing the theme of triumph and articulating the impassability of Christ's divinity, this compositional variant as it appears on the Nott and Constanza gems can be seen to present a formative phase in the development of Crucifixion iconography in the early Church. This phase is preparatory to that documented in extant Christian art of the fifth century which shows Jesus, in the earliest appearances of the subject of the Crucifixion in a narrative context, alive on the cross. In those later instances the Crucifixion has attained some importance as part of a cycle or *mélange* of scriptural scenes and derives its full meaning from its position in the overall iconographic scheme.

Thus, the dominant and energetic figure that appears in the fifth century on the Maskell ivory and Sabina panel would seem to be inaugurated on the two acclaim gems. The peculiarities of the fifth century open-eyed iconographic type, Jesus presented in strict frontality, upright and with arms rigidly outstretched almost in emulation of the *orant* figure, have previously been explained as an informed response to the problems of how to visually define the interrelationship of Christ's two natures at the time of his death. In light of the iconographic and compositional evidence presented by the Nott and Constanza gems, the peculiarities can also be seen to derive (in part at least) from the Church's adaptation of those pictorial devices used in imperial art for the depiction of the deified emperor: the gems' compositional model has been shown to derive from an imperial format in which the emperor was divinised, presented elevated above his retinue and with his eyes fixed out of the image as though he transcended his physical environment. The gems raise the possibility of a direct lineage from the imperial model to early Crucifixion iconography. Such evidence highlights the importance of the gems as preserving iconographic evidence and challenges the conventional view of gems as an inferior art form and therefore as a separate body of evidence. It also highlights the need to integrate engraved gems into the broader context of early Christian art.

It is not possible to say that because there are so few images of the Crucifixion surviving from Late Antiquity there was a conscious omission of the subject from pictorial programmes or a deliberate avoidance of the subject. In so doing, scholars have created an entire theory of rejection. The Narbonne controversy, although much later, feeds into this desire to see that lack of evidence as a manifestation of the repulsion or shame felt towards the body of Jesus on the cross. The rarity of the gems can also be exploited to achieve this end. The wider impact of the iconographic and compositional evidence presented by the gems is that in Late Antiquity there seems to have been an emphasis not on the Crucifixion but on other subjects relating to Jesus and his ministry. Like the iconography of the Nott and Constanza gems, where the crucified Jesus is shown out of a narrative context, these were not strictly drawn from the New Testament. They concentrated on the power of Jesus, showing him as miracle worker, philosopher, teacher, judge, law-giver, and heavenly *basileus*. All of these themes were communicated through language previously devised in pagan and imperial artistic traditions for the representation of philosophers and of the emperor seated amongst his retinue, as noted above. This evidence of thematic emphasis away from the Crucifixion, rather than explicit rejection of the Crucifixion, fits with the theory outlined in Chapter I that certain factors contributed to the creation of an artistic and religious environment increasingly conducive to the representation of the Crucifixion. That is, certain factors assisted a shift in artistic focus onto the Crucifixion, where previously the focus has been on other subjects or themes. It will be possible to see (in a subsequent study) that such factors were particularly active in the fourth century. The Nott and Constanza gems indicate that iconography initially adopted for the representation of Jesus as crucified continued in this thematic vein and merely adapted the same formula: presenting Jesus as a powerful figure, still surrounded by his retinue. In light of this iconographic evidence and the argument concerning the shift in focus onto the Crucifixion, it is apparent that the prevailing presumptions regarding the rejection of Crucifixion imagery in Late Antiquity need to be reconsidered.

With regard to the development of the notion of Christ's victorious kingship in the fourth century, Gaston warned that this was a complex process in fourth century

literature; it is difficult to claim that this particular group of ideas takes precedence over the conception of suffering in those years.¹⁰⁵³ Similarly, we cannot use the extant art of the early Christian period as a platform from which to make sweeping assumptions about the whole early period and the Church's attitude to other subjects such as the Crucifixion: firstly, so little evidence actually survives; and secondly, it is predominantly funerary in nature. Nevertheless, in consideration of this evidence we can say that of itself, it suggests that the Crucifixion was not important, with artists opting instead for symbolic subjects, such as the Apostolic processions and the *traditio clavis* etc. The gems bear witness to this fact in two fundamental ways. Firstly in their iconography, which is dependant on sarcophagi schemes both in the non-narrative presence of the Apostles and the apparent replacement of the *crux invicta* at the centre of the procession with the figure of the triumphant yet crucified Jesus. Just as the *crux invicta* represented the dual themes of Crucifixion and Resurrection, the triumphal figure of Jesus on the acclaim gems, presented as he is in the heavenly setting, could almost be interpreted as a representation of the crucified and resurrected Jesus. This interpretation is borne out most prominently in the iconography of the Nott gem where the figure of Jesus is elevated above the Apostles, standing as though outstretched triumphantly on the cross, but no cross is actually shown. The Constanza gem seems to preserve an earlier stage between this iconography and that of the Pereire gem. The Constanza Jesus is attached to the cross in exactly the same way as the magician Jesus, with arms hanging and head turned in profile, only now he is placed into the adorative scheme of the Apostolic procession, and his legs are straight not split.

Whilst the Nott and Constanza gems preserve iconography similar to the sarcophagi and monumental compositions it is impossible to specify a likely model. However, if a linear development is assumed for the acclaim iconography as it appears on the sarcophagi and other monuments, there is a strong likelihood that the prototype for the gems falls in the late fourth or early fifth century, somewhere around the time of the production of the sarcophagi and such imagery as seen in the apse at S. Pudenziana. The three gems in their rarity also bear

¹⁰⁵³ Gaston (1969), p. 242.

witness to the lack of interest in the Crucifixion in art of this time. This is an equally important point to note. A substantial portion of engraved gems from Late Antiquity probably do not survive, being small and more easily lost. Nevertheless, the ratio of extant Crucifixion gems [three] to those surviving with representations of the Good Shepherd [noted earlier] would seem to suggest that there were more popular subjects for visual representation in this medium. That is, their rarity is due to an emphasis on other subjects over and above that Crucifixion rather than conscious omission. This correlates with Derchain's own thesis that a representation of the Crucifixion must have been known in the early centuries, and specifically a representation that alluded to the suffering of Jesus on the cross, but that this depiction did not find favour with Christian buyers.¹⁰⁵⁴

In the presence of such little, and predominantly funerary evidence, the creation of a theory of rejection is not viable as a solution to the scarcity of Crucifixion images prior to the sixth century. From the evidence that survives, both material and literary, it is evident that there was a culture conducive to the production of Crucifixion imagery in Late Antiquity. Firstly the Pereire, Constanza and Nott gems attest that depictions of the Crucifixion were circulating prior to the fifth century amongst Christians and those individuals who were cognisant of the need to partake in the divine power shown forth and enacted through the death of Jesus. This material evidence corresponds to literary evidence, from the New Testament and Christian writers up to Justin, as well as spells preserved in magical papyri, where the name of the crucified Jesus was called upon for help in warding off demons. The Coptic papyrus noted by Derchain but otherwise overlooked in subsequent studies of Crucifixion iconography illustrates that the crucified Jesus remained a magical force to be reckoned with in the Byzantine period. Yet undoubtedly the most intriguing aspect of the papyrus is the image of the crucifixion that accompanies the spell. The image indicates: (a) that in the seventh century the representation of the Crucifixion was by no means the preserve of Christians; and (b) that magicians, although apparently conversant with Christian pictorial types for the representation of the Crucifixion, could add their own

¹⁰⁵⁴ Derchain (1964), p. 111-112.

idiosyncratic iconographic features, seen in this case in the unusual representation of Jesus' legs. For with the Pereire figuration, the only two images up to the seventh century in which Jesus is shown with his legs apart are both magical. Without basing a whole new theory on such little evidence (as the theory of rejection does), the coincidence is worth noting.

The assumption that images makers were afraid to show the Crucifixion is further falsified by the artistic and literary evidence assembled independently by Grigg and Weitzmann which suggests that by the sixth century several models were known amongst artisans in Palestine.¹⁰⁵⁵ Moreover, in their competency and in the confidence with which they appear to have been handled by their artists, it seems likely that the multiple prototypes circulating in the East *by the sixth century* were a result of experimentation with the subject prior to that time. On the evidence presented in this thesis, the prevailing assumptions regarding the incapacity of Christians to formulate an image of the Crucifixion, for which they had no artistic precedent, also need to be reconsidered. In conjunction with the image borne by the Pereire gem, the Palatine image would seem to indicate that early visual interpretations of the Crucifixion were not necessarily the preserve of Christians. The stark iconographic differences between the Palatine and Pereire images, the former following the more upright body position adopted in Christian art, the latter showing a singular composition unmatched in any subsequent pictorialisations, Christian or otherwise, can in fact support this theory. For both images, the one satirical, the other magical, utilise the subject for the expression of very different views regarding Christian beliefs on the one hand, and the man Jesus on the other. In both cases, the views can be interpreted as those of individuals looking at Christianity rather than Christianity representing its own teachings regarding Jesus' death. In the Palatine image, the basic concept of Crucifixion and indeed the rudiments of the art of crucifying, are clearly present, whether derived from a known image or drawn from hearsay, popular belief, or other such sources. Hence it is evident that the issue of the emergence of Christian interpretations of the event, utilising art as a method of expression, is not simply a question of whether Christians were able to show it artistically or not, since those

¹⁰⁵⁵ Grigg (1974), p. 221 & p. 267 n. 76; Weitzmann (1974), pp. 40-41.

on the fringes of or outside the parameters of the Christian church proper were clearly able to do so. It is perhaps a question of *how* they were going to portray it according to their interpretation of the event. Speaking generally, pagans misunderstood and therefore parodied it [illustrated by the Palatine graffito]. For men increasingly preoccupied with evil in Late Antiquity Jesus was perceived as a powerful deity who vanquished unseen demonic forces [illustrated by the Pereire gem]. Christians also had this interpretation of Jesus, yet in order to express their perception they adopted and adapted a format already utilised elsewhere in Christian art for the expression of Christian triumph [illustrated by the Nott and Constanza gems]. According to the surviving evidence, this particular Christian format does not seem to have been utilised widely for the representation of Jesus' Crucifixion, although it does reappear in Rome in the eighth century in the figuration of the subject on the triumphal arch over the main apse in S. Maria Antiqua [Pl.14a].

Beyond their testimony to the existence of Christian prototypes for the pictorialisation of the Crucifixion prior to the fifth century, the three Late Antique gems discussed here yield vital information regarding the changing perception of Jesus' nudity on the cross in the East and West up to the 6th century. Without making any assumptions in the presence of such a small body of evidence, there does seem to be a pattern of nudity followed by concealment. In the East prior to the mid-fifth century, Jesus is deliberately naked: on the magical gem and in the late fourth century, on the Constanza gem. In the West in the 420s, he is shown wearing a narrow loincloth like the one mentioned in the fourth century *Acts of Pilate*. By 586 in the East, the date of the Rabbula gospels, Jesus is robed in the *colobium*. This garment, which accentuated the upright stance of Jesus on the cross, is shown consistently in figurations of the Crucifixion up to the seventh century at least. After that time it seems to co-exist with the longer loincloth type, which may itself be introduced as early as the seventh century given the evidence of the Lewis gem and the Sinai icon B.32. As the Perm plate attests, the sleeveless *colobium* was sometimes replaced by a long-sleeved full length garment so that the whole body is concealed.

The proposed late sixth/seventh century date for the Lewis jasper implies that the gem preserves one of the first reappearances of the bare-chested Jesus on the cross after the rejection of the loincloth in the sixth century. In conjunction with Sinai Icon B.32, where a loincloth is painted, the bare-chested Lewis Jesus indicates that artists had begun to experiment with the reduction of Jesus' clothing prior to their portrayal of him dead on the cross around the eighth century. Jesus, wearing the *colobium*, has closed eyes on Sinai Icon B.36, dated to the eighth century. Hence the two types were co-existing earlier on, indicating that some experimentation with Jesus' clothing had begun very soon after the appearance of the *colobium*-type, which the Rabbula Gospels record emerged by the late sixth century if not before; the pre-eminence of the *colobium* in pictorialisations of the Crucifixion in the East in the sixth century was under challenge quite quickly.

Traditionally, the fifth century semi-nakedness has been interpreted as an allusion to Jesus' death as a man; the purple sleeveless *colobium* as a means of indicating his kingship, drawing particularly on Biblical literature.¹⁰⁵⁶ On this notion, the dramatic covering of Jesus' body in the sixth century occurs not so much out of shame over nudity, but out of a desire to assert the triumph of the incarnate deity. I have suggested that this emphasis is misplaced. Taking into consideration the changes in religious and social attitudes towards nudity from the fourth century onwards, it is clear that the motives behind the use of nudity in the fourth and fifth centuries and the initial introduction of the *colobium* in the sixth century need to be re-examined.

Victims were usually crucified naked as a means of augmenting their dishonour, and this may be the reason behind Jesus' nudity on the magical gem. However, in their depiction of a naked Jesus receiving the celestial acclaim of the Apostles, it would seem that both Christian gems borrow from the Roman concept of the athletic and heroic display of nudity as a mark of superior status. This corresponds to the profound theological symbolism attached to Jesus' nudity on the cross by Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century: Cyril makes a connection between the stripping of Jesus and his subsequent subjugation of evil powers; Jesus' triumph

¹⁰⁵⁶ eg. Schiller (1972), p. 91.

on the cross is encapsulated in his divine, and naked, form. The surviving fifth century figurations from the West continue this theme: Jesus' naked form on the Maskell relief is carefully rendered and I would argue that his posture *in conjunction* with the shapely musculature of the body radiates a superior triumphalism reminiscent of a quasi-divine Roman hero rather than an ordinary mortal. The display of Jesus' nudity on the cross in the fourth and fifth centuries in the East and West is therefore not a means of indicating Jesus' humanity, but a way of affirming his invincibility.

The dramatic change in the East and West which recast nudity as a sign of a person's vulnerable humanity rather than a mark of their invincibility, is manifest in the subsequent desire to clothe Jesus on the cross. This desire has parallels in the clothing of other holy figures in Christian art that had previously been depicted naked, and in the robing of the emperor. The interpretation of the introduction of the *colobium* as a means of hiding Jesus' mortality finds support in Corrigan's own suggestion that the desire to remove the *colobium* in some religious circles in the seventh/eighth century, relates to the association of the garment with Jesus' mortality. The Narbonne controversy related by Gergory of Tours also seems to support this idea, since the once acceptable naked image is not merely deemed inappropriate in the West in comparison with the new eastern clothed-type, but grossly offensive.

... ..

At least four of the gems derive their power from the interaction of medium, image and words and in so doing, conform to the criteria enunciated by Vikan for all pilgrimage-related artefacts, which function amuletically on some level.¹⁰⁵⁷ This conformity does not imply that each gem is related to pilgrim trade; merely that as amuletic devices, they exhibit the characteristics so often associated with such items. The new dating of the Gaza gem proposed here suggests that the use of Christian images for amuletic purposes continued into the Middle Byzantine period.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Vikan (1984), *passim*, & Vikan (1991), p. 81.

Whilst all five gems may have exercised an amuletic role in the life of their owners, the Pereire stone's size indicates that it was likely to have been purely amuletic in function, probably worn close to, or secretly concealed on, the body. In contrast, the size and shape of the Constanza, Nott and Lewis gems indicate that whether amuletic or not, they could have been worn as decorative stones in a finger ring. Exhibiting Christian inscriptions and iconography these three gems may also be seen as objects of devotion in early Christian spirituality. The three Christian gems were probably worn and owned by ordinary Christians. They are produced on the model of seal-stones but since their designs were intended to be viewed on the stone and not in impression it is clear that they were not intended to be used as seals. It therefore seems likely that the Constanza, Nott and Lewis gems could have been worn openly or discreetly as a sign of personal allegiance to God, possibly having an additional charm-like or prophylactic quality. The possession of inexpensive amulets transcended class divisions in the Late Antique and early Byzantine periods, with prophylactic devices being owned by ordinary or wealthy individuals alike. Hence a seventh century bishop was not ashamed to wear an ampulla fabricated from clay.¹⁰⁵⁸

As the Gaza gem indicates, the need for amuletic devices that facilitated a spiritual link with the Christian God, and with the unseen world, and which provided a tangible indication of that link did not dwindle with the increasing status of the Church after the fourth century. For the hostile demonic forces were not only an external threat, but as the Desert Fathers experienced with piquancy in their isolation, were also perceived as an internal threat, being an extension of, and thus lurking within, the self.¹⁰⁵⁹

In furnishing designs for various purposes, amuletic, prophylactic and/or possibly devotional, all five Crucifixion gems confirm that individuals from across a broad time period - whether they be avowedly Christian, or having some peripheral association with the Church or some knowledge of Christianity - in their prayerful dialogue with the unseen world and/or with God, looked visually as well as

¹⁰⁵⁸ The panegyric of St Spiridon of Trimithon, Cyprus, composed 655. Frolow (1961), pp. 174-175.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Brown (1993), p. 90.

spiritually to the crucified Jesus as the source of protection and power. Christians and magicians devised two different images to express that power; nevertheless in both models, Jesus is revered because of his death, not in spite of it. The Pereire jasper attests to the fact that this occurred as early as the second/third century; the Gaza jasper to the fact that it was continuing in the Middle Byzantine period.

CATALOGUE OF ENGRAVED GEMS

1. Pereire Jasper [*Plate 9*]

London. British Museum MLA: 1986, 5-1, 1. Previously in the private collection of Roger Pereire, Paris. Acquired by the British Museum from Jack Ogden in 1986.

Dark brown upright oval jasper, wide angled bezel: intaglio
[badly chipped around the edges, especially lower region; superficial chips to the obverse and reverse faces.]

3.005 x 2.49 x 0.56 cms

probable date: second-fourth century

Obverse. The naked figure of Jesus appears at the centre of the field, affixed high-up on a tau cross: his torso is shown *en face* and upright against the vertical shaft of the cross; his legs, hanging in profile, are bent at the knee and appear to be forced apart by a projection at pelvis height from the vertical shaft; his arms stretch out beneath the *patibulum* and are attached to it by two short strips over the wrists; his profile head is bearded, with long hair and facial features discernible. The horizontal beam of the cross terminates at either end in transverse bars - although the termination on the right is obscured by a chip to the edge of the stone. A base of the vertical post terminates in a deeper transverse line.

Eight lines of characters run horizontally across the field: YIE / ΠΑΤ ΗΡΗΗ /
COYX ΠICTE / COAM ΝΩΑ / ΜΩΑ ΩΙΑ / CHI ΟΥΩ / ΑΡΤΑ ΝΙΑ / ΥC IO /
I

It is possible that a ninth line of script appeared at the bottom of the gem with part of a letter (an iota?) remains visible to the left of the cross.

Reverse: inscription, 10 lines of characters. ΙΩΕ / ΕΥΑΕΥΗΗ / [-][?]ΟΥΙCΥΕ / [-]
[?]ΑΛΗΤΟΨΝ / [?]ΘΙΕCCTCKHE / [Ψ]ΜΑΝΑΥΗΛΛ / CΤΡΑΠICTKMΗ /
ΨΠΕΙΘωΔΡ / ΜΕΜΠΕ

Again, given the layout of the letters in horizontal row formation across the reverse face, from the top of the face downwards, it is possible that a final line of letters appeared at the base, now missing due to chipping sustained around the lower edge.

Publ: P. Derchain (1964), pp. 109-113, (passim); A. Delatte & P. Derchain (1964), pp. 284-285, nr 408 p. 287; K. Wessel (1966), p. 6, fig. p. 11; P. Maser (1976), pp. 257-275, fig. 2; Morton Smith (1978), p. 61; J. Engemann (1981), v. XI, col. 293.

2. Nott Gem [*Plate 10a-c*]

In the collection of the Reverend George Frederick Nott until 1847; present whereabouts unknown.

Transverse oval carnelian: intaglio

1.9 x 1.4 cms (approx.)

probable date: late fourth/fifth century

Obverse: The central nimbate figure of Jesus stands rigidly *en face* upon what appears to be the *suppedaneum* of a cross. Jesus' arms are outstretched flat as if attached to the *patibulum*, although the crossbeam is not shown and no ties or nails are depicted at the wrists or hands. Jesus is naked and is set up high on the cross above twelve diminutively sized figures, arranged in two groups of six either side of him. These are likely to be the Apostles, and they process in profile along the exergual line towards him. The two figures at the head of each group extend an arm to touch the *suppedaneum*. At least two other Apostles within the procession extend their right arms in gestures of acclamation. The first nine letters of the Greek inscription EHCXPECTOC run horizontally across the field, below Jesus' arms and above the Apostles' heads. The last two letters appear beneath the exergual line, one on either side of a lamb. The lamb, aligned with the figure of Jesus directly above it, is shown walking on its own ground line in profile to the viewer's left.

Publ: R. Garrucci (1873-1881), v. 6 (1880), p. 124, pl. 479 nr 15; F. X. Kraus (1882-1886), v. 2 pt. 2, p. 241; J. Reil, (1904), p. 58; H. Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3050 nr 3358, & 6.1, col. 816 nr 4944; Leclercq (1907), v. 2, p. 369 nr 268; C. Jéglot (1934), fig. p. 13; P. Thoby (1959), p. 19, pl. I nr 5; P. Derchain (1964), pp. 109-113, fig. p. 110; P. Maser (1976), pp. 257-275, fig. 4; J. Engemann (1981), col. 293-294, abb. 11; R. Milburn (1988), p. 281; F. Tristan (1996), pp. 564-565; J. Spier (1997), p. 39 fig. 12.

3. Constanza Carnelian [*Plate 10d*]

London. British Museum. MLA: 1895, 11-13,1. Franks Collection

Said to be from Constanza (Romania).

Transverse oval carnelian: intaglio

1.13x 1.35cms

probable date: late fourth/fifth century

Obverse: The central figure of Jesus stands upright on an exergual line with his arms outstretched as if attached to a tau cross. His naked body is shown rigidly *en face*, his head and feet shown in profile to viewer's right; his elbows and hands drop as if the wrists are tied to the horizontal beam [*patibulum*] of the cross. The *patibulum*, which terminates in transverse bars, is visible above Jesus' arms; the vertical post of the cross is visible between his lower legs. Six diminutively sized figures assemble either side of Jesus (as in the previous example); representing the twelve Apostles, they walk in profile towards the cross and are clothed in close-fitting knee-length garments. Above Jesus' head, following the contour of the field perimeter, appear four of the five letters comprising the sacred monogram (I)XΘYC. Fractures to the upper and lower-right sides of the gem have caused the

loss of the first letter of the positive inscription and damage to the bodies of three of the Apostolic figures (although their heads remain visible).

Publications: C. Smith (1896/7), pp. 202-206, fig. p 201; O. M. Dalton (1901), p. 7 nr 43, pl. I; O. M. Dalton (1915), p. 74 nr 544 pl. XVII; J. Reil (1904), pp. 57ff, pl. I, fig. 2; H. Leclercq (1907), v. 2, pp. 368-369, fig. 262; H. Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 3.2 (1914), col. 3050 nr 3357 & 6.1 (1924), col. 816 nr 4943; F. Dölger (1928), v. I pp. 322-326; G. de Jerphanion (1923), pp. 40-41; C. Jégnot (1934), p. 14, fig. p. 13; P. Thoby (1959), p. 19, pl. I nr 4; P. Derchain (1964), pp. 109-113, fig. p. 110; G. Schiller (1972), pp. 89-90, fig. 321; P. Maser (1976), pp. 257-275, fig. 3; E. Popescu (ed.) (1976), nr 53 pp. 89-90; J. Engemann (1981), cols. 293-294, abb. 10; G. H. R. Horsley (1981), nr 90 p. 140; R. Milburn (1988), p. 281; J. Bréhant (1995), p. 10, fig. 2.iii; F. Tristan (1996), p. 564; P. C. Finney (1999), "Cross", fig. p. 304; J. Spier (1997), p. 33, fig. 6 p. 34.

4. Lewis Jasper [*Plate 12a-c*]

Cambridge. Lewis Collection of Gems and Rings

(in the possession of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge ~ on long term loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum [Lewis 103.571]).

Upright oval green jasper, flat: intaglio [nineteenth century ring mount]

1.55 x 1.25cms

probable date: late sixth/seventh century

Obverse: Central figure of Jesus stands rigidly *en face*, arms extended flat upon the *patibulum* and bound to it at the wrists. His cupped palms, flexed back at the wrists, face upwards. The upright shaft of the cross is not visible. Jesus is clothed from the waist down in a long pleated skirt, the hem of which flares around his ankles. Both feet are shown in profile, as though standing upon the exergual line below. His head is encircled by a cruciform nimbus. Flanking his head are two indeterminate symbols: the sun and moon, or an alpha and omega? The diminutively sized figures of the lance and sponge-bearers stand in profile one on either side of Jesus, facing inwards towards him. They extend their lance and sponge on an angle to reach his hips.

Publ: C. W. King (1881), pp. 1-4; J. H. Middleton (1892), p. 84, Class E, nr 1; H. Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3066 nr 3374, & v. 6.1, col. 847 nr 213, fig. 5090 col. 846; P. Derchain (1964), pp. 109-113 (*passim*), fig. p. 111; P. Maser (1976), pp. 257-275, fig. 5; M. Henig (1975), p. 39 nr 139, E1; F. Tristan (1996), p. 565.

5. Gaza Jasper [*Plate 15*]

London. British Museum. MLA: 1867, OA 9717. Purchased from the Reverend Greville J. Chester.

Red upright-oval jasper, bevelled edge; vertical band of yellow: intaglio

2.25 x 1.75 x 0.53 cms

probable date: Middle Byzantine

Obverse: Central figure of Jesus shown as though hanging from a cross, although no cross is rendered: arms out-stretched and angled just above shoulder height, torso and pelvis curved, legs flexed at the knees, feet dangling. The limbs almost reach to the extremities of the field. Jesus' head, encircled by cruciform nimbus, drops onto the chest and inclines to viewer's left. Two diminutively sized figures appear in profile, one on either side of Jesus, facing inwards: the very worn figure on viewer's left kneels; angular cuts for legs make possible the conclusion that the second figure also kneels. Both figures are depicted with hands placed in an attitude of prayer or penitence. Five or six characters are engraved above Jesus' head, following the contour of the field perimeter: these may be an attempted rendering of the Hebrew title "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews (Jn 19.19-20) in abbreviated form:

יש נז מל יה

Bezel: thirteen or fourteen letters appear around the bezel.

Reverse: three lines of letters appear across the reverse face.

Publ: F. X. Kraus (1882-1886), v. 2.2, p. 241; E. Le Blant (1867), pp. 111-113; J. Reil (1904), p. 106 n. 2; H. Leclercq (1907), v. 2, pp. 369-370, fig. 269; H. Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-53), 3.2 col. 3049, nr 3356, & 6.1 col. 818, nr 4945; G. de Jerphanion (1923), pp. 40-41; C. Bonner (1951), pp. 336-337, nr 54, pl. 98; P. Thoby (1959), pp. 18-19, pl. I nr 3; P. Derchain (1964), pp. 109-113, fig. p. 111; P. Maser (1976), pp. 257- 275, fig. 6; Morton Smith (1978), p. 62; R. Milburn (1988), p. 281; P. C. Finney (1994), p. 112, fig. 5.1 & 5.2; J. Bréhant (1995), p. 10, fig. 2.ii; F. Tristan (1996), p. 564.

6. Orpheus Bakchikos Seal-Cylinder [Plate 17a & b]

Present whereabouts unknown. Previously held in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Das Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst, inventory no. 4939. haematite seal-cylinder
h. 14mm; d. 9mm¹⁰⁶⁰
spurious?

A naked figure with outstretched arms hangs from a cross; the body is turned to the left in 3/4 view, the legs bent at the knees, head dropped onto the chest, wrists attached to the *patibulum*. Two large nails are angled into the base of the cross, forming a V shape. Directly above the upright shaft is an upturned crescent moon, over which seven stars are aligned in a semi-circle. The legend OPΦEOC BAKKIKOC appears below the arms of the cross, running across the lower half of the field and arranged in three lines of script:

OP ΦEOC
BAK KI
K OC

Publ: A. Furtwängler (1896), nr 8830; O. Wulff (1909), I, p. 234, nr 1146, tav. 56; H. Leclercq "Gemmes" in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, col. 840 nr 177 fig. 5059, & "Orphée", v. 2.2, col. 2753 nr 22, col. 2754 fig. 9249; R. Eisler

¹⁰⁶⁰ The measurements are given in Wulff (1909), p. 234 nr 1146.

(1921), pl. XXXI; A. Boulanger (1925), pp. 145 ff; R. Eisler (1925), pp. 338ff; R. Zahn & J. Reil, (1926), pp. 62-3; J. Reil (1930), p. 3; J. M. Rivière (1938), pp. 155-156; W. K. C. Guthrie (1952), pp. 265-266; P. Hinz (1973), p. 91; P. Maser (1976), pp. 257-275; Sr. M. C. Murray (1981), p. 37 & p. 147 n. 1; A. Mastrocinque, (1993), pp. 16-24. Elsner (1998a), p. 746.

7. Crucified-Ass Amulet

Present whereabouts unconfirmed

bone crucifix

Provenance: found in Montagnana- no archaeological context
spurious?

The amulet is carved in the shape of a foliate tree. Created in the style of a crucifix, it shows an ass-headed figure crucified on the tree, at the base of which crouches an ape. It has a hole at the top to facilitate suspension by a cord.

Publ.: Bettini (1947), pp. 60-70; Morton Smith (1978), pp. 62-63.

8. Haematite Amulet [Plate 17c]

New York. Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. nr 10.130.1395. Murch Collection of Egyptian Antiquities; Gift of Helen Miller Gould, 1910.

Upright-Oval haematite: intaglio

18 x 14 x 3 mm¹⁰⁶¹

Obverse: A naked figure standing facing right with his feet together, his wrists bound together in front of him. Behind him, running vertically down the right hand side of the gem, are a series of signs. Under the man's feet is an oblong rectangle -with a triangular gable at the right end. This is occupied by six rows (the last incomplete) of incised signs, and some Greek letters (an I, O and Y are recognisable). Slightly chipped at left.

Reverse: X and a second symbol (possibly meant for a rho?)

Publ. Bonner (1950), pp. 112 & 224, nr 154 p. 278 & pl. VII.

¹⁰⁶¹ The measurements are given in Bonner (1950), p. 278 nr 154.

THE LEWIS JASPER AND ITS GROUP: SPIER

Jeffrey Spier has identified a group of nine gems that he believes may originate from a sixth/seventh century Byzantine workshop located in a provincial centre. The gems are jasper (usually green) or carnelian and are crudely engraved. Jesus usually has a cross-nimbus. The following descriptions and references listed for each gem were provided by Spier, since his research is not yet complete and therefore unpublished at this time. The information appears in appendix form here with his kind permission, and I take responsibility for any errors contained in the following citation of his material. Those references not included in the bibliography of this thesis are cited in full. The measurements are those provided by Spier and are given in millimetres.

1. *Entry into Jerusalem*: British Museum, M&LA, inv. OA 6522. 14.2 x 12.7 x 2.7. Green jasper, top flat and sides and back cut down. Egyptian or Syrian origin.
Jesus, with cross-nimbus, his hand raised, rides an ass left; to right, two standing figures, the first holding a palm branch; palm branch above; to left, a kneeling figure; a tree behind.
Publ. King (1872), v. 2, p. 31; Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1, p. 2064, fig. 606; O.M. Dalton (1901), p. 14, nr 90; J. A. Lerner, *Christian Seals of the Sasanian Period* (Leiden, 1977), pp. 15-17.
2. *Entry into Jerusalem*: Kassel, Staatliche Kunstsammlung. Green jasper.
Jesus, with cross-nimbus, rides an ass right; behind stand two figures, one holding a palm-branch; to left is a kneeling figure and a tree.
Publ. P. Zazoff (1983), p. 378, nr 19, pl. 125, 3.
3. *Entry into Jerusalem*: Private collection. Green jasper, 17.2 x 12.3 x 3.2. Said to be from Asia Minor.
Jesus, with hand raised, rides an ass right, a cloak is placed below; behind stand two figures; a palm branch above; before, Zacchaeus in a tree.
4. *Entry into Jerusalem*: Leiden (formerly in the Hague). Cornelian, 6 x 5 x 3.
Jesus, with cross-nimbus, rides an ass left; before and behind stand two figures holding palm branches.
Publ. E. Babelon, "Intaille sur corneline représentant l'entrée du Christ à Jérusalem", *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* 57 (1896), pp. 194-5; Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 5, col. 52, fig. 4079; M. Maaskant-Kleibrink, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems in the Royal Coin Cabinet, the Hague. The Greek, Etruscan and Roman Collections* (The Hague, 1978), nr 1144.

5. *Entry into Jerusalem*: Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico, inv. Gl. 176.
Cornelian, irregularly shaped, slightly convex, 16.3 x 13 x 3.
Jesus, with cross nimbus, rides an ass right; two figures stand on either side holding palm branches.
Publ. A.R. Mandrioli Bizzarri, *La collezione di gemme del Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna* (Bologna, 1987), p. 140, nr 275.
6. *Virgin and Child Enthroned*: British Museum, M&LA, inv. OA 6522. Brown and black jasper, irregular shape, 15.9 x 14.2 x 2.9.
Virgin and Child enthroned side by side, both nimbate and Jesus with cross-nimbus; a figure stands on either side holding a long palm branch; two angels fly above.
Publ. King (1872), v. 2, p. 31; Smith & Cheetham (1875), v. 1, p. 719; Dalton (1901), p. 14, nr 91; Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 6.1, col. 845, nr 203, fig. 5080.
7. *Adoration of Magi*: Berlin, inv. 4938. White (discoloured cornelian?) irregular shape, 14.6 x 12.2 x 3.0. Said to be from Constantinople.
Three Magi, facing right, approach the seated Virgin and Child, both nimbate.
Publ. Furtwängler (1896), nr 8827; Wulff (1909), p. 234, nr 1145, pl. 56.
8. *Doubting of Thomas*: Sa'd collection. Cornelian, slightly convex, 15 x 12. Said to be from Gadara, Jordan.
Jesus, with cross-nimbus, stands in doorway, holding the wrist of Thomas, also nimbate; long cross behind Thomas.
Publ. M. Henig & M. Whiting, *Engraved Gems from Gadara in Jordan* (Oxford, 1975), p. 3, nr 451.
9. *Crucifixion*: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, the Lewis Collection. Green jasper, flat, 15.5 x 12.5.
Jesus, with cross-nimbus, wearing long robe, on cross; to left, a figure (Longinus) holding a spear; another figure to right; above, symbols (sun and moon? or A Ω?).
Publ. C.W. King (1881), p. 3-4; idem, *Handbook of Engraved Gems* (2nd edn, London, 1885), p. 208, pl. 14.5; Middleton (1892), p. 4 Class E, nr 1; Leclercq in Cabrol & Leclercq (1907-1953), 3.2, col. 3066 nr 3374; Derchain (1964), p. 111; Henig (1978), p. 39 nr 139; R. Nicholls, *Classical Heritage* (1978), nr 212.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	<i>The Art Bulletin</i>
AC	<i>Antike und Christentum</i>
ACW	<i>Ancient Christian Writers</i>
AJA	<i>The American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
Byz. Zeitschr	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CAH	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
C.Arch	<i>Cahiers Archéologiques</i>
CCL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
FC	<i>Fathers of the Church</i>
GCS	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JbAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JWAG	<i>Journal of the Walters Art Gallery</i>
JWCI	<i>The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857-91)
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> . 2d edn ed. K. Preisendanz et al. (Stuttgart, 1973-1974)
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844-55)
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalia</i>
PTS	<i>Patristische Texte und Studien</i>
RivAC	<i>Rivista di archeologia cristiana</i>
Röm. Quart.	<i>Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte</i>
SC	<i>Sources chrétiennes</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i> , CD Rom nr E, Regents of the University of California (1999)
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>

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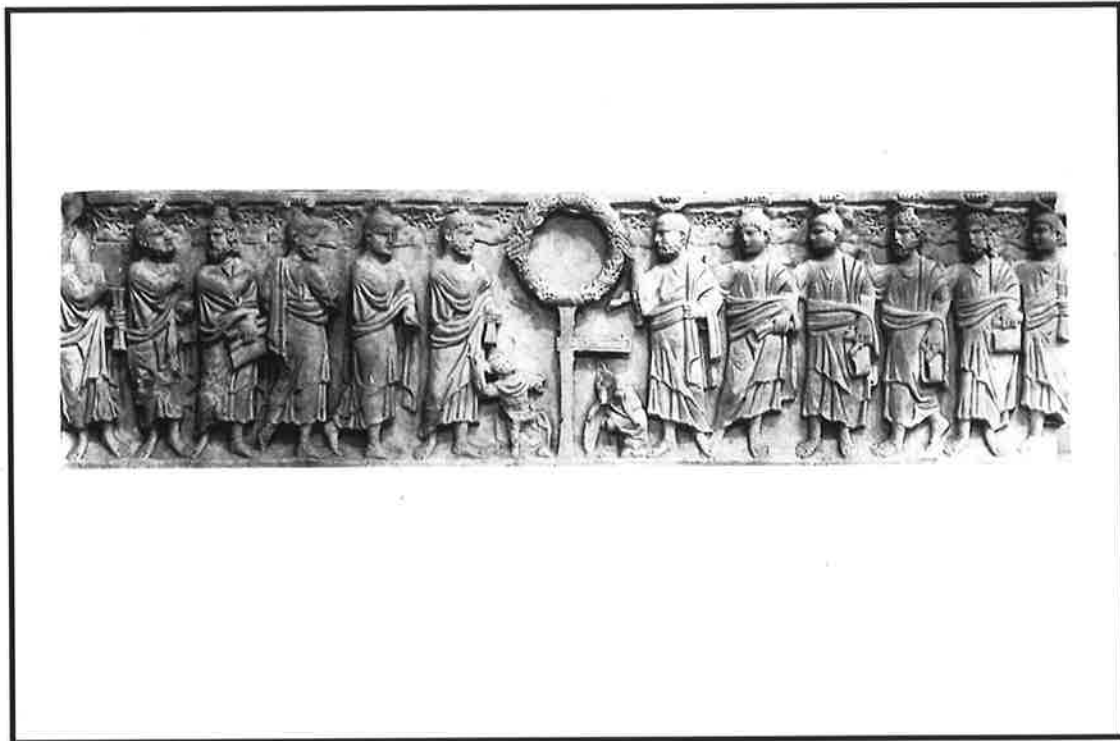
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b. *Daniel pendant*: obverse, Daniel and the Lions. 4.4x3.9x0.8cm. Provenance unknown. Fourth century?



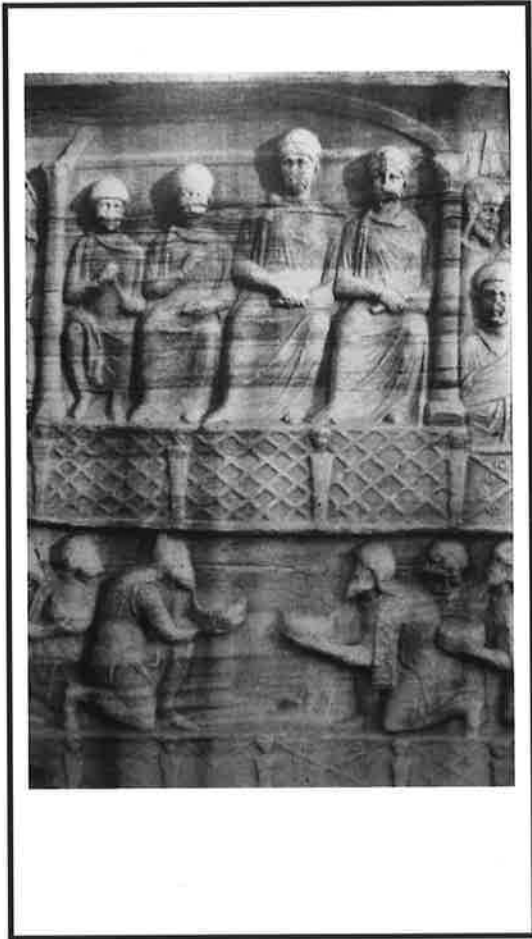
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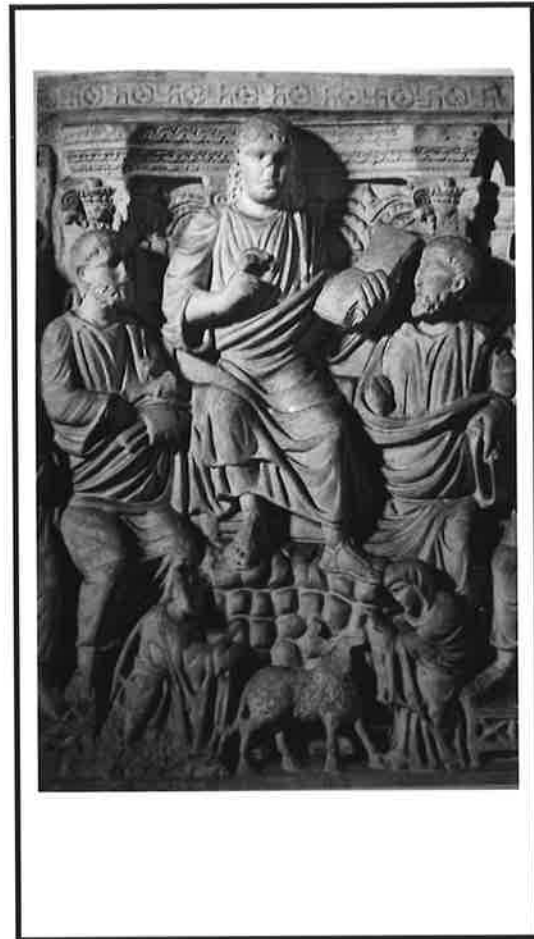
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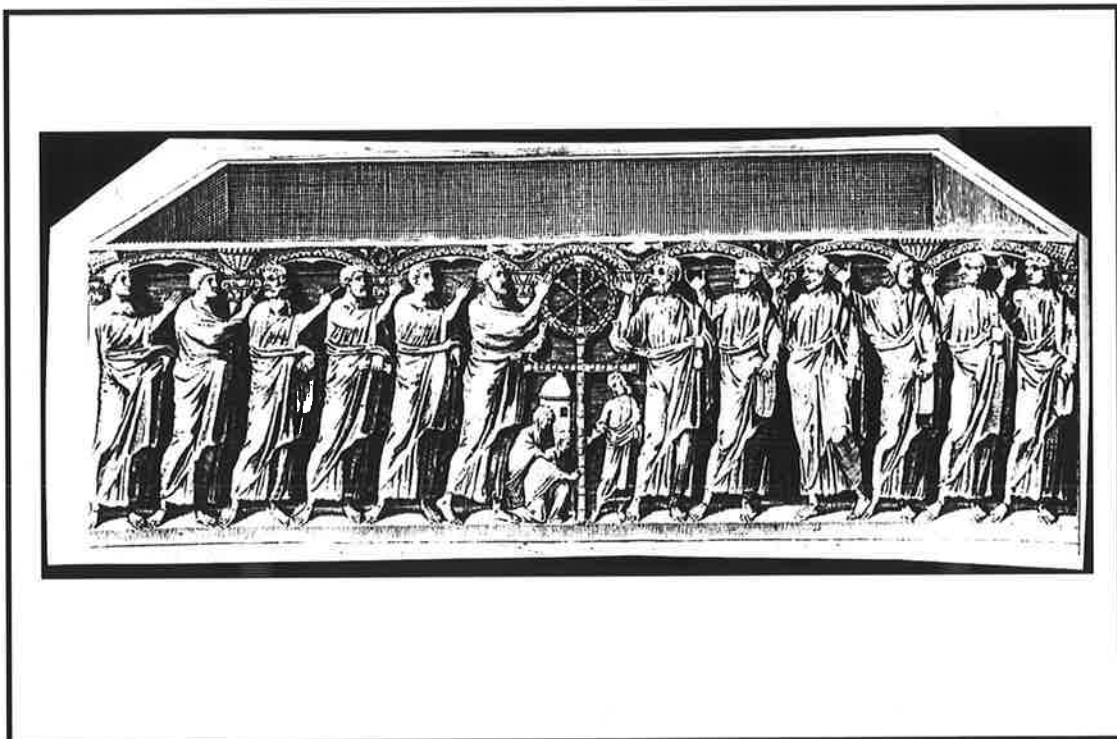
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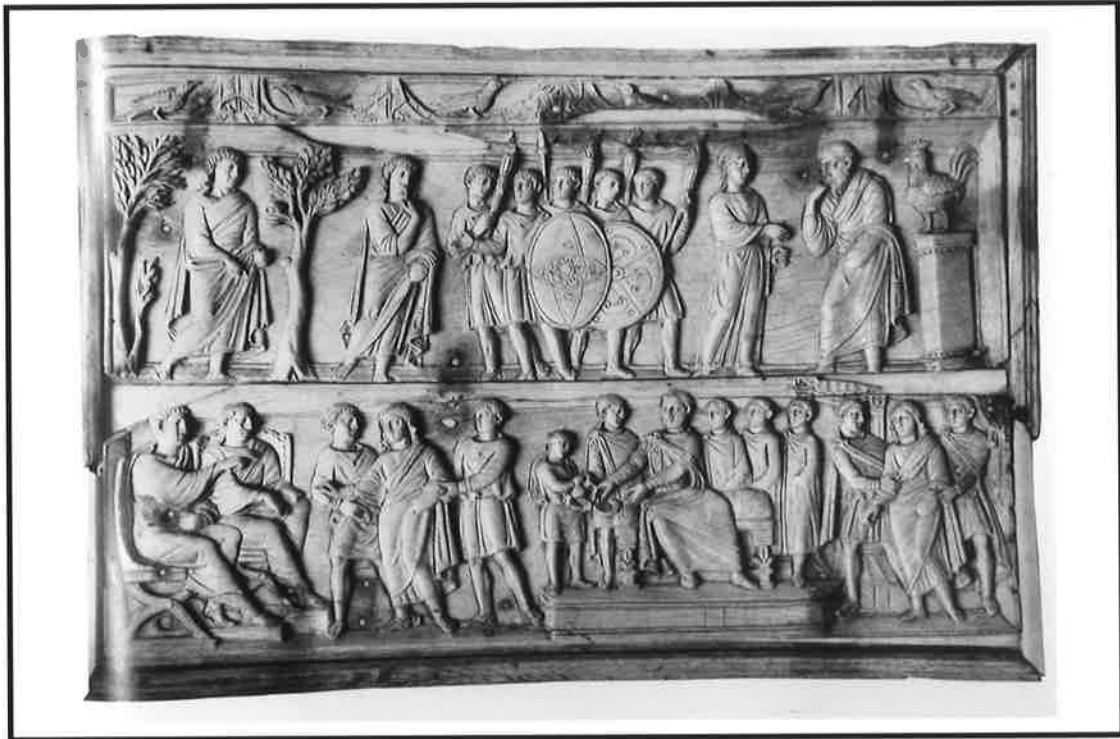
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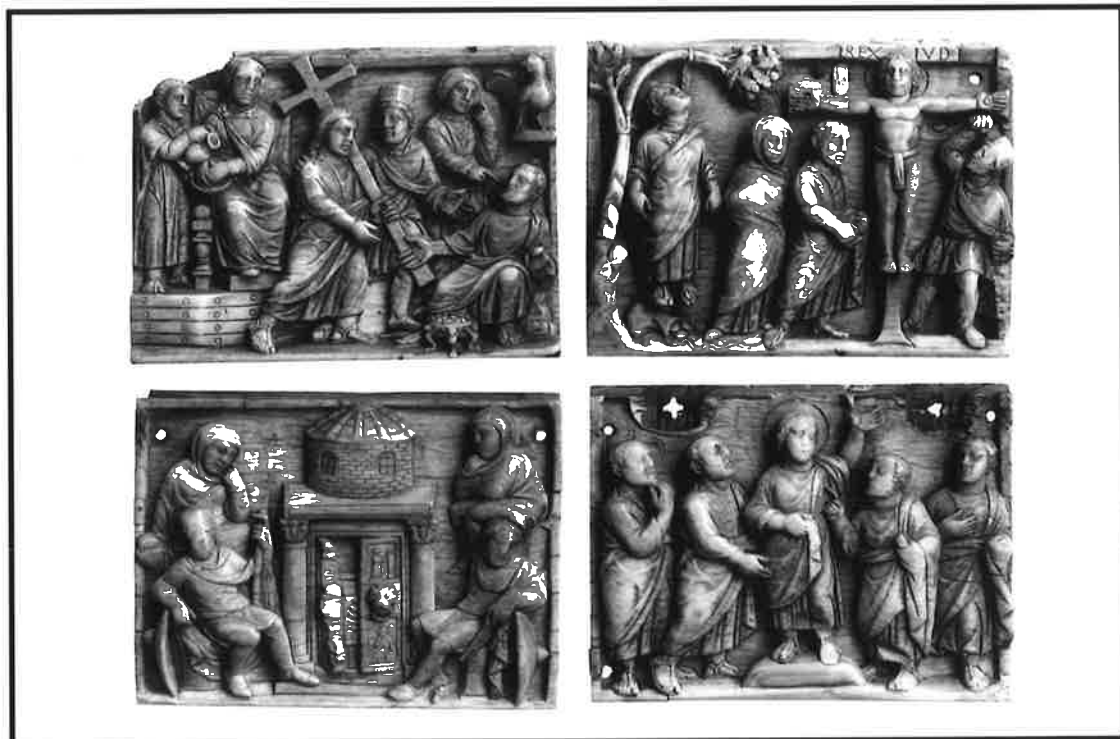
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c. *Acclaim Sarcophagus* from the Palazzo del Duc di Ceri in Borgo Vecchio, now lost. Fourth century



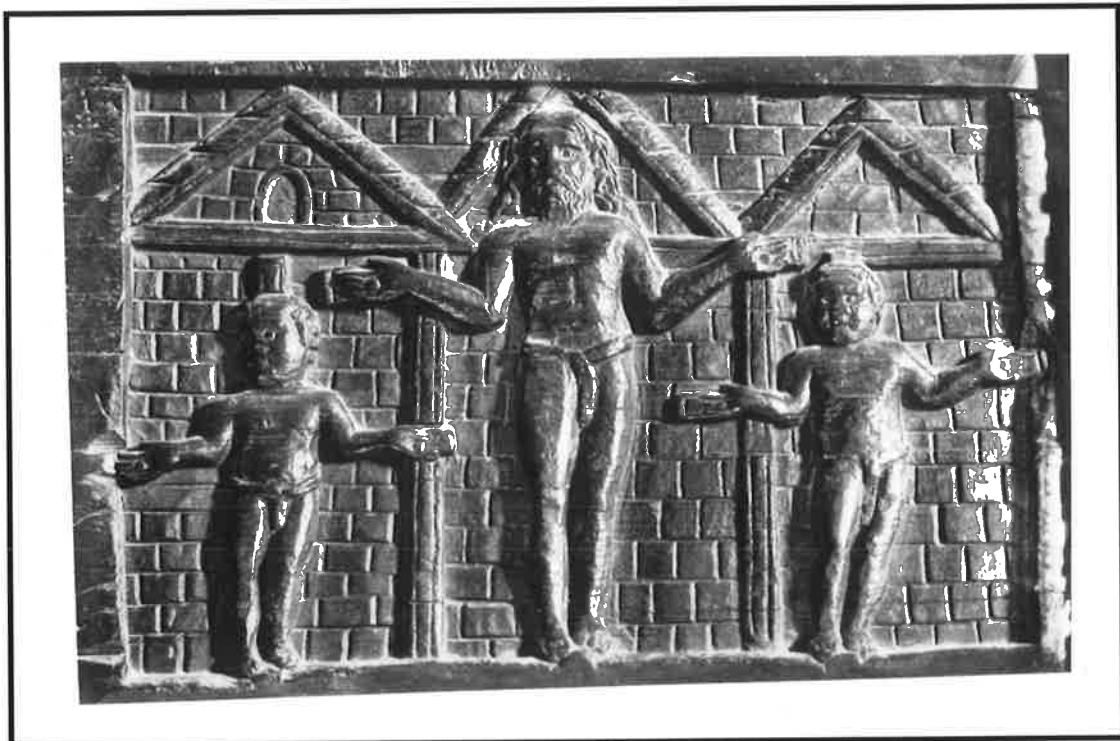
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b. *Maskell Passion-casket Panels*. 7.5 x 9.8cm. Probably Rome, c. AD 420-430



a. *Maskell Passion-casket*: Crucifixion relief. 7.5 x 9.8cm. Probably Rome, c. AD 420-430



b. *Church of Santa Sabina* door panel: Crucifixion relief. 30 x 40cm. Rome, probably AD 432-440



a. *Maskell Crucifixion Relief*. 7.5 x 9.8cm (upper view)



b. (view from below of same)



a. *Monza Ampulla 10*. d. approx. 6-7cm. Palestine, late sixth/early seventh century



b. *Monza Ampulla 13*. d. approx. 6-7cm. Palestine, late sixth/early seventh century



c. *Monza Ampulla 15*. d. approx. 6-7cm. Palestine, late sixth/early seventh century



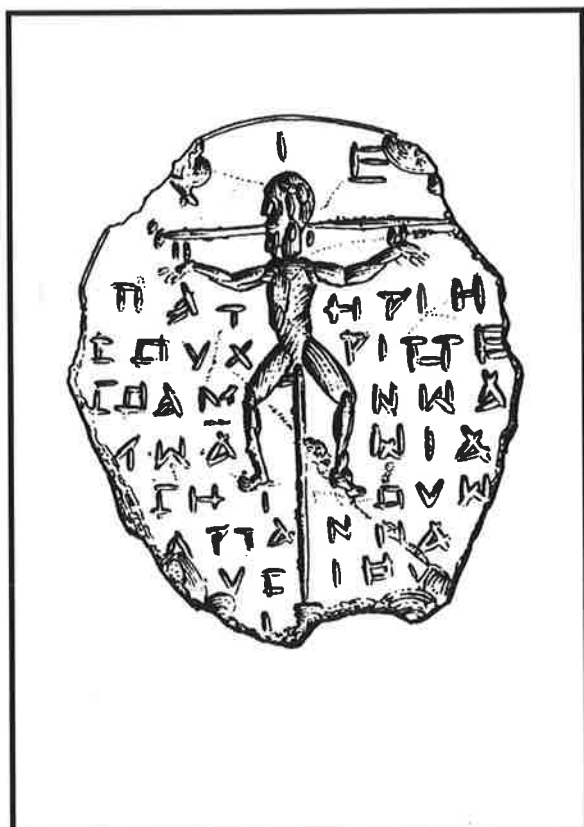
d. *Bobbio Ampulla 18*. d. approx. 6-7cm. Palestine, late sixth/early seventh century



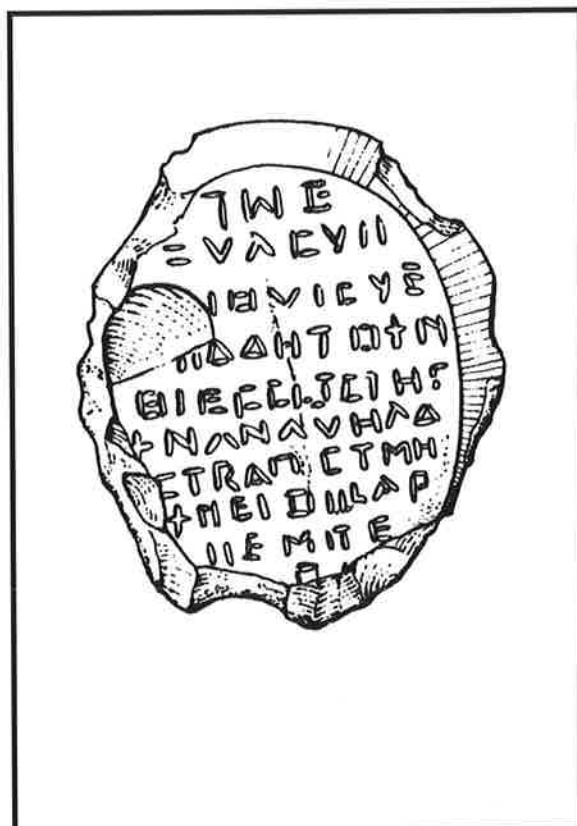
a. *Pereire Jasper*: obverse. 3.005 x 2.49 x 0.56cm.
Eastern Mediterranean, second-fourth century



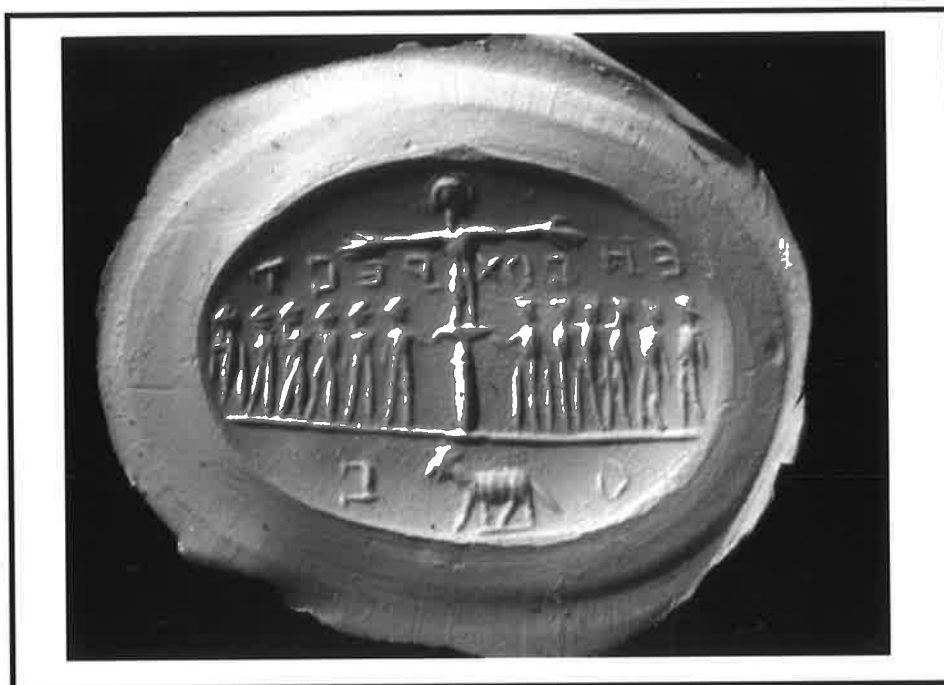
b. reverse



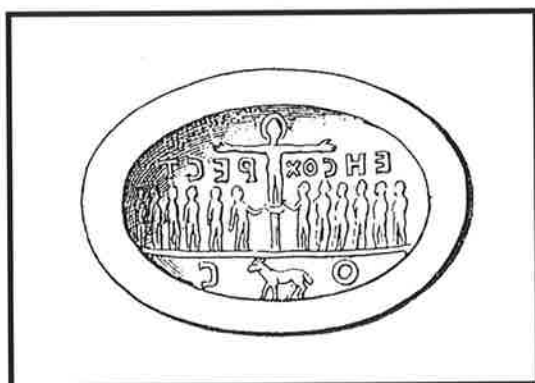
c. *Farrant line drawing*: obverse



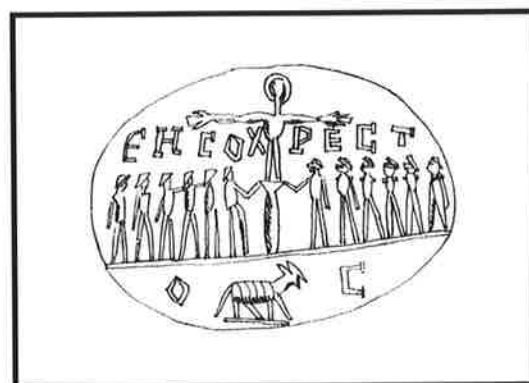
d. reverse



a. *Nott Gem*: nineteenth century impression. Approx. 1.9 x 1.4cm. Eastern Mediterranean, late fourth/early fifth century



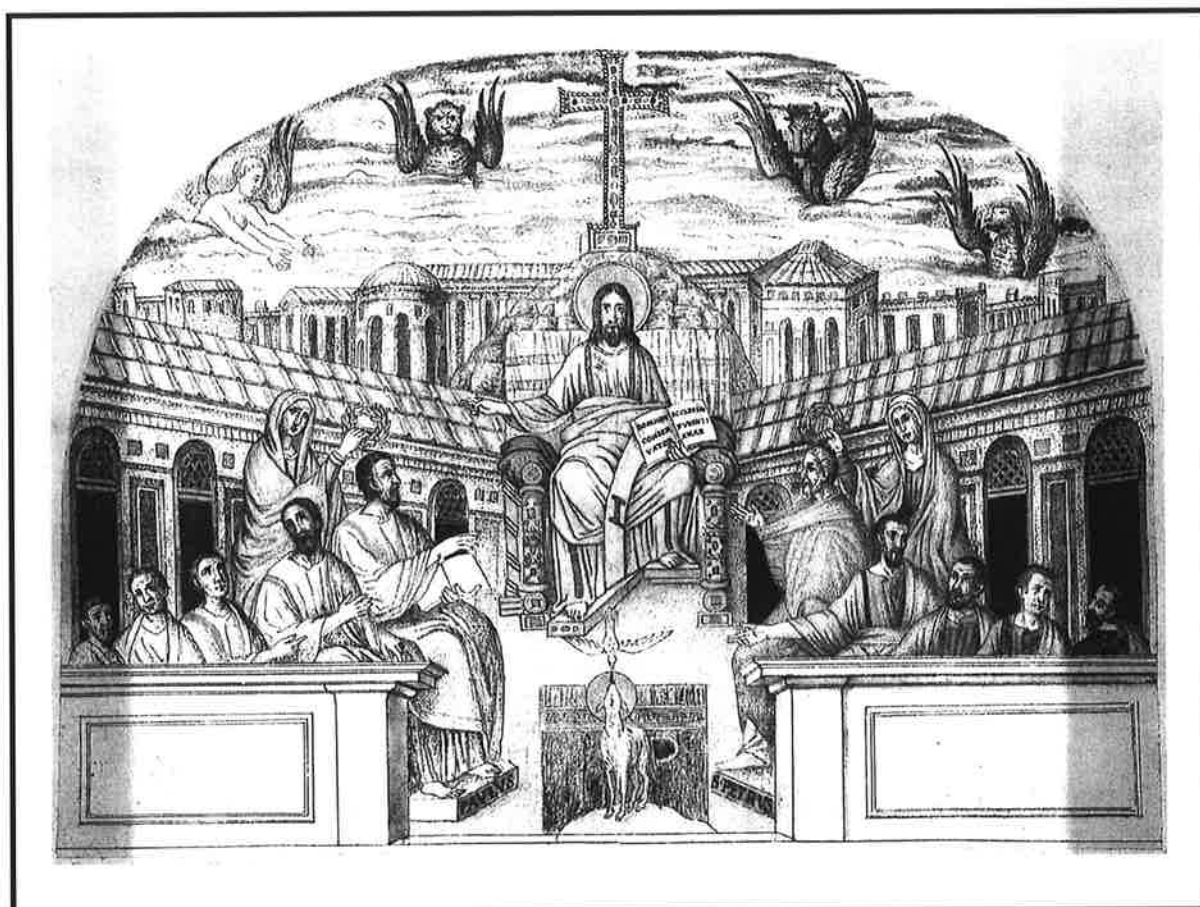
b. *Garrucci's line drawing* (reconstructing the design as it appeared in impression)



c. *revised drawing* (reconstructing the design as it appeared on the gem)



d. *Constanza Carnelian* 1.13 x 1.35cm. Eastern Mediterranean, late fourth/early fifth century



Apse mosaic, Church of S. Pudenziana: Rome: seventeenth century drawing by Antonio Eclessi. Mosaic completed AD 401-417



a. *Lewis Jasper*: impression. 1.55 x 1.25cm. Provincial Byzantine centre, late sixth/seventh century



b. Middleton's line drawing of same



c. *Lewis Jasper*



d. *London Gold ring*, d. 1.8cm: Crucifixion facet. Probably Syria/Palestine, late seventh century



e. *Baltimore Gold ring* with Christological scenes. Probably Syria/Palestine, late seventh century



a. *Louvre Crystal Pendant*. 3.5 x 1.8cm. Egypt?, seventh/eighth century



b. *Columbia Silver Armband*: Crucifixion roundel. (Armband d. 7.7-7.9cm). Egypt?, probably mid sixth/seventh century



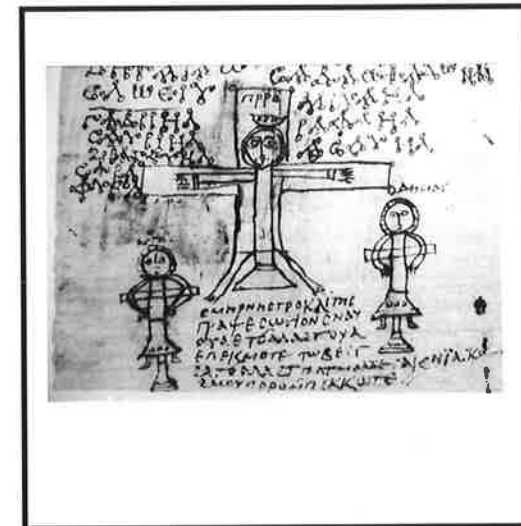
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d. *Virginia Bronze Censer*: Crucifixion. 10.7 x 12.7cm. Egypt?, late seventh/early eighth century



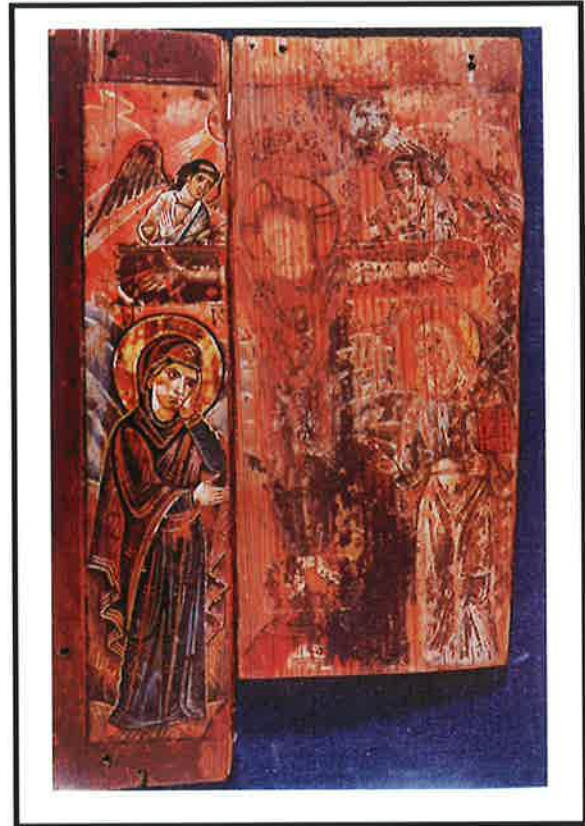
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f. *Magic Papyrus*. Coptic, c.600



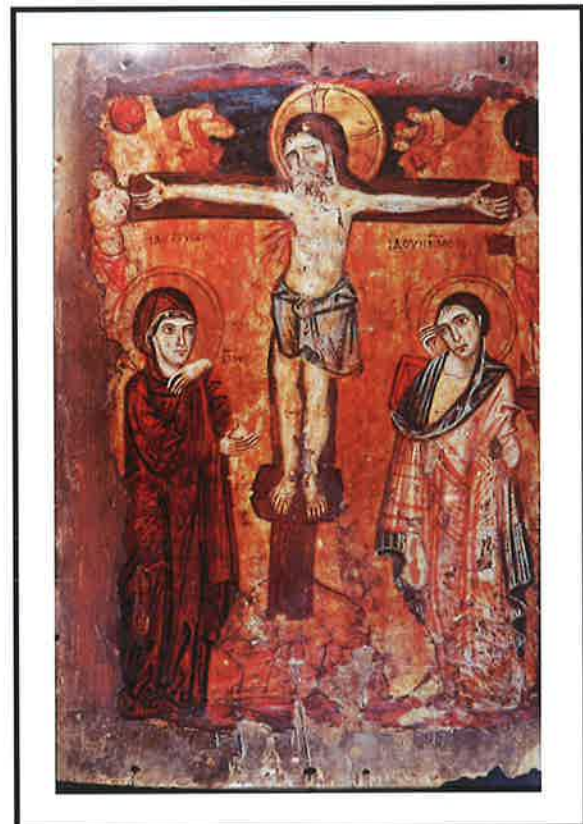
a. *Crucifixion*, mural. Chapel of Theodotus, Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome. Between 741-752



b. *Mt. Sinai Icon B. 32*. 2 parts: left fragment 36.3cm x 8.9cm: right fragment 31.5cm x 14.5cm. Palestine, seventh/eighth century



c. *Mt. Sinai Icon B. 36*. 46.4 x 25cm. Palestine, eighth century



d. *Mt. Sinai Icon B.50*. 47.1 x 34.4 x 1.3cm. Palestine, late eighth/ninth century



a. *Giza Jasper*: obverse 2.25 x 1.75 x 0.53cm. Possibly Syria, Middle Byzantine (thirteenth century)



b. reverse



c. *Farrant's line drawing*: obverse



d. reverse



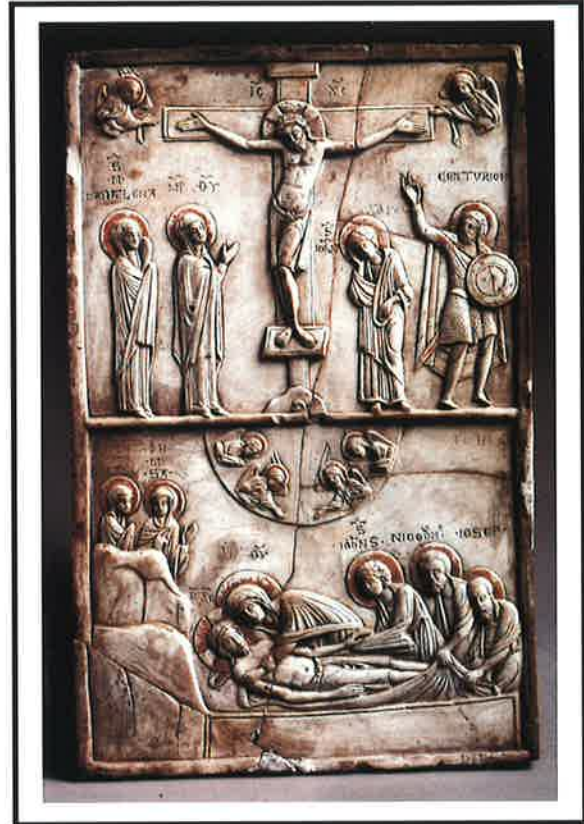
e. *Longperier's line drawing*: obverse



f. reverse



a. *Benaki Chalcedony*: reverse. (measurements unavailable) Byzantine, probably tenth-twelfth century



b. *Ivory Icon with Crucifixion and Entombment*. 24.4 x 15.5cm. Byzantine, twelfth century



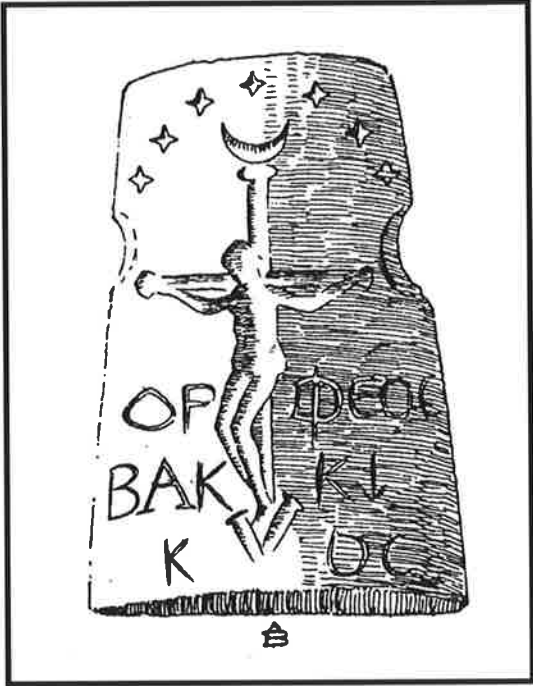
c. *Icon with Crucifixion*. 28.2 x 21.6cm. Byzantine (Sinai or Constantinople), c. AD 1100



d. *Votive cross of the Lady Alda Giuliani*. 67 x 46cm. Venice, AD 1383



a. *Orpheus Seal-cylinder*: impression. 1.4 x 0.9cm. Fake?



b. *Becker line drawing*



c. *Haematite Amulet*. 1.8 x 1.4 x 0.3cm. Eastern Mediterranean, second-fourth century