

ÉTUDES et TRAVAUX

XIII

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*Apocryphal and Canonical Scenes.
Some Remarks on the Iconography
of the Sarcophagus from the Collection
of the National Museum in Cracow**

* According to a suggestion offered by Prof. M. L. Bernhard, the author decided to study the whole collection of late antique sarcophagi preserved in the National Museum in Cracow. The author wishes to take the opportunity to thank Prof. Bernhard once again. The results of these studies have been published in the following: J. Ostrowski, Frammenti sconosciuti di sarcophagi paleocristiani, *RendPontAcc.* XLIV, 1971-1972, pp. 203-207; id., Unknown Fragments of Early Christian Sarcophagi, *Meander* XXVIII, 1973, pp. 326-331; id., An Unknown Fragment of an Early Christian Passion Sarcophagus, *Zeszyty Naukowe UJ, Prace Archeologiczne* n° 16, 1974, pp. 63-74; id., Jonah on an Early Christian Sarcophagus in the Collection of the National Museum in Cracow, *Folia Orientalia* XXI, 1980, pp. 205-209; id., The Battle Scene on the Sarcophagus in the Collection of the National Museum in Cracow, *Studia Archeologiczne* 3, Warszawa 1982, pp. 119-126. Other author's research has shown also that the Cracow collection represents an interesting group of sarcophagi: J. Zintel, Fragment of Late Antique Sarcophagus in Czartoryski Collection in Cracow, *Archeologia* VII, 1955, pp. 173-183; R. Gostkowski, Bachants romains sur un sarcophage, *Eos* 31, 1928, pp. 321-336; F. Matz, Zwei Bruchstücke Bakchischer Sarkophage in Polen, *Mélanges offerts à Kazimierz Michałowski*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 527-539 (with mention by R. Turcan, *Les sarcophages romains à représentations dionysiaques*, Paris 1966, p. 548).

EARLY CHRISTIAN SARCOPHAGI SCULPTURE developing within the general bounds of Late Antique art, after an initial phase when only religious symbols were represented, turned to depict the scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The episodes taken from the lives of Christ, Moses, Daniel, Jonas and St. Peter were the most popular among them. St. Peter for understandable reasons enjoyed particular popularity in Italy. His life was the main theme of many monuments which based on both canonical and those later recognized as apocryphal Books of the New Testament.

Such scenes as the miracle at the well (an analogy to Moses' miracle), and the martyrdom and death of the Apostle, were based upon the Acts of Peter. This popular apocryph originated in the A.D. 2nd or 3rd c. and formed a particular continuation of the Acts of the Apostles¹. Among others it contains a story relating to the struggle between St. Peter and the false prophet Simon Magus. This story found its plastic vision in representing one of the episodes of this rivalry. This is the taming of the dog of Simon Magus by St. Peter. The dog is keeping guard over the house of a Roman senator on the orders of its master, while Simon was within teaching. This is a theme which is extremely rare in Early Christian art, and it is not encountered in painting or minor arts of this period². Till now only three examples of this theme have been noted in sarcophagi sculpture. It decorates the lids of sarcophagi in Verona³ (Fig. 1) and Mantua⁴, and it must have been represented upon a missing sarcophagus which once was in France and is known only from an inaccurate drawing⁵ (Fig. 2).

The author has been able to identify yet another object decorated with this scene (Fig. 3). It is an upper part of a sarcophagus preserved in the Department of Ancient Art of the National Museum in Cracow⁶. On it we find the figures of two men standing back to back and a dog sitting in the arcade-shaped front door of a building. The arrangement of persons suggests that two separate scenes are contained here. The first consists of an effigy of a bearded man, whose head is shown from a right profile, and a torso en trois-quarts. The left hand is holding the folds of a mantle, while the right hand is bent at the elbow and is pointing in the direction of the seating dog. The dog is holding out its right fore-paw to the man. The second only partly preserved scene, portrays a youth with long hair that falls over his shoulders. He is dressed in a tunic with long sleeves, on which he wears a long mantle. The left hand is holding up the folds of an outer garment, while the right open palm is directed aside. Before the youth stands a vertical post, to which a slightly widening cross-bar is attached at the top. The cross-bar features a small plug at the left end. The figures of the men are preserved from the height of the knees, and their heads reach as high as the fillet on the upper rim of the lid. The relief

¹ *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, ed. R. A. Lipsius et M. Bonnet, Lipsiae 1891–1903, *Actus Petri cum Simone* c. IX. Cf. G. Stuhlfauth, *Die apokryphen Petrusgeschichte in der altchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig 1925.

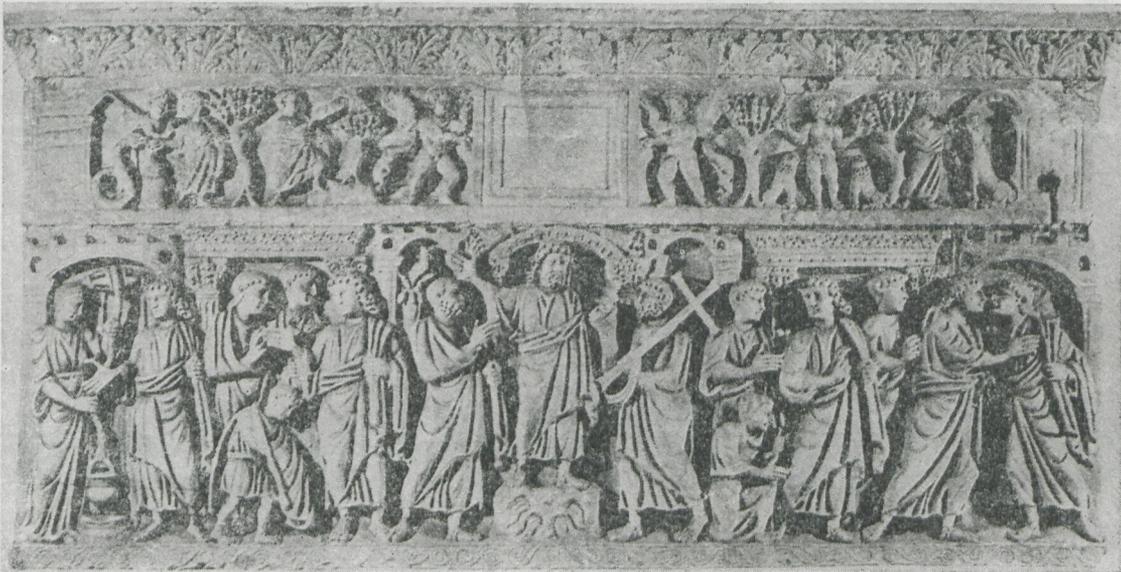
² Scenes with Simon Magus (without the representation of his dog) appeared very seldom during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In the period of the Counter-Reformation Simon Magus symbolized Martin Luther, cf. L. Reau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, III, Paris 1959, pp. 1094–2095.

³ T. Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi*, Roma 1929–1936, tav. 150,2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, tav. 30.

⁵ E. Le Blant, *Les sarcophages chrétiens de la Gaule*, Paris 1886, p. 114, n° 136.

⁶ Inv. No DMNKCz 2167. H. 0,24 m, L. 0,51 m. Coarse-grained grey marble. From the Potocki Collection in Krzeszowice. Cf. O. Hirsch, *The Provenance of the Collection of Antiquities from Krzeszowice*, Meander XX, 1965, pp. 309–314; ead., *Ancient Sculptures from Krzeszowice in the National Museum in Cracow*, *Rozprawy i Sprawozdania Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie* X, 1970, pp. 111–117.



1. Sarcophagus in S. Giovanni in Valle, Verona (after Grabar, Fig. 283)



2. Design of sarcophagus in France (after Le Blant, p. 114)

is not high, but by portraying the dog against a background of an arcade, the artist tried to deliver the impression of dimensional depth. The folds of the clothing are very conventional, with a tendency to vary the thickness of the material from which the clothing is made. The thicker fabric of the mantles have deeper folds with sharper bends than the shallow and wide bends of the thinner tunics. The artist, in sketching the scene, circumscribed the contours of the figures with incised lines, well visible near the post, near the beard of the older man, and near the dog's muzzle.

Undoubtedly the first of these scenes illustrates the described episode from the life of St. Peter, so rarely found in art. The positioning of the Apostle's body and the dog's torso on the object in Cracow is almost identical with those noticed on the Italian ones. However, only the



3. Fragment of the lid of the sarcophagus, National Museum in Cracow, inv. no DMNKCz 2167 (phot. K. K. Pollesch)

sarcophagus from Verona features a similar representation of the walls and arcade, characterized by poorer workmanship. These elements of architecture do not appear on the object from Mantua⁷, and, judging by the sketch of the missing sarcophagus from France, only one column adhering directly to the wall of the building appears. Having iconography in mind, the object in Cracow most closely resembles the scene from the Verona sarcophagus. The method of presenting the clothing, gestures, hair styles, working of the eyes and the muzzle of the dog are almost identical in both objects. Both the Verona and Mantua sarcophagi are dated to the years A.D. 390–400.

Of great aid in determining the sense of the second scene is the fragment located at the extreme end. The vertical post with the crossing beam at the top suggests that we have here a representation of a well with a windlass to which the rope was wound upon (the small plug on the left side would be the axis of this windlass)⁸. As we have suggested that the first scene may be an interpretation of a theme from Christian iconography, so also do we suggest that the answer to the riddle of the second scene should be found here, too.

In Early Christian art a well appears only in the scene of Christ and the Samaritan woman inspired by the Gospel of St. John (4,1–42), talking about the water of life⁹. This is a theme

⁷ It could be that the scene takes place in the interior of the house, as Stuhlfauth suggests, *op. cit.*, p. 5*

⁸ Wells were thus portrayed in sarcophagi sculpture, cf. F. W. Deichmann, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, I. Band, 2 vol., Wiesbaden 1967, no 755; R. Garrucci, *Storia dell'arte cristiana*, 6 vol., Prato 1873–1881, tav. 334,1; 385,3.

⁹ A well in Early Christian iconography appears only one more time apart from the scene of Christ and the Samaritan woman. This is the scene of Rachel at the well, but because it has no male figure it cannot be considered in identifying our fragments.

with few representations, as it appears on sarcophagi and catacomb painting only thirteen times¹⁰. In these representations Christ is portrayed as a youth whose right hand is pointed in the direction of a woman with a jar, standing on the other side of the well¹¹. Undoubtedly the Cracow relic preserved only in fragments portrays exactly this scene.

Christ's hairstyle, the method of working the face, and the almond-shaped eye with the large pupil carved in, are all typical for the so-called Theodosian Renaissance (A.D. 380-400). A similar portrayal of Christ appears on the chest of the mentioned Verona sarcophagus and the insignificant differences may be explained by the state of preservation of the relics and their different proportions. On the Veronese object the figure of Christ hides almost all of the post. The manner in which Christ is positioned on the object in Cracow may be compared with a sarcophagus in the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli in Rome, dated to the end of the A.D. 4th c.¹²

It is important to note, that all the known representations of St. Peter taming the dog originate not in Rome, but in Gaul, both Cisalpina (Verona, Mantua) and Transalpina (the missing French object). Similar scenes at wells were more popular in Gaul than in Italy¹³. One might logically conclude that the relic from Cracow also originates from the workshops of Gallia Cisalpina and was created in the years A.D. 390-400.

The find in the Cracow collections of another sarcophagus featuring such a rare scene, allows us to reach some significant conclusions. Firstly it verifies the frequency of the appearance of such themes. And it also suggests that apocryphs played a larger role in Christian iconography than was heretofore presumed. On the other hand the scene with the Samaritan woman allows one to conclude that it was featured not only on the chest of sarcophagi, but on the lid as well. The figure of Christ, more often than was heretofore presumed, also appears on the lids of the sarcophagi and not only on its chest.

Cracow, 1978

¹⁰ P. Styger, *Die altchristliche Grabeskunst*, München 1927, p. 7, states that nine sarcophagi sculptures and four paintings on this theme exist. On the other hand Wilpert, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 306-307, lists fifteen sarcophagi (including some not preserved) decorated with this scene. The earliest known illustration at this theme is found in the Baptistery of the Christian House in Doura Europos.

¹¹ In some cases Christ sits on a small hill, cf. Wilpert, *op. cit.*, tav. 231,2; 233,2.

¹² Deichmann, *op. cit.*, no 755.

¹³ From fifteen sarcophagi listed by Wilpert, only four originate from Rome.