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The Apocalypse in Early Christian Monumental Decoration

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The Apocalypse
in the Middle Ages

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The Apocalypse
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To write a history of Apocalypse imagery in early Christian frescoes and mosaics is impossible; too many significant monuments are lost, and what survives is neither necessarily typical nor demonstrably unique. A responsible account can only describe and categorize what remains, pointing to similarities and differences without assuming that they constitute direct relationships, and bearing in mind what has disappeared without attempting to recover it by speculation. Despite these limitations, some generalizations seem unobjectionable. The Apocalypse is hardly known in early Christian mural art before about 350, but it makes a sudden and profuse appearance—an "invasion" according to Frederik van der Meer—in the latter part of the fourth century.[1] When it does appear, it is not as comprehensive or narrative imagery—no early Christian apse or wall painting represents the Apocalypse per se—but as a cadre of motifs. Often enough the motifs seem to be employed with straightforward reference to themes or episodes of the book, but sometimes, especially in apsidal imagery, they are combined with images and symbols from different iconographic traditions (for example, Christian funerary art or imperial propaganda) to create synthetic compositions that cannot be said to be textually based. Attempts to specify the meaning of these compositions have engendered an inconclusive but invigorating scholarly debate over the past twenty years.[2]

The motifs and compositions surveyed here are not peculiar to monumental painting; on the contrary, the same imagery occurs in nearly all

Christian visual media at around the same time.[3] Sculpture (namely, figured sarcophagi), commemorative objects (for example, pieces of gold glass), luxury arts (ivory carving), and monumental painting were iconographically interdependent; murals and mosaics are distinguished less by their visual vocabulary than by what we can assume about their common purpose and the conditions of their reception. The decoration of a basilica was physically part of the sacred space and presumably in a mutually enhancing relationship with the rituals enacted in that space. It seems likely that the imagery was selected with reference to the ritual, and the ritual certainly provided a context for the viewer's reception of the imagery.

A survey of the use of Apocalypse motifs should begin by defining what they are. This must be an arbitrary determination, partly because the boundaries between the Apocalypse and other apocalyptic descriptions are so permeable (for example, the verbal imagery of Apocalypse 4 overlaps Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1), partly because the artistic visualization of the Apocalypse was devised from a preexisting repertoire of conventional images, such as lambs and thrones, whose specific meaning is conditioned by context. The list appended to this essay, containing all of the monuments on which it is based, is conservative, that is, limited to images either unique to the Apocalypse (such as the twenty-four Elders and the book with seven Seals) or especially characteristic of it (like the Lamb). Crowns and the cross (identified as the tree of life in Apocalypse 2:7, 22:2, 14) are excluded as too commonplace, and thrones are counted only when accompanied by another image that is indisputably Apocalyptic (that is, dependent on John's Apocalypse), like the book with seven seals.

Motifs selected by these criteria tend to cluster in Books 4 and 5. The exceptions are also unusual in other respects: trumpeting angels (Apoc. 8:2) and heavenly Jerusalem (Apoc. 21:2, 10–27) because they appear so rarely (respectively, once, App. no. 29; and thrice, App. nos. 1, 4, 21), and the AΩ (Apoc. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13) for the opposite reason, because it was ubiquitous. Disposed on either side of the Christian monogram, or chrismon, the Alpha and Omega appeared on all manner of objects made, seen, used, and worn by Christians, including bricks, jars, rings, medallions, coins, and slave collars. Though the motif occurs on a few inscriptions datable before the time of Constantine, it was more frequently found afterward, especially from about the middle of the fourth through the early

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[1]Frederik van der Meer, *Maiestas Domini: Théophanies de l'Apocalypse dans l'art chrétien* (Vatican City, 1938), 445, 450.

[2]See, e.g., the discussion of the apse of S. Pudenziana summarized at the end of this chapter.

[3]This generalization probably does not include manuscript illumination. No Apocalypse manuscript of this period is known, but many scholars have argued the existence, and even the iconography, of such manuscripts from Carolingian miniatures believed to have been copied from them. Some of these arguments are detailed and persuasive, e.g., Cäcilia Davis-Weyer, " 'Aperit quod ipse signaverat testamentum': Lamm und Löwe im Apokalypsebild der Grandval-Bible," in *Studien zur mittelalterlichen Kunst, 800–1250: Festschrift für Florentine Mütherich,* ed. Katherina Bierbrauer et al. (Munich, 1985), 67–74. If there were such illustrated manuscripts, it seems likely that they were iconographically distinctive: figuratively as well as physically closer to the text.

fifth centuries.[4] Except for the Lamb, AΩ is the only Apocalypse motif found in Roman catacomb painting, where it normally was combined, as in inscriptions, with the chrismon.[5] Some hold that it was an anti-Arian symbol, and this seems a possible explanation for those instances of monumental painting in which AΩ appears with the portrait, rather than the monogram or symbol, of Christ (App. nos. 2, 3, 18, 20). A vault painting in the Roman catacomb of SS. Marcellino e Pietro (App. no. 3), for example, shows the figure of Christ enthroned and, axially below him, the Lamb on Mount Sion. AΩ is painted beside Christ's nimbus and also inside the Lamb's, making a clear equation of the (human) victim and the resurrected divinity.

Anti-Arian or not, the AΩ symbol was not an automatic sign of the Apocalypse. Like some of the metaphors of Saint Paul, "Alpha and Omega" was a felicitous phrase that could be applied out of context to many situations. Generally it signified Christ's priority to the created world.[6] In monumental imagery, it seems to have acquired a specific Apocalyptic reference only in the fifth century, in programs that brought the AΩ/chrismon or AΩ/cross together with the Four Living Creatures.

After the AΩ, the Lamb (Apoc. 5:6–14, 6:1, 7:9–17, 14:1) is the first Apocalyptic motif encountered in monumental art. Friedrich Gerke traced its emergence on sarcophagi in the second half of the fourth century, and it appeared in painting about the same time.[7] It seems to have been a particular instance of the *agnus dei*, which occurs in fourth-century painting and sculpture in both narrative and nonnarrative compositions.[8] The Lamb is designated as the Lamb of the Apocalypse by attributes like the mound with rivers symbolizing Mount Sion, the throne, and a scroll with seven seals.[9] The animal itself is always a generic lamb, not the creature with seven horns and seven eyes described in Apocalypse 5:6, and thus it resembles the sheep that abound in earlier catacomb and sarcophagus imagery, for example, in representations of the Good Shepherd. Ambitious iconographers could play on these multiple biblical and visual associations. The best-known (though not necessarily typical) example is Saint Paulinus of Nola, whose explanatory inscriptions for two apse mosaics (App. nos. 13, 14) are preserved in a letter to Sulpicius Severus dated 403. Both apses apparently contained images of the Lamb on Mount Sion

(Apoc. 14:1). In one, according to the verse, the Lamb represented Christ as a member of the Trinity, as sacrificial victim, and as foundation of the Church. In the second apse, the Lamb was victorious victim and judge. Neither interpretation refers specifically to the Apocalypse, though the second seems inclined in that direction.[10]

In the painting in the catacomb of SS. Marcellino e Pietro mentioned earlier, the Lamb on the mount is shown between two pairs of male saints, while Christ above is enthroned between Saint Paul and Saint Peter (App. no. 3). The composition has the typical vertical structure of late antique acclamation scenes, in which the lesser (lower) figures raise their hands in praise of the honored central figure at the top (compare the column of Arcadius, fig. 20).[11] Although, as in this case, the Lamb is not always the object of the acclamation, it is consistently depicted in scenes of this general tenor, that is, in images of praise or glorification.[12] The acclamatory context has textual justification in Apocalypse 5:8, the Lamb at the throne, glorified by the Four Living Creatures and the twenty-four Elders, and in Apocalypse 14:1, the Lamb on Mount Sion, acclaimed by the Creatures, the Elders, and the 144,000. It is interesting that, except for the 144,000, these are the most common Apocalypse motifs in fifth- and sixth-century monumental imagery: the Elders, the Creatures, and the throne. Initially, they do not normally occur all together. The Lamb can be acclaimed by other lambs as on sarcophagi, by saints, or, in Saint Paulinus's apses, by the voice (probably symbolized by the hand) of God. The Creatures are often seen praising Christ or his symbols, and the Elders likewise were represented on the triumphal arch of S. Paolo fuori-le-mura (fig. 19) adoring the bust of Christ.

Two cases that seem atypical in this regard may not actually have been so. A verse by the poet Prudentius from around 400—the last stanza of forty-eight that seem to have been meant, like those of Saint Paulinus, to accompany pictures—described an adoration of the Lamb that seems unusually close to Apocalypse 5:6–12: "Four and twenty elders seated and resplendent with vessels and harps and each with his crown of honor are praising the Lamb that is blood-stained from the slaughter, and that alone

[4]Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1924), 2–23.

[5]Examples are listed by Aldo Nestori, in *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* (Vatican City, 1975), 192, 204. The chrismon is the monogram of Christ, made with chi and rho, chi and iota, or a cross and rho (as in fig. 21 herein).

[6]Prudentius *Liber cathemerinon* 9.10–12 (ed. Maurice P. Cunningham, *CC* 126:47).

[7]Friedrich Gerke, "Der Ursprung der Lämmerallegorien in der altchristlichen Plastik," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 33 (1934): 164–65.

[8]Ibid., 160–96; Antonio Ferrua, S.J., "Scoperta di una nuova regione della Catacomba di Commodilla," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 35 (1958): 35–37, figs. 28, 30.

[9]Cf. van der Meer, *Maiestas Domini*, 29–30, 38–39.

[10]Saint Paulinus of Nola *Epistula* 32.10, 17 (ed. Guilelmus de Hartel, *CSEL* 29:286, 292). For translations of the inscriptions, see Cäcilia Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art*, 300–1150 (reprint, Toronto, 1986), 20, 23. On the interpretation, see Josef Engemann, "Zu den Apsis-Tituli des Paulinus von Nola," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 17 (1974): 21–34.

[11]Johannes Georg Deckers, Hans Reinhard Seeliger, and Gabriele Mietke, *Die Katakombe 'Santi Marcellino e Pietro,' Repertorium der Malereien* (Vatican City, 1987), 199–201 no. 3; Johannes Georg Deckers, "Constantin und Christus: Das Bildprogramm in Kaiserkulträumen und Kirchen," *Spätantike und frühes Christentum: Ausstellung im Liebieghaus Museum alter Plastik Frankfurt am Main*, ed. Dagmar Stutzinger (Frankfort on the Main, 1983), 274; Josef Engemann, "Akklamationsrichtung, Sieger- und Besiegtenrichtung auf dem Galeriusbogen in Saloniki," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 22 (1979): 152–55.

[12]Gerke, "Ursprung der Lämmerallegorien," 170–74.

has been able to unroll the book and undo the seven seals."[13] The textual parallels are obvious, but it is not known how closely the verses matched the pictures, nor indeed if the pictures were ever made.[14] An adoration of the Lamb is also recorded as having been on the facade of S. Pietro in Rome (App. no. 8), which was decorated by the consul Marinianus and his wife Anastasia in the pontificate of Leo I (440–61). Their mosaic is known from a drawing in an eleventh-century manuscript now in Eton College (fig. 18), which shows the Elders in striding poses, wearing crowns and holding up bowls toward the Lamb represented in the gable. The winged Creatures hover below the Lamb, carrying books.[15] Because a seventh-century note refers to the mosaic as "four animals around Christ," scholars since the nineteenth century have conjectured that the facade originally displayed a bust of Christ and that the Lamb was a replacement made by Pope Sergius I (687–701), who is known to have repaired the mosaic.[16] The fifth-century facade, according to this hypothesis, would have had the same iconography as the contemporary arch of S. Paolo.[17]

The visualization of the twenty-four Elders is consistent in the known representations, which are all in Rome: S. Pietro (fig. 18), S. Paolo (fig. 19), SS. Cosma e Damiano (fig. 1), and several later decorations for which these served as models.[18] These images correspond only loosely to the written account. The Elders do wear white, and at S. Pietro they apparently had crowns on their heads (Apoc. 4:4). But (excepting always Prudentius) they are not shown with harps or vials (Apoc. 5:8); they neither sit (4:4) nor fall down before the Lamb (4:10, 5:8); they do not throw down their crowns (4:10). In the Roman images, the Elders move upright and hold their of-

[13]Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art*, 33.

[14]Cf. Cäcilia Davis-Weyer, "Komposition und Szenenwahl im Dittochaeum des Prudentius," in *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann gewidmet*, vol. 3, ed. Otto Feld and Urs Peschlow (Bonn, 1986), 19–20.

[15]Eton College, MS. 124, fol. 122; first published by Hartman Grisar, S.J., in "Die alte Peterskirche zu Rom und ihre frühesten Ansichten," *Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde* 9 (1895): 240–48, 259–66. The manuscript contains a life of Pope Gregory I, and the scene below the roof line (see fig. 18 herein) is the pope's burial in the porch of S. Pietro.

[16]Louis Duchesne, ed. and trans., *Le Liber pontificalis*, vol. 1 (reprint, Paris, 1981), 375, 379 n. 34; Grisar, "Alte Peterskirche," 261, 264–66; van der Meer, *Maiestas Domini*, 93. One of the strongest reasons for attributing the Lamb to Pope Sergius I is its prominence in the dispute between Rome and Constantinople after the Quinisext Council in 692; see Duchesne, *Liber pontificalis* 1:376, 381 n. 42, and Thomas F. X. Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680–825* (Philadelphia, 1984), 17.

[17]Scholars who reject this speculation include Stephan Waetzoldt; see *Die Kopien des 17. Jahrhunderts nach Mosaiken und Wandmalereien in Rom* (Vienna, 1964), 67.

[18]The triumphal arch of S. Paolo fuori-le-mura was decorated between 442 and 450; see Stephan Waetzoldt, "Zur Ikonographie des Triumphbogenmosaiks von St. Paul in Rom," in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Hertzianae* (Munich, 1961), 20. The mosaic was remade after the fire of 1823, which is why we rely on the reproduction by Giovanni Ciampini (fig. 19). On SS. Cosma e Damiano, see no. 34 below.

ferings (crowns, or bowls at S. Pietro) out and upward.[19] Theodor Klauser recognized that this representation is related to the imperial ceremony called *aurum coronarium*, in which gifts conventionally called *coronae* (though they might be other precious objects or even money) were presented to the emperor by subject states or peoples. A domestic version of this ritual was the *aurum oblaticium*, a presentation to the emperor by a representative of the senate.[20] A depiction of the *aurum oblaticium* was identified in a sixteenth-century drawing of the base of a commemorative column erected in Constantinople by the emperor Arcadius (395–408; fig. 20).[21] The togate senators in the second register from the bottom (half destroyed) were represented by two leaders who held out bowls or crowns as presents to the Augusti, shown with arms upraised in the register above. The symmetrical arrays of standing Elders seem to belong to this realm of ceremonial representation. Their bent, obeisant posture (seen especially at S. Paolo, fig. 19) does not appear on the column base but is typical of images of the *aurum coronarium*.[22]

The mosaics of S. Pietro and S. Paolo, made just before the middle of the fifth century, are the earliest known images of the twenty-four Elders. The Four Living Creatures (Apoc. 4:6–9, 5:8–14, 7:11–12, 14:3, 19:4) were represented before then, in the apse of S. Pudenziana in Rome (fig. 22), made before 417, and possibly earlier in S. Giovanni in Fonte, the baptistery of the cathedral of Naples (fig. 21).[23] Unlike the Lamb and the Elders, the Creatures are not an obvious appropriation of a preexisting, nonapocalyptic convention or symbol, but like the other images, they were created in the Greco-Roman tradition of naturalism rather than as visualizations of the ecstatic text. The Eagle is a conventional eagle, and the others are a man and two animals with wings attached. They are not shown covered with eyes (Apoc. 4:6), and they more frequently have two rather than

[19]The Elders described by seventeenth-century writers in the old cathedral of Naples (App. no. 19) were kneeling; for this and other reasons, Yves Christe proposed that the mosaics must have been later than the early Christian period ("A propos du décor de l'arc absidal de Santa Restituta à Naples," in *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst* 2:157–58.

[20]Theodor Klauser, "Aurum coronarium," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts: Römische Abteilung* 59 (1944): 129–53.

[21]Klauser, "Aurum coronarium," 145. The column base survives, but its reliefs do not; see Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen, 1977), 252 fig. 285. The drawing was first published by E. H. Freshfield, in "Notes on a Vellum Album Containing Some Original Sketches of Public Buildings and Monuments, Drawn by a German Artist Who Visited Constantinople in 1574," *Archaeologia* 72 (1921/22): pl. XXIII.

[22]Klauser, "Aurum coronarium," 146–47.

[23]The apse mosaic of S. Pudenziana is dated to the pontificate of Innocent I (401–17) by an inscription recorded by Onofrio Panvinio in the sixteenth century; see Guglielmo Matthiae, "Restauri: Il mosaico romano di Santa Pudenziana," *Bollettino d'Arte* 31 (1937/38): 422–23. The Neapolitan mosaics are dated by style to the bishopric of Severus (400–408) by Jean-Louis Maier; see *Le Baptistère de Naples et ses mosaïques* (Fribourg, 1964), 69–76.

six wings (4:8). In the earliest examples, the Creatures are presented as busts, but it soon became more common to depict them at half-length, with limbs to hold wreaths (as at S. Maria Maggiore, App. no. 6) or books.[24]

In the Apocalypse, the Creatures sing the praises of the *sedens*, the indescribable one on the throne (4:6–9, 19:4), of the Lamb (5:8–14), or both (7:11). Monumental imagery corresponds to these passages, but again without being strictly illustrative. In seven monuments, the Creatures occur with emblems of Christ (the cross or chrismon) or with emblems or symbols upon a throne.[25] In two cases, they appear with the Lamb, and in three with busts of Christ.[26] Finally, in apse mosaics in Rome (App. no. 4), Salonika (App. no. 33), and possibly Ravenna (no. 26), the Creatures accompany a full-length figure of Christ enthroned.[27] A peculiarly Egyptian variant of this last type, very popular in the painted monastic chapels of Bawit (fig. 26; App. nos. 35, 36), includes the Old Testament detail of wheels under the throne (Ezek. 1:15–21); sometimes elements of the Ascension are present as well.[28] In these images the Creatures are disposed radially around the *sedens*, who is enclosed in an aureole or mandorla, as in the so-called *majestas domini* so common in later medieval art. In early Christian imagery it is a much rarer composition, appearing on extant monuments only in Salonika and Egypt (App. nos. 33, 35, 36).[29]

In Italy, the distribution of the Four Living Creatures with respect to the object of their adoration varies with the architectural context, and it can be two- or three-dimensional. In basilicas they commonly appear on vertical surfaces—usually triumphal or apsidal arches—arrayed horizontally in pairs, two on each side of the symbol or throne (figs. 1, 19).[30] An excep-

[24]Examples are listed by Marjorie de Grooth and Paul van Moorsel in "The Lion, the Calf, the Man and the Eagle in Early Christian and Coptic Art," *BABesch (Bulletin Antieke Beschaving)* 52–53 (1977/78): 238–39; the wreaths at S. Maria Maggiore are overlooked.

[25]With cross: App. nos. 4, 27; with chrismon: nos. 12, 28; with throne: nos. 6, 11, 18 (in no. 11 the Lamb is among the symbols on the throne).

[26]With Lamb: App. nos. 8, 10; with bust of Christ: nos. 7, 16, 31.

[27]The mosaic in S. Croce, Ravenna, was destroyed in the seventeenth century and is known only from its descriptive inscription, which names "Christ, Word of the Father," and "the winged witnesses" who "surround [Christ] saying a triple *sanctus* and amen." Though some have reconstructed it as an apsidal composition, Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann argues (*Ravenna: Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes: Kommentar*, vol. 1 [Wiesbaden, 1974], 57) that the mosaic was on the inner wall of the facade; see App. no. 26, and n. 29 below.

[28]Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 95–100, 201.

[29]If Friedrich Gerke's reconstruction of the lost mosaic in S. Croce in Ravenna is correct, that composition would have been similar, though embellished with the motif of the defeated lion or viper and basilisk from Psalm 90(91): 13; see "La composizione musiva dell'oratorio di S. Lorenzo Formoso e della basilica palatina di S. Croce a Ravenna," *Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 13 (1966): 157. The objections to such a reconstruction were foreseen by Ihm, *Programme*, 171–72.

[30]Examples: App. nos. 5–8, 11, 31.

tional case is S. Pudenziana, where this arrangement is employed in an apse (fig. 22). More interesting are the vaulted chapels—baptisteries, oratories, and mausoleums—in which the Creatures could be placed in the four squinches that make the transition from walls to vault (fig. 21).[31] The object of their worship is shown above them, in the apex of the vault; this creates a theatrical spatialization of the two-dimensional convention mentioned earlier, according to which praise flows upward, from lesser to greater.[32] Simply by looking upward to see the images, the observer becomes a participant in this ritual of ascending acclamation.

The remaining motifs listed in the appendix are mostly accessories to the throne: the candelabra (not lamps; Apoc. 1:12–13, 20, 2:1, 4:5), the sea of glass (Apoc. 4:6), and the scroll (not a book) with seven seals (Apoc. 5:1).[33] The apsidal arch of SS. Cosma e Damiano in Rome, of the sixth or seventh century (fig. 1), is the first extant monument in which all of these attributes appear together.[34] The Lamb is included as well, reposing confidently on the seat of the throne, making this also the first preserved monumental image that combines the Lamb and the scroll with seven seals.[35] Despite this pregnant juxtaposition and the relative abundance of detail, the mosaic makes no move in the direction of dramatic narration; on the contrary, it is an additive, emblematic expansion of the hieratic composition of S. Paolo, with the same sense of infinite deferral.

In sixth-century Ravenna, by contrast, Apocalypse motifs are dispersed rather than concentrated, and they appear in unparalleled combinations. In the apse of S. Vitale (546–48), for example, the scroll with seven seals appears in the hand of Christ himself, who is seated on a symbolic globe (fig. 24). The Lamb is represented in the vault of the preceding chancel bay (fig. 25), in a scheme adapted from smaller groin-vaulted buildings of the

[31]Examples: App. nos. 10, 12, 22, 23, 27. In the chapel of S. Matrona (no. 18) and the Archbishop's Chapel in Ravenna (no. 28), which are groin vaulted and consequently have no squinches, the animals are respectively dropped to the wall surfaces or raised to the compartments of the vault.

[32]Engemann, "Akklamationsrichtung" (see n. 11 above).

[33]Candelabra: App. nos. 11, 19, 25; sea of glass: nos. 11, 29; scroll with seven seals: nos. 6, 11, 18, 30. In nos. 19 and 25, the candelabra may have accompanied images of Christ. Margherita M. Cecchelli argued that the sea in nos. 11 and 29 is the *mare vitreum mistum igne* of Apoc. 15:2; see "Osservazioni circa il mosaico di S. Michele in Africisco," *Felix Ravenna*, ser. 3, 31 (1960): 128–29.

[34]SS. Cosma e Damiano was a Roman government building consecrated as a church by Pope Felix IV (526–30) (Duchesne, *Liber pontificalis* 1:279). Guglielmo Matthiae has argued that the arch mosaics are of a later date, in the pontificate of Sergius I; see *Mosaici medioevali delle chiese di Roma*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1967), 209–11. Two Living Creatures on the arch and most of the twenty-four Elders were obscured in the seventeenth century, when the clear width of the nave was reduced.

[35]The combination of Lamb and throne is known in the early fifth century, on an ivory casket from Pola and, presumably, the apse of the basilica at Fundi; cf. Ihm, *Programme*, 138; also Gertrud Schiller, *Die Auferstehung und Erlösung Christi*, vol. 3 of *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst* (Gütersloh, 1971), 196–200. The fact that there are no preserved fifth-century examples of the Lamb with the scroll does not, of course, mean that such images were not made then.

fifth century (cf. App. nos. 9, 10).[36] In S. Michele in Africisco, we find the only known example in early Christian art of the trumpeting angels (Apoc. 8:2), on an apsidal arch flanking two archangels and Christ enthroned.[37]

It is time to ask what this imagery means. Answers can be sought by investigating the literary and visual origins of each of the separate motifs. Thus, to take the throne as an example, one learns that the throne was an Old Testament image; a staple of imperial iconography; and a symbolic surrogate used in pagan, secular, and ecclesiastical ceremonial. In the Psalms, the throne is an attribute of the Lord's eternal dominion, and in Psalm 9, of his future judgment. The throne of a hellenistic ruler was an object of official adoration; and from the first century onward, thrones appear on the coins of Roman emperors, combined like the Apocalypse thrones with other emblems. At church councils, a throne bearing the codex of the Gospels embodied the presence of Christ.[38] Similarly, investigating the Four Living Creatures, one finds an Old Testament background and also a tradition of Christian exegesis. Commentators since the second century read the Creatures as symbols of the four evangelists, and the equation was a commonplace by the time they appeared in art. Its familiarity to iconographers is indicated by the fact that so often the Creatures carry books.[39]

The shortcomings of this essentially lexical approach, when applied to the interpretation of any given mosaic, are precisely those encountered in verbal decipherment from dictionaries: there is no a priori basis for selecting among multiple possible meanings (as in the case of the throne) and no means of recognizing extra- or counterlexical usage (as when the Creatures do not symbolize the evangelists).[40] The traditional appeal to context depends on the assumption that the context itself has a lexically specifiable meaning, but this is not demonstrably true of visual imagery. The apse of S. Pudenziana provides an exemplary instance of this and other interpretative problems.

[36]For a view of the ensemble, see Ernst Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), fig. 153. The date given here is that established by Deichmann, in *Ravenna: Kommentar*, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden, 1976), 188–89.

[37]The church of S. Michele was founded in 545 and dedicated in 547; the mosaics were made in that period. The apse and arch mosaics were removed from the church in 1843 or 1844 and are now on display in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. Stylistically they cannot be considered original works of early Christian art, but the iconography is generally considered authentic (Deichmann, *Ravenna: Kommentar* 2:35, 38–39).

[38]Schiller, *Ikonographie* 3:193–94; Andreas Alföldi, "Insignien und Tracht der römischen Kaiser," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts: Römische Abteilung* 50 (1935): 134–39.

[39]Schiller, *Ikonographie* 3:184–87.

[40]These difficulties are addressed, in different terms, by Beat Brenk, *Tradition und Neuerung in der christlichen Kunst des ersten Jahrtausends: Studien zur Geschichte des Weltgerichtsbildes* (Vienna, 1966), 71–73; Engemann, "Apsis-Tituli," 42–46; and de Grooth and van Moorsel, "Lion, the Calf," 233–41.

The mosaic (fig. 22) portrays Christ on a gem-studded throne, surrounded by twelve Apostles.[41] He makes a gesture of speech with his right hand and holds open a book with his left, displaying the motto DOMINVS CONSERVATOR ECCLESIAE PVDENTIANAE (The Lord, Preserver of the Church of Pudentiana). Two women hold wreaths over the heads of Saint Paul and Saint Peter. Behind the figures is a portico with gilded roof tiles, an architectural skyline, and a mound supporting a tall gold and bejeweled cross. The Four Living Creatures float in a medium of wispy, variegated clouds, some of which are red. Sixteenth-century drawings record a dove and the Lamb, which seem to have been represented on an axis below Christ and the cross.[42]

Analyzed archaeologically, the image reveals several strata.[43] The basic composition of Christ seated among the twelve appears earlier in catacomb painting and is itself an adaptation of a pagan convention, the colloquium of philosophers. Overlaid on this scene of "Christ teaching" is a stratum of imperial paraphernalia: the throne, the halo, the *aurum coronarium*, the title *conservator*, and the emblematic cross, the potent sign that guaranteed imperial victory (cf. fig. 20).[44] Mixed with this layer is a third one composed of apocalyptic motifs: the Creatures, the heavenly city, the Lamb, the multivalent throne, and the cross, now understood as the sign of the Son of Man, "coming upon the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty" (Matt. 24:30).

A basic question is whether all or some of these strata constitute the meaning of the image, or whether one supersedes or subordinates the others. Johannes Kollwitz, for example, considered the imperial stratum predominant and described the subject as "the heavenly king, who comes to make an address to his community," the latter comprising the Apostles and also the real-life congregation.[45] Ernst Dassmann favored the apocalyptic layer, arguing that the composition shows Christ as final judge, though not in the act of judgment.[46] Yves Christe maintained that the subject is eschatological but without any reference to future events. "[It is] the manifestation of an already realized cosmic kingdom. . . . One must speak of present or realized, not of future or end-of-time

[41]The outermost Apostles were eliminated in 1588.

[42]Cf. Ihm, *Programme*, 130–32, pl. III. 2.

[43]Most clearly explicated by Ernst Dassmann, "Das Apsismosaik von S. Pudentiana in Rom," *Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde* 65 (1970): 70–74.

[44]*Conservator* was also an epithet of Jupiter (Johannes Kollwitz, "Das Bild von Christus dem König in Kunst und Liturgie der christlichen Frühzeit," *Theologie und Glaube* 37-38 [1947/48]: 101 n. 37). On the cross, see André Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (reprint, London, 1971), 32–34.

[45]Kollwitz, "Bild," 102.

[46]Dassmann, "Apsismosaik," 81. Before Dassmann, Erich Dinkler identified the subject as the moment of judgment at the Second Coming (*Das Apsismosaik von S. Apollinare in Classe* [Cologne, 1964], 54–55).

eschatology."[47] Josef Engemann objected that Christe's reading is too restrictive, that early Christian images typically encode a plurality of meanings, one of which, in S. Pudenziana, is Christ's second coming and the attendant judgment.[48] Geir Hellemo contends that the ambiguities in the imagery are purposefully unresolvable; the simultaneous utilization of biblical and imperial motifs creates "an open and ambiguous framework which balances on the border between the earthly and the heavenly, of the present and of the future."[49] The meaning of this and of all church apses, according to this author, is neither imperial nor eschatological but liturgical: "Apsidal imagery unifies and summarizes the central content of the eucharistic prayer."[50]

Refocusing on Apocalypse imagery in the light of this debate, it is useful first to review the data. Two gross patterns appear among the monuments in the Appendix: the predominance of motifs in Books 4 and 5 already mentioned, and a clear break just after 400. The motifs in use before then—AΩ and the Lamb—were freighted with christological significance and not specifically indexed to the Apocalypse; this is borne out by Saint Paulinus's inscriptions.[51] In the fifth century, by contrast, we find many combinations of Elders and Living Creatures with the symbol or image of Christ, which seem to function as visual précis of Apocalypse 4–5. As these books are themselves liturgical, a liturgical content for the images seems inescapable.[52] Conversely, it was probably the liturgical character of the text that recommended these motifs to iconographers. By "liturgical," we should understand not the theology and symbolism of the eucharistic sacrament but the more general practice of ritualized public worship. The imperial cult had already produced a liturgical iconographic vocabulary (fig. 20), which does much to explain the marriage of Christian and imperial imagery in our monuments. The celebratory character of the imagery is both part of its content and intrinsic to its nature as art. Public art in the late Roman Empire was panegyrical, and Christian public art unquestioningly took up the same role.

Why the break around 400? The matter deserves investigation. Diverse factors could be pertinent, including the significance of the perceived fall

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[47]Yves Christe, "Gegenwärtige und endzeitliche Eschatologie in der frühchristlichen Kunst: Die Apsis von Sancta Pudenziana in Rom," *Orbis Scientiarum* 2 (1972): 52; see also, by the same author, *La vision de Matthieu (Matth. XXIV–XXV): Origines et développement d'une image de la Seconde Parousie* (Paris, 1973), 12–13, 26–27, 31–36, 75–78.

[48]Josef Engemann, "Images parousiaques dans l'art paléochrétien," in *L'Apocalypse de Jean: Traditions exégétiques et iconographiques,* ed. Yves Christe (Geneva, 1979), esp. 79–84.

[49]Geir Hellemo, *Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in Fourth-Century Apses and Catecheses* (Leiden, 1989), 63.

[50]Ibid., 281.

[51]See also the essay by E. Ann Matter in this volume.

[52]Cf. Leonard Thompson, "Cult and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John," *Journal of Religion* 49 (1969): 330–50.

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of Rome in 410 and the subsequent patronage of the Empress Galla Placidia, whose personal devotion to the author of the Apocalypse was probably a cause of some innovative imagery in Ravenna (App. nos. 25, 26) and who sponsored the triumphal arch mosaic of S. Paolo fuori-le-mura in Rome (no. 7).

APPENDIX

Apocalypse Motifs in Monumental Art, A.D. 350–565

AΩ	Alpha and Omega (Apoc. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13)
HJ	Heavenly Jerusalem (21:2, 21:10–27)
L	Lamb (5:6–14, 6:1, 7:9–17, 14:1)
SG	Sea of glass (4:6)
T	Throne (4:1–11, 5:1–14, 7:9, 7:15–17, 19:5, 20:4, 22:1)
Tr	Trumpeting angels (8:2)
4LC	Living Creatures (4:6–9, 5:8–14, 7:11–12, 14:3, 19:4)
4LCe	Living Creatures as evangelist symbols (post scriptural authorities: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Victorinus, Jerome, and so on)
7C	Candelabra (1:12–13, 1:20, 2:1, 4:5)
7S	Seven seals (5:1)
24E	Elders (4:4, 4:10–11, 5:8–14, 7:11–12, 11:16, 14:3, 19:4)
()	Indicate "destroyed"

ITALY

Rome

1. S. Costanza, tower
   - ca. 350?
   - destroyed ca. 1620; recorded 1608.
   - (mosaic: L, HJ).
   - Adele Anna Amadio, *I mosaici di S. Costanza* (Rome, 1986), 40–41 no. 14, 52–53 no. 25.

2. Catacomb of Commodilla, cubiculum of Leo *officialis annonae,* end wall and vault
   - 375–80?
   - painting: AΩ/bust of Christ, AΩ/standing Christ, AΩ/chrismon.
   - Ferrua (as in n. 8), figs. 14, 22, 26.

3. Catacomb of SS. Marcellino e Pietro, crypt of the saints, vault
   - last quarter 4th c.?
   - painting: AΩ/enthroned Christ, AΩ/L.
   - Deckers, Seeliger, and Mietke (as in n. 11), 'Tafelband,' colorplates 2, 3a; cf. pl. 1.

4. S. Pudenziana, apse
   • 401–17.
   • partly destroyed 1588 and 1711; recorded 1595.
   • mosaic: HJ, T, 4LC, (L).
   • fig. 22; color photo: Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Early Christian Art* (New York, 1962), pl. 130; cf. Ihm (as in n. 28), pl. III.2.

5. S. Sabina, entrance wall
   • 422–32.
   • destroyed; recorded 1690.
   • (mosaic: 4LC).
   • Waetzoldt (as in n. 18), 21 fig. 10.

6. S. Maria Maggiore, triumphal (originally apsidal) arch
   • 432–40.
   • mosaic: T, 7S, 4LC.
   • Josef Wilpert and Walter N. Schumacher, *Die römischen Mosaiken der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV.–XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1976), pls. 68–70.

7. S. Paolo fuori-le-mura, triumphal arch
   • 422–50.
   • reworked 13th c.?; damaged 1823; remade; recorded 17th c.
   • (mosaic: 4LC, 24E).
   • fig. 19; also Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), 87 fig. 58.

8. S. Pietro in Vaticano, facade
   • 440–61.
   • altered 692–701?; remade 1227–41; destroyed 1608–18; recorded 687–701 and 11th c.
   • (mosaic: L?, 4LCe, 24E).
   • fig. 18.

9. S. Giovanni in Laterano, baptistery, chapel of St. John the Evangelist, vault
   • 461–68.
   • remade.
   • mosaic: L.
   • Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), pls. 80, 81.

10. S. Giovanni in Laterano, baptistery, chapel of St. John the Baptist, vault
    • 461–68.
    • destroyed; recorded 17th c.
    • (mosaic: L, 4LCe).
    • Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), 92 fig. 62.

11. SS. Cosma e Damiano, apsidal arch
    • 526–30 or later.
    • partly destroyed 1626–32.
    • mosaic: L, T, 7S, SG?, 4LCe, 7C, 24E.
    • fig. 1.

Campania

12. Naples, S. Giovanni in Fonte, cupola and squinches
    • 4th–5th c.
    • mosaic: AΩ/chrismon, 4LC.
    • fig. 21; color photos, in Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), pls. 8, 15, 18a–b.

13. Nola, Basilica Apostolorum, apse
    • ca. 400.
    • destroyed; recorded 403.
    • (mosaic: L).
    • Engemann (as in n. 10), figs. 1, 2.

14. Fundi, Basilica of Paulinus, apse
    • ca. 403.
    • destroyed; recorded 403.
    • (mosaic?: L, T?).
    • Engemann (as in n. 10), figs. 4, 5.

15. Naples, Catacomb of S. Gennaro, crypt of Cominia and Nicatiola, arcosolium
    • 5th c.?
    • painting: AΩ/St. Januarius standing.
    • Raffaele Garrucci, *Storia della arte cristiana*, vol. 2 (Prato, 1873), pl. 102.

16. Naples, Catacomb of S. Gaudioso, cubiculum vault
    • 5th c.?
    • painting: 4LCe.
    • Garrucci (see no. 15 above), pl. 105.

17. Naples, Catacomb of S. Gennaro, crypt of the bishops, arcosolium
    • mid-5th c.
    • partly destroyed.
    • mosaic: AΩ/cross, 4LCe.
    • Beat Brenk, *Spätantike und frühes Christentum* (Frankfort on the Main, 1977), pl. 25.

18. Santa Maria Capua Vetere (near), S. Prisco, chapel of S. Matrona, lunettes on three walls
    • 5th c.
    • partly destroyed.
    • mosaic: AΩ/bust of Christ, (L?), T, 4LC, 7S.
    • Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), pls. 83–85; Brenk (see no. 17 above), pl. 23.

19. Naples, S. Restituta, apsidal arch
    • 5th or 6th c.?
    • destroyed after 1643; recorded 1623, 1643.
    • (mosaic: 7C, 24E).
    • Ihm (as in n. 28), 176–77 no. 33.

North Italy

20. Milan, S. Lorenzo Maggiore, chapel of S. Aquilino, southwest niche
    • 4th c.?
    • mosaic: AΩ/Christ seated.
    • *La Basilica di San Lorenzo in Milano*, ed. G. A. Dell'Acqua (Milan, 1985), figs. 159, 160; Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), pl. 6.

21. Milan, S. Lorenzo Maggiore, chapel of S. Aquilino, vestibule
    • 4th c.?
    • partly destroyed.
    • mosaic: HJ?
    • *Basilica di San Lorenzo* (see no. 20 above), figs. 169–177.

22. Milan, S. Ambrogio, chapel of S. Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, squinches
    • 5th c.
    • remade 19th c.
    • (mosaic: 4LC).
    • Brenk (see no. 17 above), pl. 27; Giuseppe Bovini, "I mosaici di S. Vittore 'in ciel d'oro' di Milano," *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate* . . . 16 (1969): 73 fig. 1.

23. Vicenza, SS. Felice e Fortunato, chapel of S. Maria Mater Domini, squinches
    • 5th c.
    • mosaic: 4LC.
    • Brenk (see no. 17 above), pl. 21.

24. Albenga, Baptistery, niche vault
    • late 5th c.
    • mosaic: AΩ/chrismon.
    • Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), pl. 86; Brenk (see no. 17 above), pl. 20.

Ravenna and Istria

25. Ravenna, S. Giovanni Evangelista, apse wall and apsidal arch
    • ca. 430
    • destroyed 1568; recorded 556–70, before 1589, and 1589.
    • (mosaic: 4LC, 7C?).
    • reconstructions: Deichmann (as in n. 27), figs. 67, 68.

26. Ravenna, S. Croce, entrance wall?
    • before 450.
    • destroyed 1602; recorded 556–70.
    • (mosaic: 4LC).
    • description: Deichmann (as in n. 27), 57; cf. n. 29 herein.

27. Ravenna, "Mausoleum" of Galla Placidia, barrel vaults and cupola
    • before 450.
    • mosaic: AΩ/chrismon, 4LC.
    • Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna* (Baden-Baden, 1958), pls. 16–18, 22–25; color detail: Giuseppe Bovini, *Ravenna Mosaics* (Oxford, 1978), pl. 5.

28. Ravenna, Archbishop's Chapel, vault
    • 6th c.
    • mosaic: AΩ/chrismon, L, 4LCe.
    • Wilpert and Schumacher (see no. 6 above), pls. 93b, 94.

29. Ravenna, S. Michele in Africisco, apsidal arch
    • 545–47.
    • dismantled 1843; remade; damaged 1945; recorded 17th c.
    • (mosaic: L, Tr, SG?).
    • Ihm (as in n. 28), pl. VIII.2.

30. Ravenna, S. Vitale, apse and chancel walls and vault
    • 546–48.
    • mosaic: L, 7S, 4LCe.
    • figs. 24, 25; also Kitzinger (as in n. 36), fig. 153; color photos: Volbach (see no. 4 above), pls. 158, 161.

31. Ravenna (near), S. Apollinare in Classe, apse and apsidal arch
    • 547–49 and 7th c.
    • mosaic: AΩ/cross (6th c.), 4LCe (7th c.).
    • Volbach (see no. 4 above), pl. 173; Deichmann (see no. 27 above), pl. XIV.

32. Poreč (Parenzo), Basilica of Bishop Euphrasius, apse
    • 543–53.
    • mosaic: L.
    • Brenk (see no. 17 above), pl. 375.

GREECE

Salonika

33. H. David, apse
    • 5th–6th c.
    • mosaic: 4LCe.
    • Volbach (see no. 4 above), pl. 134.

EGYPT

Mt. Sinai

34. Monastery of St. Catherine, Church of the Virgin Mary, apsidal arch
    • 565–66.
    • mosaic: L.
    • George H. Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1973), pls. CIII, CXXII.A.

Bawit

35. Chapels VI (now Cairo, Coptic Museum, Inv. no. 1220), XVII, XX (Coptic Museum no. 1120), XXVI (partly destroyed), XLII (partly destroyed),

XLV (partly destroyed), XLVI (partly destroyed), LI (partly destroyed);
apsidal niches
• 6th–7th c.
• painting: 4LC.
• fig. 26; Ihm (as in n. 28), pls. XIII.2; XIV.1; XXIV.1, 2, XXV.1, 2.

Saqqara
36. Monastery of Jeremiah, Chapels B (now Cairo, Coptic Museum; partly de-
stroyed), D (partly destroyed), F; Cell 709 (partly destroyed), Cell 1733 (de-
stroyed); apsidal niches
• 6th–7th c.
• painting: 4LC.
• Ihm (as in n. 28), 208 no. LIII.1.

BULGARIA

Sofia
37. Necropolis, Tomb 4, east wall
• 4th c.
• painting: AΩ/chrismon.
• Brenk (see no. 17 above), pl. 396b.

9

Purpose and Imagery in the Apocalypse Commentary of Beatus of Liébana

JOHN WILLIAMS

We are poorly informed about the life of Beatus, and the
deductions made possible by his literary legacy are a better guide than the
vita concocted by Juan Tamayo de Salazar (d. ca. 1662) for his *Marty-
rologium Hispanum*.[1] Beatus was probably born around the middle of the
eighth century and lived at least beyond the *vita's* date of death, 19 Feb-
ruary 798, in the monastery of S. Martín de Turieno (today Sto. Toribio) in
the Asturian valley of Liébana.[2] That he was a member of the clergy is
confirmed by a letter written by Paulus Alvarus of Córdoba,[3] and in his
Adversus Felicem, Alcuin termed Beatus an abbot.[4] He was known to his
contemporaries chiefly as the champion of orthodoxy against the Adop-
tionist teachings of Bishop Elipandus of Toledo. In opposition of Eli-
pandus, Beatus composed the *Adversus Elipandum*,[5] a tract that earned
him a letter of praise from Alcuin, who led the Carolingian campaign
against Adoptionism. For the modern world, however, Beatus's fame is tied
to an earlier work, the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*. More precisely, it is
the densely illustrated copies of this work which have made Beatus a fa-
miliar name in the history of medieval culture.

No copy of the commentary from Beatus's own era survives. The closest
in time is an illustrated fragment now in Silos, from the latter part of
the ninth century. We know the commentary from thirty-two medieval
manuscripts, including fragments, dating from the ninth century to the

[1] *PL* 96:890–94.
[2] Luis Vázquez de Parga, "Beato de Liébana y los Beatos," in Bibliotheek Albert I. *Los
Beatos: Europalia 85 España* (exhibition catalog) (Madrid, 1985), 3–7.
[3] Juan Gil, ed., *Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicum*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1973), 179.
[4] *PL* 101:133.
[5] *PL* 96: 893–1030; *Beati Liebanensis et Eterii Oxomensis adversus Elipandum, libri
duo* (*CCCM* 59).