

**4. “EXIERUNT EDUCTI VELUT MANU DEI”:
DANIEL “TALES” AND CHRISTIANS’ ESCHATOLOGICAL DESTINY**

The definition of the role of the “tales” in the early reflection about *Pascha* and the “apocalyptic” manifestation of end times directly leads to another perimeter of paleochristian speculation in which the use of this biblical material is widely attested, namely the broad reflection about *eschata* and the condition of the believers after earthly death.

The present chapter will try to individuate and describe the modalities in which communities assumed and interpreted “haggadic *Dn*” in order to articulate the principal coordinates of their “eschatological conception”; also in this occasion, the exegetical instrument eminently used seems to be represented by typology, so that scriptural events are conceived as an antecedent and a prefiguration of future realities.

As has been done for the concepts of “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic”, also in this case it is necessary to offer some clarifications concerning the way in which the same term “eschatology” will be assumed in this context, at least because of the vastness of arguments and speculations with which it can be associated. Three peculiar features of preconstantinian “eschatological thought” have to be remarked and constantly considered in this occasion¹:

- 1) eschatology is rooted in history² and represents a dimension which involves the entire community – in other words, the speculations about *eschata* do not deal with individual experiences but rather concern the church and its general salvation³;
- 2) eschatology is indissolubly connected with Christ’s *Pascha*, which was considered as the same proclamation and beginning of the eschatological time⁴; in this sense, eschatology

¹ A weighty summary of the principal features of early Christian “eschatological thought” is offered by G. PELIZZARI 2006-2007, pp. 160-161. According to the so-called school of the “Konsequente Eschatologie”, neotestamentary eschatology spread as the attempt of post-apostolic generations to explain the *parousia* delay (see in part J. WEISS, *La predicazione di Gesù sul Regno di Dio*, Napoli 1993 [Collana di classici neotestamentari] and A. SCHWEITZER, *Das Messianitäts und Leidensgeheimnis: eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu*, Tübingen 1956). Such interpretative hypothesis is not accepted by O. CULLMANN, *Cristo e il tempo. La concezione del tempo e della storia nel Cristianesimo primitivo*, Bologna 1965, in part. pp. 79-93, who suggests to include eschatology in a long-period parable of salvation history.

² See in part J.N.D. KELLY, *Il pensiero cristiano delle origini*, Bologna 1972, pp. 559-565: “...la storia aveva raggiunto il suo punto culminante e il regno di Dio, secondo molte parabole del Signore, aveva avuto un inizio effettivo” (p. 559).

³ As also G. PELIZZARI 2006-2007, p. 161, notices, the “individual eschatology” represents a later thought, which cannot actually be ascribed to early speculation.

⁴ This is the hypothesis of R.T. ETCHEVERRÍA, *La Bibbia nel cristianesimo antico. Esegesei prenicena, scritti gnostici, apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, Brescia 2003 (Introduzione allo studio della Bibbia 10), p. 383: “L’elemento

is “inaugurated” in Jesus⁵ and grounded on the same meaning attributed to *Pascha* and its consequences;

- 3) eschatology is associated with the “apocalyptic dimension”, which describes the way in which end time will be established⁶.

Considering such points, it becomes easier to understand in which sense early Christian eschatology should not be principally assumed as a “chronological *datum*” but rather as an “hermeneutical coordinate” allowing communities to interpret their present condition in the light of a substantial distinction between the time concluded by Christ’s arrival, and the eschatological dimension in the offing⁷.

Finally reaching the topic of the present research, it is necessary to notice that – though the whole panorama of Christian origins reveals the centrality of *Dn* “tales” in the reflection concerning the relation between communities and *eschata* – the two categories of sources testify different approaches to the matter. Literature does not apparently insist on such interpretation of *Dn* narrations, probably because it rather exploits the section of “visions” in this sense⁸. The already examined “apocalyptic” interpretation of “tales” can be considered as the most fruitful outcome of the speculation about end times in a broad perspective, since the only eschatological tradition in the stricter sense attested in ancient texts introduces the story of the Hebrews in the specific development of the theme of flesh resurrection⁹.

caratteristico della soteriologia e dell’escatologia cristiana è la tensione tra il presente e la salvezza decisiva, raggiunta grazie all’opera redentrice di Gesù Cristo, e la speranza in una salvezza piena e definitiva con la seconda venuta del Cristo glorioso”.

⁵ Such concept is expressed by J. JEREMIAS, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, Göttingen 1998, p. 227. C.H. DODD, *Le parabole del Regno*, Brescia 1970 (Studi biblici 10), p. 193, speaks about “realized eschatology”.

⁶ This association can be considered as the logical consequence of a process whose roots have to be researched in Jewish context (but it is necessary to remember that the origins of Christian eschatology results from heterogeneous influences, from pagan-Mediterranean theologies to messianic tendencies, as described among the others also by M.V. CERUTTI, *Antropologia e Apocalittica*, Roma 1990): if in Jewish apocalyptic conception the scandalous persecution of the righteous ones’ (identified with Israel) activates the promise of their redemption from death, the completion in Christ (the righteous one) of such promise represents the very beginning of a “new time”, which will be introduced by imminent apocalyptic events (for further specifications about the meaning and the sense in which the definition of “apocalyptic” should be intended here see *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 95-97). For a panorama about Jewish eschatology see among the others A. CHESTER, *Future Hope and Present Reality, I: Eschatology and Transformation in the Hebrew Bible*, Tübingen 2012 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 293).

⁷ The efficacious definition comes from G. PELIZZARI 2010, p. 154.

⁸ Such evidence has already been discussed about the specific field of apocalypse, see *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 96-98. About the eschatological theme of God’s kingdom in *Dn* see J. WEISS 1993, pp. 46-47.

⁹ See *infra*, pp. 203-216.

Apart from such issue, the most relevant *data* emerge from the study of the interpretation of a specific biblical subject, the so-called “fourth figure in the furnace” granting salvation to Daniel’s companions exposed to flames¹⁰.

The limited literary fortune of the “eschatological reception” of “tales” is balanced by the voice of iconography, which outlines a completely different panorama: a conspicuous tradition mainly attested in catacomb paintings – of which literature seems to be substantially unaware – attributes to the type of Daniel in the lions’ den a clearly eschatological interpretation, so that the prophet precisely becomes a type of the “saved martyr”, rather than a generic “martyrial figure”¹¹.

In other words, if the adoption of *Dn* “tales” in literary eschatological speculations remains a secondary phenomenon connected with specific districts of paleochristian reflection, visual documentation places the biblical story of Daniel in the very heart of its manifests about the destiny of souls.

For these reasons, the present exposition will start from the analysis of the rich and fruitful witnesses coming from iconography, reserving the literary outcomes to a conclusive remark.

4.1. *EXCURSUS*. ESCHATOLOGY AND ICONOGRAPHY, FROM “PARADIGMI DI SALVAZIONE” TO “ESCHATOLOGICAL TYPES”

The identification of themes and symbols endowed with an “eschatological value” in the context of iconography represents a sensitive and appalling issue that requires to be faced with a special caution. Contrary to what happens with the “apocalyptic coordinate”, whose possible subsistence in the context of visual has not been considered at all¹², the eschatological value has been indiscriminately assessed by critics as an intrinsic character of the whole panorama of documents, so that all the types and figures have been vaguely interpreted as “paradigmi di salvazione”¹³, expressing an undefined hope of salvation.

It is certainly not an issue both that through iconography paleochristian communities wanted to describe the path of believers toward God’s reign, and that in funerary context the biblical types must have been particularly assumed in a consolatory perspective; notwithstanding this, the

¹⁰ See *infra*, pp. 217-231.

¹¹ See *infra*, pp. 158-200.

¹² See *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 142-144.

¹³ This is the approach expressed, among the others, by F. BISCONTI 2000 in the introduction of his lexicon, in part. pp. 30-31, where he affirms: “...l’arte paleocristiana rappresenta una manifestazione fortemente espressiva ed organizzata...per la comunicazione rapida efficace di concetti, misteri e dogmi, tutti gravitanti attorno all’orbita della salvezza”. See also S. ENSOLI-E. LA ROCCA (curr.), *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, Roma 2000, p. 293, where the idea of “paradigma di salvazione” is defined as a “costante imprescindibile nella formazione del repertorio figurativo paleocristiano”.

attribution of a generic “eschatological-salvific” meaning to every figurative manifestation seems a candid simplification that does not give accounts of the complexity and the richness of this source.

Two principal consequences seem to derive from such approach: on one side, it contributes in diffusing an “interpretative vagueness” that drastically dulls the peculiarities of the single themes and often impedes the real definition of their distinctive meaning¹⁴; on the other, it becomes difficult to identify and point out the specificities of the eschatological outcomes expressed by the iconographic source, so that its exegetical potential cannot be fully grasped. Since the principal cause of this problematic tendency – as already mentioned¹⁵ – is represented by the scarce attention paid by critics to the study of the external connection between single figures¹⁶, the assumption of a method that focuses on iconographic programs can represent a first, important occasion to reevaluate the relation between visual and eschatology, in a perspective which tries, on one side, not to give it for granted, and highlights, on the other, the specific developments of every document.

A comprehensive overview of materials allows to identify a double acceptance in which the allusion to *eschata* can be formulated in figurative source:

- 1) as an “eschatological tension” characterizing the entire visual program. In these cases, the final salvation of Christians represents the implicit outcome toward which the manifest tends¹⁷.

¹⁴ Such interpretative “vagueness” and a possible explanation for it have been mentioned *supra*, introduction, p. 12.

¹⁵ See *supra*, introduction, p. 12.

¹⁶ The issue has been shortly introduced in the general premises, see *supra*, introduction, pp. 14-17.

¹⁷ Though such “eschatological tension” will clearly emerge during the analysis of catacomb paintings (see *infra*, pp. 158-200), it may be interesting to consider here a paradigmatic case from which such concept emerges with particular strength. It is the document of Villa Albani, REP 1:925, ascribable to the first fourth of the 4th century (see also J. WILPERT 1932, pp. 203, 220 and *fig.* 162:1), where the images of Daniel and that one of the Hebrews are associated to the scene of Jonah resting under the pergola. The “eschatological tension” of the composition is not principally due to the essential combination of the three themes, but it is rather conveyed and expressed through the progressive *climax* that guides from the prophet with lions – standing on the ground – to the Hebrews – emerging from the furnace – and finally to Jonah, resting under a pergola unusually placed on a high rock. This figurative “ascension” efficaciously evokes the progression “from the world” toward the eschatological dimension of reign, in a way that also reminds of those “stairs” cited in *Acta Martyrum* and leading the persecuted ones toward salvation (see in part. *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, ed. H. MUSURILLO 1972, pp. 110-111; 4:3).



(Fig. 1)

- 2) As a specific “eschatological value” belonging to certain types and figures which directly evoke such dimension in a distinctive way. Each of these subjects can be associated with a peculiar eschatological *theologumemon*, and should not be considered as a generic and faint “paradigma di salvazione”. The following *table* gathers the scenes and the symbolic elements endowed with such “eschatological value”, trying to propose a possible distinction among their punctual meanings.

Eschatological themes	Eschatological types			
The inauguration of new times	Christ in throne (the type is scarcely diffused and scarcely studied; for an example see REP 2:10; a possible interpretation of the scene puts it in connection with <i>Jn</i> 16:16-20)	Cana miracle (see <i>infra</i> , chapter 4, n. 119)		
The promise of resurrection / salvation	Jonah spitted out from the monster (see <i>supra</i> , pp. 27-29)	Ezekiel and the dry bones (For generic references see D. CALCAGNINI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 268-269)	Lazarus (see <i>infra</i> , chapter 4, n. 69)	Noah in the ark (see <i>supra</i> , pp. 138-142)
God's reign	Jonah resting under the pergola (see <i>supra</i> , pp. 27-29)	The good shepherd (see <i>supra</i> , chapter 2, n. 102)	The eschatological banquet (See in part. E. JASTREBOWSKA 1979, pp. 3-90)	
“Salvific/ transcendent markers”	The dove (see <i>supra</i> , chapter 2, n. 93)	<i>Clipeus</i> and <i>parapetasma</i> (see D. MAZZOLENI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 243).		

(Tab. 1)

4.2. THE “SAVED-MARTYR”: DANIEL IN LIONS’ DEN IN CATACOMB PAINTINGS

In order to efficaciously test and interpret the “eschatological reading” of *Dn* “tales” in iconography, it becomes necessary to pay constant attention to the relation between the scenes derived from the “book” and those endowed with an “eschatological value”. As already mentioned, the most interesting outcomes of this tradition apparently emerge from the assumption of Daniel in the lions’ den type in the specific context of catacomb paintings.

Also in this occasion it is useful to preliminary introduce some quantitative *data*. The first relevant evidence is the fact that in catacomb frescoes the figure of the prophet *ad bestias* is the most diffused type among those extracted from *Dn*, with 52 attestations¹⁸. The evidence is significant also because it traces a substantial difference in comparison with sarcophagi production, where the scene of the lions’ den is decisively less attested than the Hebrews’ one¹⁹. Concerning the diffusion of Daniel type in catacomb paintings, it is possible to notice that:

- the figure is associated 35 times with scenes of First Testament, against 33 times in which it is connected with subjects extracted from New Testament²⁰;
- considering the iconographic programs and the disposition of the scenes²¹, the type seems to be principally combined with the following subjects: Lazarus (9 times); Noah (8 times); doves/birds (8 times); good shepherd (7 times); Jonah cycle (6 times); Peter striking the rock (6 times); other miracles (5 times)²².

An interesting evidence emerges from the survey: the prophet *ad bestias*, which is indistinctively associated with proto or neotestamentary figures, recurs 25 times in connection with some of the subjects that preferably allude to the resurrection and the salvation of the soul²³: Lazarus, Noah and doves/birds. Moreover, it is often linked with the scenes of Jonah cycle endowed with an eschatological meaning: the symbol of Christ’s resurrection (Jonah spitted our from the sea monster) and the allusion to the rest in God’s reign (Jonah under the pergola). Such documentary evidence

¹⁸ The Hebrews in the furnace appear 21 times; Susanna 14 times and the prophet’s companions in front of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue only 2 times.

¹⁹ The value of the scene of the Hebrews in sarcophagi production is described in part. in chapter 2 and 6.

²⁰ For a general panorama about the association between *Dn* types and other figures in catacomb paintings see

²¹ For a methodological warning about the definition of these relations see *infra, tab. 3*, p. 201, n. 1.

²² See *infra, tab. 3*, pp. 201-202.

²³ For a list of all the subjects that seem to have a distinctive eschatological value see *tab. 1*.

may reveal the existence of a peculiar tradition interpreting the scene of the den in an eschatological perspective and in connection with the final participation of Christians to reign²⁴.

a) *Daniel in Pietro and Marcellino catacomb*

The most fertile context to analyse the features of Daniel type “eschatological use” is represented by Pietro and Marcellino catacomb²⁵, not mainly because of the capillary recurrences of the subject in this area²⁶, but rather in the light of the paradigmatic significance and heterogeneity of the iconographic programs historiated: on one side, all the principal eschatological contents elaborated in protochristian visual are here gathered and assumed; on the other, those contents are developed in systematic association with the figure of Daniel, whose semantic potential finds a full expression.

The circulation and use of this scene in Pietro and Marcellino catacomb substantially confirms the *data* emerged from a generic inspection of Roman paintings: in most cases, the programs in which the theme of the den is included can be considered as “eschatological” in a specific sense,

²⁴ This possibility is supported by the fact that other themes from *Dn* do not keep up any privileged relation with the “eschatological themes” in catacomb paintings. As the *tab.* 3 shows, the figure of the Hebrews is never associated with the image of the ark, and it is connected only 4 times with that one of Lazarus; also the figure of Susanna does not show significant associations with salvific themes.

²⁵ The study of roman catacombs reveals a tragic scarcity of recent bibliography, and a generic lack of studies presenting a full and complete panorama of the disposition of frescoes in the iconographic programs (it is much easier to find single articles about archaeological issues or isolated representations). Luckily, the catacomb of Pietro and Marcellino can be considered as an exception, since the monumental work by J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER, *Die Katakombe “Santi Marcellino e Pietro”*. *Repertorium der Malereien*, Città del Vaticano-Münster 1987, offers a full reconstruction of areas through reliable tables and pictures. See also the monograph work by J. GUYON, *Le cimetière aux deux lauriers. Recherches sur les catacombes romaines*, Città del Vaticano 1987 – which focuses on all the general information concerning the creation and the organization of the paleochristian cemetery – and the dedicated section of NR pp. 49-71. For a chronological reflection about the area see J. GUYON, *Peut-on vraiment dater une catacombe? Retour sur le cimetière “aux deux lauriers” ou catacombe des saints Marcellin et Pierre, sur la via Labicana à Rome*, “Boreas” 14 (1994), pp. 89-103, and F. BISCONTI, *Materiali epigrafici dal cimitero dei Ss. Pietro e Marcellino. Spunti e conferme per la cronologia della regione I*, “Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana” 70 (1994), pp. 7-42. The problems concerning the catacombs’ chronology, with specific references to Pietro and Marcellino area, are treated by J. DECKERS, *Wie genau ist eine Katakombe zu datieren? Das Beispiel Ss. Marcellino e Pietro*, in A.A. V.V., *Memoria Sanctorum Venerantes. Miscellanea in onore di Monsignor Victor Saxer*, Città del Vaticano 1992, pp. 217-238. A synthetic but efficacious description of specific portions of the funerary context is offered by P. TESTINI, *Archeologia cristiana*, Bari 1980, pp. 236-239 (the description takes in consideration the so-called “cubicolo dei coronati” to which the “cubicolo di Susanna” cited *infra*, pp. 170-186, is connected). About recent archaeological inspections in this area see F. BISCONTI-R. GIULIANI-F.M. TOMMASI, *Nuove indagini nella catacomba dei Ss. Pietro e Marcellino sulla via Labicana*, A.A. V.V. *Archeologia Laziale 12. Atti del XII Incontro di Studio organizzato dal Comitato per l’Archeologia Laziale (CNR)*, Roma 1995, pp. 293-302. Specific bibliographical references about single cubicles or frescoes will be progressively offered.

²⁶ The catacombs in which the scenes of *Dn* know the most consistent diffusion are the following three: Pietro and Marcellino (20 recurrences); Domitilla (14 recurrences); *Coemeterius Maius* (10 recurrences). In Pietro and Marcellino catacomb the theme of Daniel in the lions’ den returns 16 times, while Susanna and the Hebrews respectively show 3 and 1 time.

since the prophet is directly connected with those types whose semantic core is represented by a distinctive and punctual allusion to resurrection, access to reign or salvation.

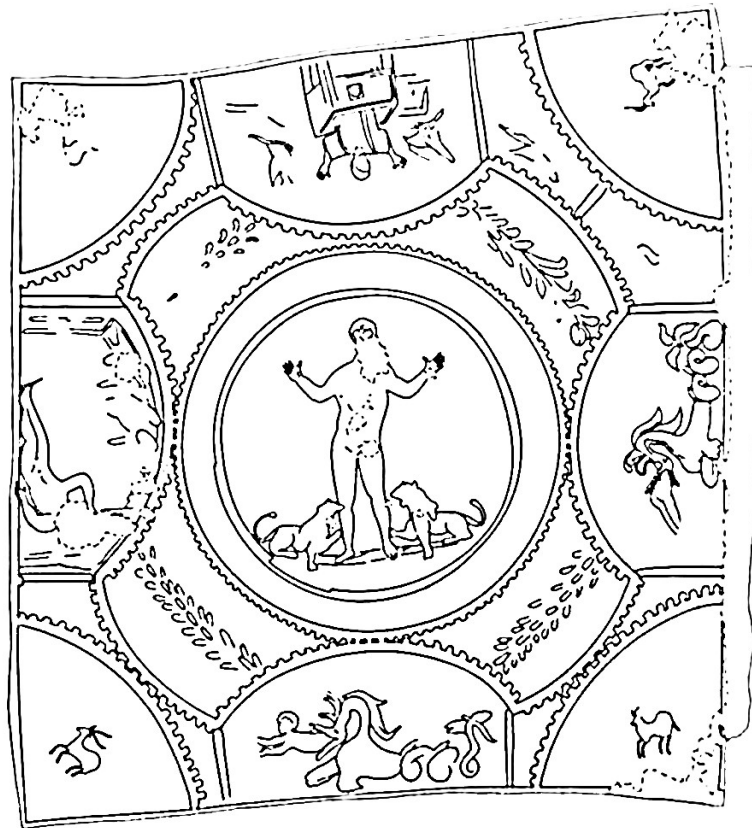
Considering the 16 recurrences of Daniel in Pietro and Marcellino, it is interesting to notice that, apart from 5 cases, the theme is always associated with at least a subject among Lazarus, Noah, Jonah spitted out from the sea monster jaws or resting under the pergola²⁷. Moreover, the figure – which appears to be preferably connected with more than a single “salvific theme” – is in most cases placed in eminent positions of iconographic programs, so that its “eschatological potential” ends up being strongly remarked. For these reasons and in the light of the complex architecture of the areas included in the cemetery, the inspection will be conducted through the analysis of the most interesting figurative programs attesting a peculiar kind of “eschatological reception” of the type, rather than considering, in a more generic perspective, the features and the working of a specific “iconographic couple”.

²⁷ See *infra*, *tab.* 2, in red.

NESTORI's classification of Daniel type	Name of the area	Placement of Daniel in lions' den type	Themes with which it is associated	Particular annotations
51 (p. 57)	Cubicle XIII	Skylight	Lazarus; birds	Daniel seems to emerge from an ark
71 (p. 62)	Cubicle	Entrance wall (left)	Peter striking the rock	The figurative core of the iconographic program on the vault is represented by Lazarus and Noah
11 (p. 51)	Cubicle next to Quinzia	Bottom wall	Fossores	
21 (p. 52)	Cubicle III	Vault, superior area	Noah in the ark	The scene of Daniel is the figurative peak of a manifest concerning sacrificial Pascha
24 (p. 52)	Cubicle XXXIII	Lunette	/	
8 (p. 53)	Cubicle, Eliodora crypt	Vault, central area	Noah and Jonah	
29 (p. 53)	Cubicle XXVII b	Vault, inferior area	Jonah	
41 (pp. 54-55)	Cubicle	Under the arch	Orant	
42 (p. 55)	Cubicle IX	Entrance wall (right)	/	
54 (p. 58)	Cubicle	Left wall	/	
57 (p. 58)	Cubicle XIV	Bottom wall arch (under the arch)	Orant, good shepherd and dove	
65 (pp. 60-61)	Cubicle	Left wall arch, (lunette)	Lazarus and dove	
74 (pp. 62-63)	Grave	Right wall	Doves	
77 (p. 63)	Cubicle	Vault	Noah and Jonah	
78 (pp. 63-64)	Cubicle	Vault	Healing of the paralytic, Noah, Lazarus	
79 (p. 64)	Arch	Front	Lazarus	

(Tab. 2)

4.2.1. Daniel and the resurrection: Eliodora's vault



(Fig. 2)²⁸

A first significant case attesting both the centrality of the figure of Daniel and its connection with the salvific dimension can be found on the vault of the so called Eliodora's crypt²⁹, where the image of the prophet *ad bestias*, placed in the central area of the program, becomes the core of the entire exegetical reflection.

If undoubtedly the theme of martyrdom – evoked by the prophet – represents here the principal argument of the theological manifest, a reflection about the figures surrounding the centre of the vault may allow to grasp the specific acceptance in which it should be conceived.

²⁸ The following images of catacombs are prevalently extracted from J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987. Other sources will be progressively indicated.

²⁹ NR 57, p. 53; J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, RCLAU 27, pp. 239-241; *farbtaf.* 11. The crypt chronological placement oscillates from the beginning of 3rd and 4th century, according to the *status quaestionis* outlined by J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 241 (s.v. “Datierung”). See IBID. also for a short bibliography. An image of the vault can be also found in J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 104. Apart from the vault, the cubicle preserves frescoes of male orant figures situated on the entrance wall, and of another orant type accompanied by the inscription HAIO on the bottom wall.



(Fig. 3)

Three quarters of the vault's program is dedicated to the development of Jonah cycle, here represented in its three most diffused scenes: on the left side, the image of the prophet resting under the pergola; in the inferior section of the vault, the figure of Jonah spitted out by the *ketos* jaws; on the right side, the prophet swallowed by the sea monster³⁰. Any effort to establish a hierarchy of importance between the scenes of the cycle seems here to fail, since all the phases of Jonah's story occupy sections of identical dimension and none of them sticks out for peculiar characteristics; notwithstanding this, such preliminary evaluation deserves to be better calibrated in the light of the fourth subject placed above the type of Daniel, that one of Noah in the ark. The introduction of this scene may stress the importance of the second representation of the cycle, namely Jonah spitted out from the monster's jaws, at least for two reasons:

- under a structural point of view, the two types appears to be reciprocally linked since they occupy a specular position: in this sense, the second phase of Jonah cycle is the only one which undergoes an exegetical deepening through the connection with an external figure;

³⁰ The scene is an equivalent of that one of the prophet ejected from the ship, an allusion to *Christi passio*, here formulated in a sort of contraction that often returns in catacomb paintings (for another example see the vault of the cubicle XXXVIIb of the same Pietro and Marcellino catacomb, see *infra*, pp. 165-166).

- under the thematic point of view the *tertium comparationis* between the two figures is represented by the dimension of salvation: if the image of Jonah develops this eschatological coordinate as a direct allusion to Christ's resurrection, that one of the patriarch seems – so to speak – to extend such meaning to the community of believers, which may be more punctually evoked both by the detail of the dove (symbol of the saved souls³¹) and by the possible visual overlapping between the ark and the casket³².

The link “Noah-Jonah spitted out from the *ketos*” may allude to the connection between the last phase of Christ's *Pascha* – the resurrection – and the access of the believers to final salvation. In this sense, the “baptismal” character of the type of the patriarch³³ may perform the role of implicit explanation of the modality in which the community members can accede to the eschatological reward predisposed for them: baptism actually becomes the instrument that allows to extend the salvific prerogative of Christ's resurrection to the destiny of Christians³⁴. Through such figurative relation, the second phase of Jonah cycle on Eliodora's vault benefits from a special treatment, that implicitly reveals the fundamental importance granted to the eschatological themes of resurrection and salvation.

In the context of this essential but clear exegetical elaboration, the figure of Daniel in lions' den assumes the role of “pivot” which “connects” and “collects”, so to speak, all the semantic elements alluded by the entire vault: placed in the heart of the program, martyrdom becomes the “space of intersection” in which *Pascha*, and mainly Christ's resurrection, meets the *passio* and the salvation of the community.

The central scene of Daniel does not just seem to represent the *trait d'union* between Christ's and Christians' destinies (which means between the images of Jonah and Noah), but it also picks up the role of landing place of the entire figurative program: in quality of iconographic acme toward which all the other scenes tend, it cannot be anymore considered as a generic allusion to martyrdom, but it rather evokes the salvific prerogative intrinsically “contained” in such experience,

³¹ About this figure see *supra*, chapter 2, n. 93.

³² About the interpretation of the figure of Noah and its semantic levels see *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 138-141.

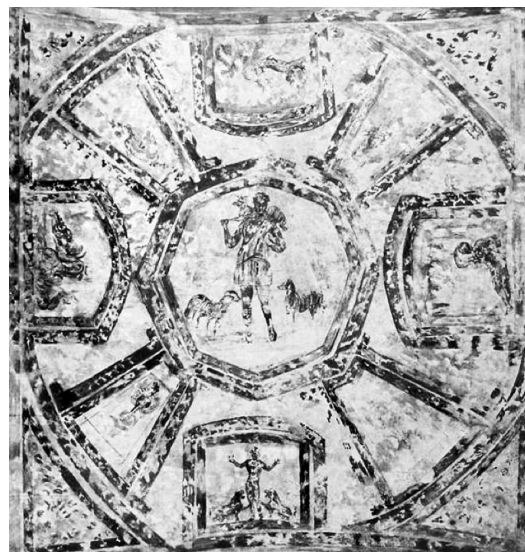
³³ About this semantic coordinate of the scene see *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 138-141.

³⁴ About the symbols and images of baptism and its meaning see R.M. JENSEN, *Living Water: Images, Symbols and Settings of Early Christian Baptism*, Leiden-Boston 2011 (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 105). In a more general perspective, about the theme of baptism in early church see, among the others, E. FERGUSON, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, Grand Rapids 2009 and D. HELLHOLM (ed.), *Waschungen, Initiation und Taufe: Spätantike, frühes Judentum und frühes Christentum*, Berlin-New York 2011 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 176).

so that it becomes possible to suggest that the “martyr-Daniel” has to be interpreted here as already participating to the eschatological dimension of an obtained salvation.

If in the context of sarcophagi production the focus of the relation between *Dn* “tales” and Jonah cycle has to be clearly researched in the moment of *passio* – systematically evoked by the connection between the prophet thrown in the sea and the Hebrews in the furnace³⁵ –, in the panorama of catacomb frescoes the interpretative axe shifts on the moment of resurrection: in this specific but paradigmatic case, Daniel exposed to lions is in fact the keystone of a circular program in which the symbol of Christ’s resurrection is exegetically stressed by the dialogue with one of the most diffused and ancient types alluding to the salvation predisposed for Christians since the baptism, that one of Noah³⁶. In this way, the representation of the den, that does not intrinsically include specific elements alluding to eschatology if considered in its individuality, seems to be somehow “charged” of such significance by the program in which it is included.

A possible confirmation of such interpretative proposal can be found on the vault of area XXXVIIb, known as the cubicle “dei pavoni nella volta”³⁷.



(Fig. 4)

³⁵ See *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 30-34.

³⁶ It is possible to underline that such “baptismal salvation” may be stressed by the figures of the gazelles that occupy the four corners of the program. The most acceptable interpretation of this subject is offered by G. PELIZZARI 2010, pp. 306-307, in the context of the description of the animals represented in the Aquileian musive program. The figure of the gazelle may be interpreted as a Christological image and as a symbol “del cristiano in cerca di Dio” (p. 307); moreover, starting from the allusion to *Ps* 41:2. *Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes tuas anima mea desiderat ad te Deus*, the type assumes the same baptismal value associated by L. DE MARIA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 110, to the deer, a substantially equivalent figure.

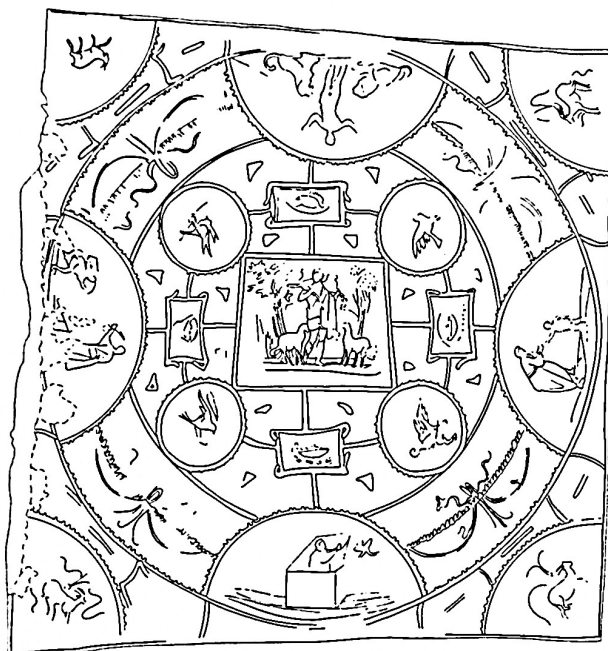
³⁷ NR 29, p. 53; J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, RCLAU 29, pp. 243-244; *tabb.* 20c and 21 – the image is extracted by J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 131. The chronological placement is generically assigned to the 4th century (J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 240, “Datierung”).

The central area of the program is here occupied by the Christological figure of the good shepherd with the flock, as well surrounded by Jonah cycle. In this case, the scene of the prophet *in lacu leonis*, placed in the inferior area of the section, is directly associated with Jonah spitted out from the sea monster jaws³⁸. The specular position expresses the privileged connection between the subject extracted from *Dn* “tales” and the typical figure of resurrection, in a way that clearly reveals the eschatological potential of Daniel in the lions’ den theme. The presence of peacocks between the historiated areas can be interpreted as a further allusion to the centrality of such eschatological dimension in the balance of the whole program³⁹.

³⁸ The first image of the cycle, just specular to the rest of Jonah, is not perfectly recognizable. Since the other two scenes undoubtedly represent the ejection of Jonah from the *ketos* and the prophet under the pergola in their typical definitions, J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 244, probably by exclusion, describes the first one as “Meerwurf”. NR, p. 53, more realistically cites, as single element vaguely recognizable, the presence in the scene of the sea monster. Considering the recurrence in catacomb frescoes of representations in which Jonah is swallowed by the *ketos* rather than thrown in the sea from the ship, as it happens for instance in Eliodora’s crypt (see *supra*, p. 162, *fig. 2*), it seems possible to accept here the interpretation formulated by J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER, so that the scene would be a symbol of *passio*.

³⁹ The generic interpretation of the peacock formulated by G.H. MOHR 1984, p. 277, seems to be principally derived from Christian literature, and signally from Augustine, who considers the animal as a reference to body resurrection, since “la carne del pavone è incorruttibile” (the allusion is to a pagan legend, accepted by Christian and cited in Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 21:4). According to the scholar, this should be the meaning of the numerous representations in frescoes, sarcophagi or tombstones, where “spesso due pavoni, posti uno di fronte all’altro, bevono dal calice eucaristico o dal vaso che simboleggia l’acqua della vita”. L. DE MARIA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 110, underlines how the symbol of the peacock assumes in paleochristian art “un significato specialmente rigenerativo, che dà una forte carica all’animale, tanto da divenire la figura zoomorfa più rappresentata”. For a monographic study about the figure see H. LOTHER, *Der Pfau in der altchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig 1929; see also D.P. MIQUEL, *Dictionnaire symbolique des animaux. Zoologie mistyque*, Paris 1991, pp. 205-206.

4.2.2. Daniel and baptism: cubicle III of Pietro and Marcellino catacomb



(Fig. 5)

If in the case of Eliodora's vault the possible "baptismal value" of the program was completely enshrined in one of the interpretative coordinates of the type of Noah, in the case of cubicle III⁴⁰ the importance of such theme emerges in a stronger way and performs a central role in a figurative exegesis including the scene of Daniel.

The core of the iconographic elaboration is here represented by the image of the good shepherd, a subject alluding to the role of Jesus as guide of a community conceived and characterized as *Christi grex*⁴¹. The concrete meaning and implications connected with such special membership, seem to be described by the entire program of the vault, resorting to types extracted from both Testaments.

The left area is dedicated to the scene of Abraham offering his son⁴², an allusion to sacrificial *Pascha* mediated by a biblical typology⁴³. Such type of Jesus – evoking in particular the dimension of *passio* – is a match for a possible representation of Christ's baptism, a figure exactly placed in front of

⁴⁰ NR 21, p. 52; J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, RCLAU 21, pp. 230-232; *tabb.* 14-15-16; *farbtaf.* 9; see also J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 73. The chronological placement of the cubicle goes from the beginning of the 3rd to the 4th century (J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 232, "Datierung").

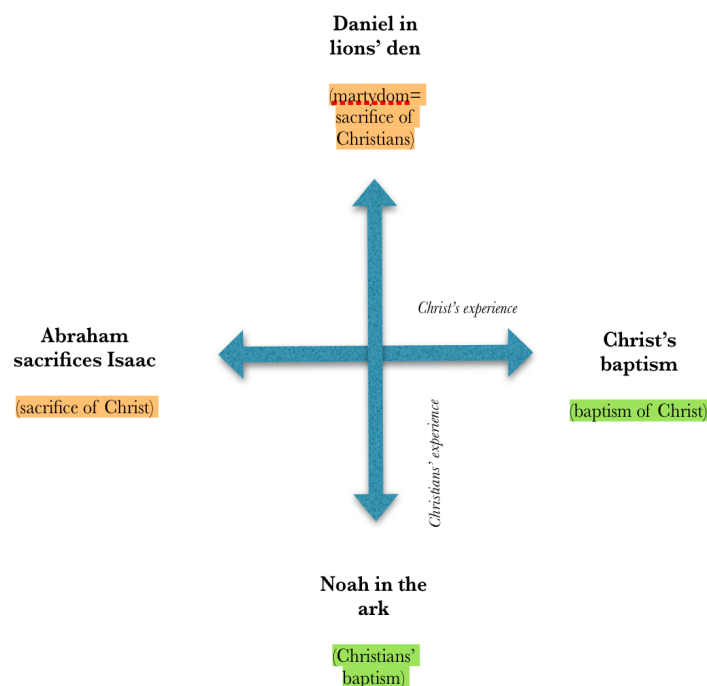
⁴¹ About the figure of the good shepherd see *supra*, chapter 2, n. 102.

⁴² The fresco is in part badly conserved, but the interpretative hypothesis of J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 231, shared by NR p. 52, seems to be fully convincing.

⁴³ As G. PELIZZARI 2013, p. 171, notices, the type principally alludes to the sacrificial *Pascha* of Christ. About the scene see also B. MAZZEI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 92-95.

it⁴⁴: the extreme phases of Jesus' earthly parable are in this way put in reciprocal connection, as to summarize and seal his experience.

The themes historiated above and below the central image seem to articulate a passage, so to speak, "from Christ to Christians": on one side, the distinctive sacrificial character of Abraham scene is fully reprised by the figure of Daniel, but if the former develops the reference to *passio* in a Christological perspective, the latter associates it to the entire "martyrial" community; on the other side, in the same way, the *tertium comparationis* between the type of Christ's baptism and that one of Noah is clearly represented by the allusion to the first Christian rite, but once again the former describes the specific experience of Jesus, while the latter extends that coordinate to the entire group of believers. In other words, it seems possible to affirm that the "horizontal" section focuses on two passages of Jesus' life, which are *Pascha-passio* and baptism, while the "vertical" section associates the same themes to Christians' experience. Coherently, as to sum up the entire figurative program, the central type of the good shepherd evokes the perfect connection between communities and their guide.



(Tab. 3)

⁴⁴ The interpretation of the figure is not univocal and oscillates, as underlined J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 231, between a generic baptismal representation and an image of resurrection (according to R. BOSIO the scene would represent Lazarus' miracle). The elements showed by the preserved parts of the fresco do not allow to formulate a palmar interpretation, but the most plausible hypothesis actually seems to be that one of J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 231, and by NR p. 52, so that in this context the scene will be assumed as a baptismal type.

In the context of this iconographic program, the image of Daniel in the lions' den dialogues with that one of Noah in the ark. In a generic perspective, martyrdom is once again associated with a figure alluding to salvation from which it derives an eschatological value; in a more specific acceptance, the reading of the whole visual project demands to further interpret such combination as an allusion to the strong link between martyrdom and baptism⁴⁵, two of the principal coordinates characterizing the life of Christian communities⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ The connection between the figure of Daniel and that one of Noah does not represent a peculiar outcome of this specific program, nor a prerogative of catacomb frescoes, being on the contrary well attested also in sarcophagi production and in the narrow category of African plates described by J. SALOMONSON 1979. Here the prophet is in some cases represented as emerging from a *cantharus* or from an ark (see for instance, *supra*, chapter 2, *fig.* 7): such development can be considered, according to the scholar, as a “combinaison intentionnelle” (p. 73), possibly deriving from the continuity between baptism and martyrdom.

⁴⁶ On the four corners of the vault, NR p. 52, recognizes the image of gazelles, whose baptismal meaning has already been mentioned, see chapter 4, n. 36. On the entrance wall it is possible to find the representation of *fossore*s (about these subjects see M. MINASI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 182-184). For the image historiated on the entrance wall see J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 59:1.

4.2.3. Daniel and salvation: the cubicle of Susanna

The analysis of the two vaults so far exposed allows to face with a more stable equipment the study of a much more complex iconographic program articulated on different levels, which seems to summarize, clarify and certainly enrich with new elements the outline of Daniel in lions' den circulation in catacombs.

The program of the cubicle XIII⁴⁷, the so-called “cubicolo di Susanna presso il cubicolo dei quattro coronati”⁴⁸, presents a rich theological manifest describing the progressive passage from martyrdom to salvation, sensibly exploiting – apart from the iconographic techniques assumed also in sarcophagi production to combine the scenes – also the architectural structure of the area to convey the idea of a progressive “ascent” that also corresponds with a theological *climax*.

The figurative system of the cubicle can be first of all divided into three macro areas, coinciding with three different “levels” of the iconographic (and theological) development⁴⁹:

- 1) the arch (inferior level);
- 2) the vault (middle level);
- 3) the skylight (superior level).

⁴⁷ The image of Daniel corresponds with NR 51, p. 57 (see also J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 232:1 for a picture). The representations of single parts of the cubicle are offered by J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987: for the vault see *farbtaf.* 29; for the scene of Lazarus in the skylight see *farbtaf.* 30/a; for the arch and the lunette see *farbtaf.* 30/b, 31a/b; 32a/b; 33a/b. The most interesting figures among them will be progressively showed. The description of the entire cubicle can be found in J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987 RCLAU 51, pp. 281-284, with detailed illustrations of paintings and a rich bibliography (p. 284); for a complete iconographic scheme of the area see IBID. RC Lau 51. The chronological placement of the cubicle oscillates from the half of 3rd century to 4th (see J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 284, “Datierung”).

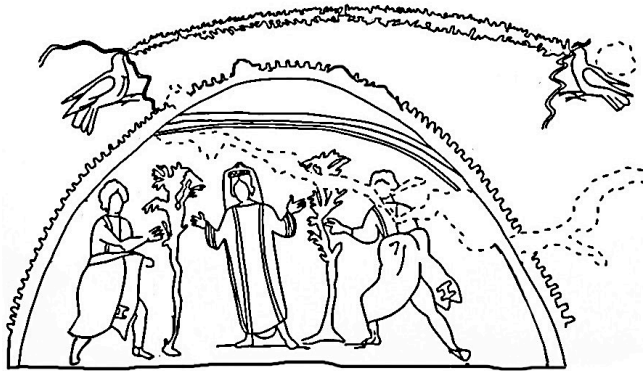
⁴⁸ J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 281.

⁴⁹ See *infra*, *fig.* 6.

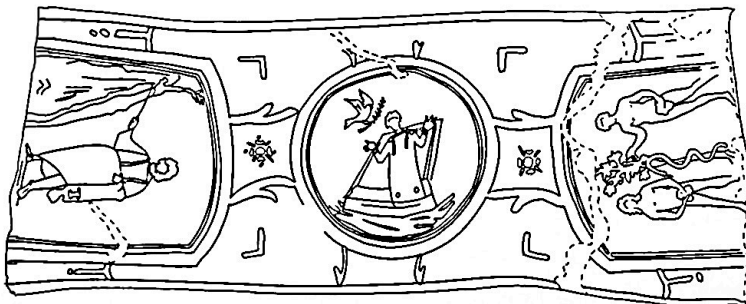


The skylight
(superior level)

The vault
(middle level)



The arch
(inferior level)



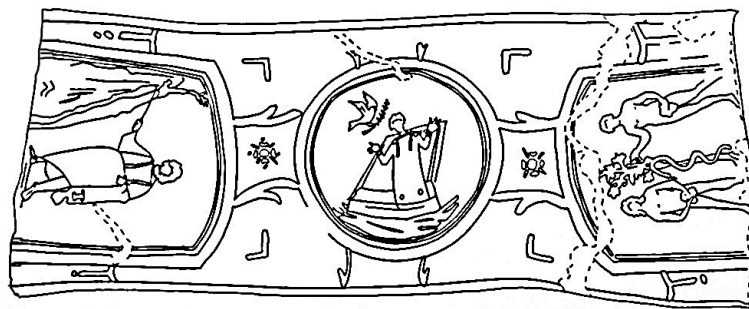
(Fig. 6)

a) *The arch (inferior level): the “baptismal” scene of Noah*

THE ARCH (fig. 7)



UNDER THE ARCH (fig. 8)



The lunette of the arch is entirely occupied by the fresco of Susanna between the elders, another scene extracted from *Dn* “tales” and signally from chapter 13. Considering the specificities of the theme, which will be investigated in a further section of the present work⁵⁰, the exegetical core of the “inferior level” of the cubicle seems to be represented by a reference to martyrdom; as it will be exposed, the condition of the woman between the evil *seniores* may represent a reference to the paradoxical condition of the early communities, harassed in their historical dimension and destined to obtain a corresponding reward⁵¹.

⁵⁰ About the typical features, the different modalities and the problems concerning the definition of the type of Susanna see *infra*, chapter 6, pp. 318-334; in this context the identification of the scene and its distinction from that one of the orant between apostles do not present any difficulty since at least two elements are convincing in this direction: the presence of the trees, evoking the biblical “garden” in which the woman was menaced by the elders, and the attitude of the same *seniores*, that seem to be approaching Susanna instead of just staying next to her. This image of Susanna is cited by P. PRIGENT 1995, p. 192.

⁵¹ It will be possible to describe, in a dedicated chapter, the reasons underling the assumption of such interpretation of the type, see *infra*, chapter 6, pp. 318-334.

The specific acceptance in which the type of Susanna – symbol of those who sacrifice themselves for faith and of the “persecuted church” – should be here assumed, is explained through the visual program exposed under the arch, consisting in three figures:

- *left area*: Peter striking the rock;
- *right area*: Adam and Eve;
- *central area, overlooking Susanna*: Noah in the ark.



(Fig. 9)

The *tertium comparationis* between the subjects – which means the “semantic focal-point” of the program – seems to be represented by baptism. If the apostle striking the rock clearly alludes to the first rite in Christian formation⁵², its connection with the specular scene of the protoplasts may describe the passage of humanity *from first to new economy*: the access to the flock of believers, disclosed by the assumption of baptism, corresponds here with the emancipation from a sinful state symbolized by Adam and Eve, placed at both sides of the biblical tree. Such interpretation may be supported by the fact that the specific composition of the type of the protoplasts exactly illustrates the moment which follows the original sin⁵³.

⁵² About the meaning of the scene of Peter striking the rock see A.M. NIEDDU, in F. BISCONTI (ed.) 2000, pp. 218. An efficacious reflection about the types of the apostle is exposed by G. PELIZZARI, in R.E. GUGLIEMMETTI (ed.) 2011, pp. 37-80.

⁵³ About this specific representation of Adam and Eve see D. CALCAGNINI-C. CARLETTI, *Note su alcune raffigurazioni dei protoparenti a Roma*, in C. CASALE MARCHESELLI (cur.), *Parola e Spirito. Studi in onore di Settimio Cipriani*, I, Brescia 1982, pp. 741-762. The study delineates the principal coordinates about the different

Both the reference to baptism conveyed by Peter and the exegetical allusion to its effects, expressed by the theme of the protoplasts, find a full expression and a synthesis in the central representation of the type of Noah, another subject extracted from *Gn.*: as already mentioned⁵⁴, the figure of the patriarch of the deluge, which can be considered as a reference to final salvation, is also endowed with a baptismal value.



(Fig. 10)⁵⁵

If, in a generic sense, the eschatological tension – enshrined in the detail of the dove – represents the principal meaning of this figure⁵⁶, in this specific case the “baptismal character” of Noah deserves to be stressed in a particular way, in the light of the entire program of the area: both the reiteration of the element of water in the scene of Peter and the exegetical link formed by the apostle’s scene and the protoplasts, activate and enlighten this acceptance of the type of the patriarch, whose salvific relevance can be assumed as a punctual consequence of the Christian rite.

representations of the theme, with an essential bibliography (p. 741, n. 1). The scene of Pietro and Marcellino is mentioned and described as “la prima raffigurazione pittorica, nella quale Adamo è colto nell’atto di accusare la compagna” (p. 749), a scene that returns “nell’ipogeo di Dino Compagni, ove, più chiaramente, la progenitrice si difende dall’accusa. Infatti, mentre nel primo dipinto, Eva mostra meraviglia per quanto sta accadendo con l’espressione del volto (si copre con la foglia sorretta da ambedue le mani), nel secondo la progenitrice atteggia il braccio destro come per difendersi” (pp. 749-750). According to the scholar, “gli autori di queste raffigurazioni hanno voluto mettere in evidenza due momenti che nel racconto biblico si succedono l’uno all’altro: la trasgressione commessa [*Gn* 3:7] e Adamo, che...cerca di giustificarsi [*Gn* 3:12]”. The type of Adam and Eve knows other representative modalities, that focus on different moments of the biblical story such as the creation, the attribution of the symbols of work and the expulsion from Eden (D. CALCAGNINI-C. CARLETTI 1982, p. 741). About the structure and the feature of this scene see also H. LECLERCQ, s.v. “Adam et Eve”, in *DACL* 1, coll. 509-519; D. CALCAGNINI IN F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 96-101.

⁵⁴ See *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 138-142.

⁵⁵ The image is from J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 186:2.

⁵⁶ See *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 138-142.

Moreover, it must be noticed that the figure of Noah, which already demonstrated to keep up significant and frequent relations with both the type of the Hebrews and that one of the prophet in the den⁵⁷, is in this occasion linked with another theme derived from *Dn*, that one of Susanna.

If the connection with the furnace principally highlights the “apocalyptic potential” of the scene drawn from *Gn* and the association with Daniel underlines its salvific role, the relation with Susanna may rather stress the value of Noah as a symbol of the “martyrial experience” of the entire community: in this sense, the ark can be interpreted as a reference to the final salvation predisposed for the whole church since baptism⁵⁸. In other words, in the “inferior level” of the iconographic program, the persecuted church typologically anticipated by Susanna would become the protagonist of that process of emancipation from sin activated by the baptismal option, which represents at the same time both the instrument and the guarantee of salvation.

The program seems to support, in this sense, the interpretation of Noah already emerged from the analysis of the cubicle III⁵⁹: the meaning of the patriarch’s type should be understood in the light of baptism and martyrdom, but if in that context those coordinates were respectively evoked by the images of Christ’s baptism and that one of Daniel in lions’ den, here the scenes involved are those of Peter striking the rock and Susanna between the elders⁶⁰. Such parallelism does not anyway have to nullify the significant differences between the programs: as already described, in the case of cubicle III the presence of Jesus and Daniel activated a reflection about the meaning of the eschatological salvation, while in this case the figures of Peter and Susanna stress the reference to the collective path of early believers who belong to Christ’s church.

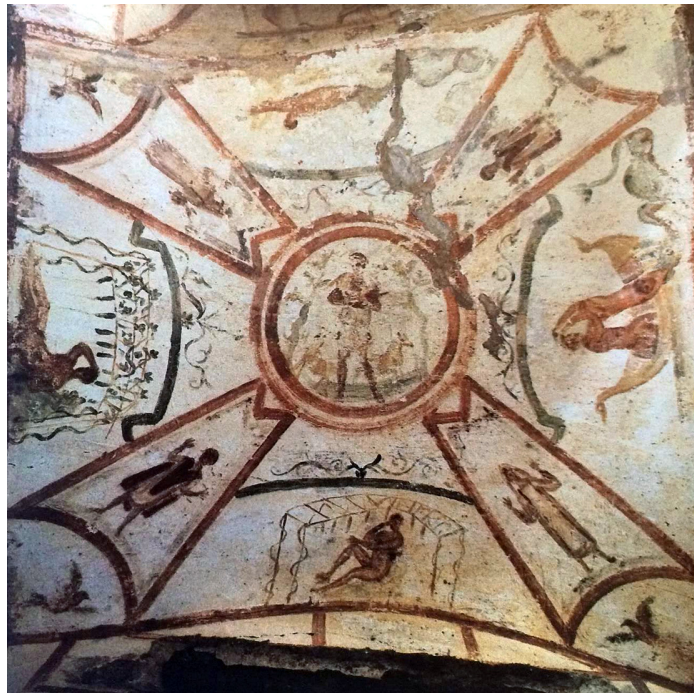
⁵⁷ See *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 138-142 and chapter 3, *tab.* 3.

⁵⁸ See *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 138-142.

⁵⁹ See *supra*, pp. 167-169.

⁶⁰ As it will be further underlined (see *infra*, in part. pp. 181-183) about the cubicle XIII, both themes will know a further reprise and development in other sections of the iconographic program.

b) *The vault (intermediate level): the “second pergola”*



(Fig. 11)

The “intermediate level” of the iconographic program is represented by the vault, whose central area is entirely devoted to the figure of the good shepherd. Also in this case, the figurative keystone of the project consists in a symbol of the Christian community, here represented as the flock of believers and their guide: the martyrial church evoked by Susanna and saved by baptism, seems to be “physically transferred” and lifted, so to speak, to a higher level, where it can finally become in all respects *Christi greges*.

Around this central group, the same identity and experience of the “shepherd” is revealed and symbolically described through the representation of a cycle of Jonah in four phases. The interpretation of the most common scenes of the cycle does not present any specific problem: the sequence goes from the ejection of the prophet from the ship (symbol of Christ’s death), to its emersion from the sea-monster jaws (symbol of resurrection) and its rest under the pergola (symbol of eschatological rest)⁶¹.

⁶¹ About the cycle see in part. *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 27-29.

The fourth image, just opposite the *ketos'* one, is generally interpreted as the rare – and probably more recent compared with the others – scene of the “sad Jonah”⁶². Trying to define the meaning of this type, P. PRIGENT hypothesizes that it had been added to the cycle, originally composed of the three other scenes; in this way, the ancient figurative sequence obtained a more faithful to the bible conclusion⁶³.

Such interpretative option does not actually seem satisfying, mainly in the light of the same working of the visual source, which often manipulates the texts it assumes, even in a substantial way⁶⁴. Though it would be impossible to conduct in this context an accurate and general inspection on such controversial “fourth figure” of Jonah cycle, it seems anyway appropriate to attract the attention on two possible interpretative coordinates of the specific figure historiated in Pietro and Marcellino fresco, trying to consider the immediate perception that the image must have raised in the audience’s perception:

- on one side, it is possible to notice that the addition of a “fourth scene” allows in this specific case to swell the symbolic exposition of Christ’s experience in the entire vault. It cannot be excluded, in other words, that the introduction of such rare figure was in some measure functional to generically stress the centrality of *Pascha* and to enlarge its figurative extension. Its use should not actually be explained as an attempt to pursue a spatial “symmetry”⁶⁵, but more seemingly as an attempt to attract the audience’s attention on the core of the Christian message, that is indeed *Pascha*.

⁶² The vault and the skylight of the catacomb are cited in P. PRIGENT 1995, pp. 160-161, in a description of the biblical theme of Jonah and as an example of the cycle represented in four scenes, including the rare type of “Jonas triste”, described as “le prophète est sous sa tonnelle, assis dans une attitude de réflexion ou de tristesse”. See also J. SPEIGL, *Das Bildprogramm des Jonasmotivs in den Malereien der römischen Katakomben*, “Römischen Quartalschrift” 73 (1978), pp. 1-15.

⁶³ P. PRIGENT 1995, pp. 161-162: “Il n’y a vraiment rien qui puisse expliquer la scène du repos. Et c’est bien cela qui amène l’addition d’une quatrième scène plus fidèle à la conclusion du livre prophétique: Jonas assis, se voit reprocher son irritation par Dieu qui veut lui faire entendre qu’il n’y a pas de commune mesure entre la miséricorde faite aux hommes et la colère soulevée par un inconfort passager...La quatrième scène témoigne d’une volonté secondaire et délibérée de conclure l’histoire conformément à la Bible”.

⁶⁴ A clamorous case of this kind, here cursorily cited as a paradigmatic example, is represented by the type of the resurrection of the dry bones, extracted from *Ez 37*: in figurative production the scriptural miracle is performed by the same Christ, who assumes the role of the biblical *Logos* (see for instance Capua sarcophagus, REP 2:11). Such example reveals the methodological weakness of any explanations of iconographic peculiarities as possible attempts to preserve the narrative fidelity to the biblical text, which is, on the contrary, constantly exposed to an exegetical and interpretative activity.

⁶⁵ This is the explanation offered by E. FERGUSON in A.C. NIANG-C. OSIEK (edd.) 2012, p. 344, who speaks about another representation of Pietro and Marcellino catacomb, in which the cycle of Jonah presents a “fourth scene” created, according to the scholar, “for the sake of symmetry”.

- In a more specific sense, such “expansion” of Jonah cycle seems to highlight and potentiate a peculiar element of the sequence, that is the scene of the rest, with which it shares the same iconographic structure: in both cases, a naked figure is actually lying under a pergola. Two differences can be spotted between the scenes of Susanna cubicle: 1) in the traditional representation of the rest, the prophet is placed on the ground, while in the “fourth scene” he is reclined on a rock; 2) in the former, the pergola is in bloom and garnished with vine (apparently ivy), while in the latter only *cucurbitae* hang on a bare pergola⁶⁶.

It seems reasonable to hypothesize that the pergolas substantially reproduce a “double rest”, and, if it would certainly be out of proportions to wonder whether the representations adumbrate a reference to a peculiar theological option, it remains at least possible to underline the centrality assumed by the themes of salvation and reign in this figurative program. Since the scenes follow here a chronological order – from Jonah thrown overboard to the prophet spitted out from the sea monster (which means from death to resurrection) – the first pergola may reasonably evoke the widespread and “traditional” reference to God’s kingdom, specifically alluding to the final landing place of Jonah/Christ’s destiny. It does not seem too hazardous to wonder whether the second bare pergola ought to be interpreted as the expression of a theological *datum* which is traditionally assumed as an implicit consequence of Christ’s rest: namely the fact that such rest is not a specific prerogative of Jesus, but implies a corresponding salvation for those who followed him.

In other words, the “fourth scene”, apart from representing a sort of “expansion” of the whole cycle that stresses the theme of God’s kingdom access, may specifically allude to the inclusion of the believers’ flock in the eschatological salvation disclosed by their guide⁶⁷. The hypothesis, which is here suggested in terms of a simple interpretative proposal, matches the presence of both the central image of *Christi grex* and the representations of orants with doves spacing out the single phases of Jonah cycle.

Summarizing what has been so far exposed, the “intermediate” level of this iconographic project can be assumed as a typological portrayal of Christ’s *Pascha*, particularly focused on its development in the eschatological rest, conceived as the conclusion of both Christ’s experience and

⁶⁶ The detail seems to be even more interesting since it does not represent a constant feature of this representation: in a fresco of the so-called “cubicolo della Madonna con i due magi” (still in Pietro and Marcellino catacomb), no difference can be spotted between the two pergolas coexisting in Jonah cycle; see J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, nr. 69, pp. 324-329; *tab.* 49a, A. GRABAR, *Christian Iconography: a Study of its Origins*, Princeton 1968 (The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts. Bollingen Series 35/10), *tab.* 2; J. SPIER (ed.), *Picturing the Bible: the Earliest Christian Art*, New Haven 2007, *tab.* 10c.

⁶⁷ The interpretative proposal will be further articulated *infra*, pp. 184-186.

the believers' one. The common destiny of Christians and their Lord would be synthesized by the central image of the vault: if the good shepherd represents an essential allusion to Christ, the flock recalls the fundamental role of the community members, who are as much ready to be assumed in the eschatological reign. In other words, it seems possible to affirm that the indissoluble unity of Jesus and his church is the real protagonist of the intermediate plan of the program.

c) *The skylight (superior level): Lazarus and the "saved-Daniel"*



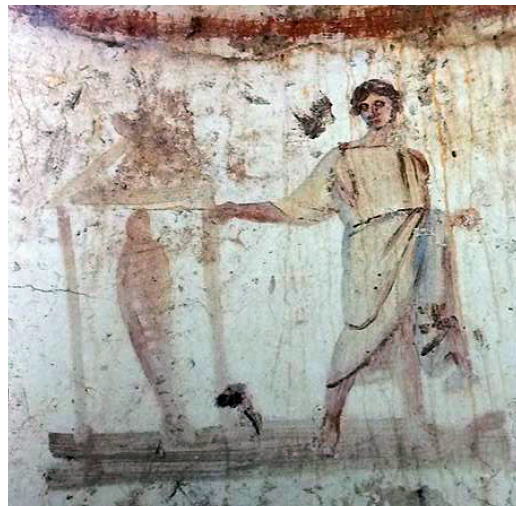
(Fig. 12)

The “third level” of the cubicle, corresponding with the skylight, is devoted to two isolated scenes: the resurrection of Lazarus and Daniel in lions’ den. The relation between the figures may be immediately interpreted as a reference to the link between resurrection⁶⁸ – recalled by the miracle scene – and martyrdom – alluded by the prophet. The disposition of the images stimulates a deeper reflection: placed in the very acme of the entire cubicle, the theme of Daniel plays the role of “figurative peak” of the whole iconographic program, so that martyrdom does not seem to be here conceived as the “grounding” and the “fundament” of the resurrection symbolized by Lazarus, but, on the contrary, as a consequence of it.

⁶⁸ About the meaning of the figure of Lazarus see *infra*, n. 69.

In order to better decipher such interesting conception, it is necessary to formulate some preliminary considerations about the figure of Lazarus, whose value and use do not actually imply any particular interpretative problem, but rather relevant specificities⁶⁹.

The deep and specific meaning of the type of the miracle narrated in *Jn*, which certainly alludes to the divine power overtaking death⁷⁰, can be fully grasped through a more conscious exegetical reflection. On one side, in quality of last sign described in the Gospel, it represents a “passaggio funzionale e strettamente correlato alla Pasqua di Cristo”⁷¹: it means that, apart from “illustrating” the resurrection of Lazarus, the theme evokes also the imminent resurrection of Christ himself who operated the miracle. On the other, the subject should not be eminently nor principally connected with the single experiences of either Jesus or Lazarus, but it should be rather conceived as an implicit reference to the wide inclusion of believers in the eschatological salvation.



(Fig. 13)

⁶⁹ The theme of Lazarus represents a good attested and precocious figure of paleochristian iconography directly extracted from the narration of *Jn* 11:1-44. For generic coordinates about the scene see E.C. COLWELL, *The Fourth Gospel and Early Christian Art*, “The Journal of Religion” 15 (1935), pp. 199-206; H. LECLERCQ, s.v. “Lazare”, in DACL 8, coll. 2010- 2011; E. MÂLE, *La résurrection de Lazare dans l’art*, “Revue des Arts” 1 (1951), pp. 44-52; D. MARKOW, *Some Born-Again Christians on the Fourth Century*, “The Art Bulletin” 63 (1981), pp. 650-655; J.S. PARTYKA, *La résurrection de Lazare dans les monuments funéraires des nécropoles chrétiennes à Rome (peintures, mosaïques et décors des épitaphes) : études archéologique, iconographique et iconologique*, Varsovie 1993 (Travaux du Centre d’Archéologie Méditerranéenne de l’Académie Polonaise de Sciences 33); F. TRISTAN 1996, pp. 195-200; M. GUJ in F. BISCONTI (ed.) 2000, pp. 201-203.

⁷⁰ As M. GUJ in F. BISCONTI (ed.) 2000, pp. 201-203 underlines, the core of this figure interpretation in paleochristian literature is exactly represented by “la peculiarità del miracolo, segno della potenza divina che vince la morte” (about the literary reception of the theme see E. DASSMANN 1973, pp. 283-289). As it will be showed, iconography seems to propose a more specific definition of this meaning.

⁷¹ G. PELIZZARI 2011, p. 53. Lazarus’ sign represents, according to R.E. BROWN 1979, p. 556, “la causa diretta della morte di Gesù”, unavoidably becoming, among the different miracles of resurrection, that one which entails the strongest relation with Christ’s Easter.

In other words, the scene would symbolize the guarantee of resurrection predisposed for the entire community and derived from the miracle introducing and preparing Christ's Easter. Both its collective value and its relation with the destiny of Christians efficaciously surface from the cases in which the portrait of the dead substitutes the traditional image of the same Lazarus⁷².

In the light of these considerations, it becomes easy to understand the theological background of a peculiar use of this type, which is often associated to the scene of Peter striking the rock, the clearest symbol of baptism in a collective perspective⁷³. The systematic link between Lazarus and the apostle, particularly attested in sarcophagi production⁷⁴ but recurring also in the "inferior level" of Susanna cubicle⁷⁵, allows to hypothesize that the scene extracted from *Jn*, evoking the victory

⁷² It happens in the case of the so-called sarcophagus of Sabino's wife, REP 1:6 (see also J. WILPERT 1929, *fig.* 139:3), where a female figure substitutes the image of Lazarus:



(Fig. 14)

⁷³ About the meaning of the figure of Peter striking the rock see *supra*, n. 52. See also *supra*, chapter 3, n. 157.

⁷⁴ Preferably placed at the extremities of documents with a single register of images, the scenes of "Peter's rock" and Lazarus respectively seem to be conceived as the beginning and the end of Christians' path, which goes from baptism to resurrection. Remaining within the panorama of sarcophagi, where the figurative couple is mainly attested, the most interesting documents, from the beginning of documentation to the constantinian period, seem to be the following ones (in chronological order): REP 1:636, 241, 951, 6, 625, 15, 11, 770, 771, 39, 772; 3:36; 2:12. Concerning catacomb paintings, J.S. PARTYKA 1993, pp. 70-76 underlines the special link between the figure of Lazarus and baptismal images, in particular the *miraculum fontis*, see in part. *tab.* pp. 71-74 for numeric data. Examples of the connection between Peter and Lazarus in catacomb frescoes also come from Pietro and Marcellino area: the themes return in a specular link on the vault of Nicerus' cubicle (see *infra*, in part. p. 193); they are directly connected with a representation of Daniel in the lions' den on the front of the arch classified as NR 79, p. 64, (see A. FERRUA, *Una nuova regione della catacomba dei ss. Pietro e Marcellino*, "Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana" 44 [1968], pp. 29-78, in part. 74). It should be necessary to further reflect about the frequent introduction, in the scene of Lazarus, of a kneeling female figure of difficult interpretation and traditionally connected with Maria or Marta (J.S. PARTYKA 1993, pp. 58-59); it cannot be excluded that the subject alludes to the bleeding woman healed by Christ (*Mk* 5:21-43; *Mt* 9:18-26; *Lk* 8:40-56). If this interpretative option – that cannot be discussed here – was valid, it would be plausible to hypothesize that Lazarus type further evokes the inclusion of every believer in the panorama of salvation, with no discriminations depending on the prescriptions of purity and impurity of *Lev*, which would appear to be in this way immediately overtaken through baptism.

⁷⁵ See *supra*, in part. p. 172.

against death, was perceived as strictly connected with the rite of baptism, representing the first and preliminary step in the path that brings believers toward salvation⁷⁶.

Coming back to the skylight of cubicle XIII, it seems possible to affirm that such “baptismal” character of Lazarus scene offers interesting elements to explain its position “under” Daniel type: the salvation of the entire community would not be exclusively conceived as the final outcome predisposed for Christians, but it would be rather interpreted as a condition “intrinsically” inscribed, since the beginning, in the same baptismal choice. In this sense, it “grounds” and “precedes” the same martyrdom.

Such interpretative hypothesis requires to be more profoundly analysed in the light of a detail characterizing the image of the prophet with lions: Daniel is actually emerging from a sort of ark-casket that immediately reminds of Noah’s distinctive attribute⁷⁷.

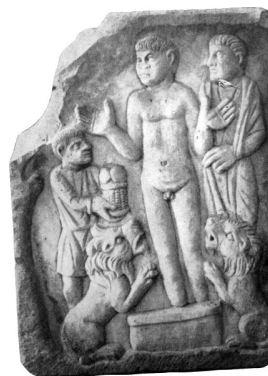


(Fig. 15)⁷⁸

⁷⁶ J.S. PARTYKA 1993, p. 76: “la representación del *miraculum fontis* liée avec la scene de la resurrection de Lazare peut être en quelque relation avec le baptême ou bien elle figure la promesse de la resurrection future pour la vie éternelle, dont le sacrement du baptême constitue le gage inaliénable”.

⁷⁷ The meaning of this attribute of Noah has already been analysed *supra*, chapter 2, n. 98.

⁷⁸ The image is from J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 232:1. A good parallel for this representation seems to be the Spanish fragment described by G. BOVINI 1954, nr. 11.



(Fig. 16)

Such element, far from representing a silent peculiarity, consistently enlarges the semantic *spectrum* of the type, which may be involved in a sort of *crisis* with the figure of the patriarch of the deluge⁷⁹. In other words, through such figurative addition, Daniel stops representing a generic allusion to martyrdom and intersects two further acceptations strictly connected with the scene derived from *Gn*: a salvific meaning and a baptismal value.

Placed in the ark-casket, the martyr seems to be first of all represented as “already saved” and “already participating” to that eschatological dimension to which Christian martyrdom brings in the same moment in which it happens⁸⁰. In a more specific sense, also the collocation *above* the scene of the miracle, at the top of the whole figurative program, contributes in connoting the martyr as the privileged addressee of the powerful, divine action involving, apart from Christ himself and Lazarus, the entire *consortium* of believers. Moreover, through the detail of the ark, the prophet seems to obtain a further “baptismal value”, not just because the scene of Noah generically evokes such meaning, but mainly considering the importance assumed by this theme in the specific context of the cubicle: as has been showed, the baptismal coordinate, which is a principal theme of the arch section⁸¹, is indeed also strictly – though implicitly – connected with the same image of Lazarus.

Conclusively, the efficacious image of Daniel, placed at the top of the entire program, gathers, summarizes and potentiates all the elements cited in the whole area, strongly remarking the indissoluble link between water and blood baptism as instruments of the eschatological salvation in protochristian life⁸².

⁷⁹ The use of the ark to connect the figure of Noah with that one of Daniel does not actually represent a semantic *unicum*: a parallel can be identified in the already examined case of Velletri sarcophagus, see *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 55-57.

⁸⁰ Such conception clearly emerges from the entire martyrial literature, where the *dies natalis* of the victims coincides with the day of their martyrdom (see generically R. CACITTI 1994).

⁸¹ See *supra*, pp. 172-175.

⁸² See also *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 142-143, where the theme has been also connected with *Passio Perpetua*.

d) *From the single sections to the whole program*

Summarizing and integrating the exegetical elements emerged from the analysis of the three iconographic “levels”, it becomes possible to propose a full reading of the cubicle XIII of Pietro and Marcellino catacomb.

Combining the figure of Susanna with a synthetic but clear development in the area of the arch, the inferior section seems to introduce a reflection about the role of baptism in the passage from First Testament to the economy inaugurated by Christ. In the elaboration of this preliminary portrait of the believers, the martyrial perspective already plays an important role, being evoked by the figure of a woman that symbolically expresses the “paradoxical” essence of Christian life, in which the earthly persecution becomes a guarantee of the eternal salvation⁸³.

This portion of the cubicle already informs about the centrality of the community in the balance of the iconographic program, since most of the figures included in this area imply a punctual reference to the *consortium* of Christians: this consideration does not just count for the already mentioned representation of Susanna exposed to the cruel elders, whose “collective value” will be investigated and pointed out in the successive chapter⁸⁴, but also for the themes of Peter – the apostle guide of the community⁸⁵ – Noah – whose ark can be interpreted as a symbol of the church⁸⁶ – and the protoplasts – alluding to the condition of the entire humanity before Christ’s arrival⁸⁷.

The “intermediate level” of the program preserves and gives further sense to the description of the path of community toward salvation, enriching the figurative panorama with Christological subjects: it is not a case that the centre of the vault is devoted to the image of the good shepherd with the flock, symbolizing *par excellence* the group of believers with their guide. This representation of Jesus unavoidably routes the theological reflection toward the theme of *Pascha*, typologically reproduced through a complete cycle of Jonah in four scenes. The sequence seems to remark with special intensity the “salvific landing place” represented by the rest, through the iconographic duplication of Jonah’s pergola. Though the protagonist of the section is undoubtedly Christ, it must

⁸³ See *infra*, chapter 6, pp. 318-334.

⁸⁴ See *infra*, chapter 6, pp. 318-334.

⁸⁵ See *supra*, chapter 3, n. 157.

⁸⁶ See *supra*, chapter 3, n. 155.

⁸⁷ See *supra*, chapter 4, n. 53.

be noticed that the church – explicitly represented through the “choir” of orants, symbolized by the flock and possibly recalled through the scene of the “second pergola” – is constantly mentioned in quality of real object of the salvation disclosed by him. As has been noticed, the unity of Jesus and his followers is the real main topic of the area.

In the vertical evolution “from the arch to the vault”, the iconographic program seems to describe the passage from the preliminary formation of the community, made possible through baptism, to the more mature definition of such group as *Christi grex*. Especially in the case of a “martyrial church” – such as the one evoked since the beginning by Susanna – the proximity with Christ, guide of his flock, mainly implies the participation of the choir of believers to the heart of the *kerygma*, that is *Pascha*. The conclusion of this path consists in the eschatological access to kingdom and rest.

The “third level” of the program, corresponding with the “highest” area of the skylight, seems to summarize and bring to further consequences all the theological arguments introduced and developed in the previous sections. Here, the image of Lazarus, an allusion to Christ’s and Christians’ resurrection, “sustains” the figure of Daniel in lions’ den emerging from an ark-casket. The “saved-martyr” is conceived as the principal and eminent depository of that final salvific reward which is already disclosed by baptism and finds its real meaning in the believers’ participation to Christ’s experience. Placed at the top of the entire program, the type extracted from *Dn* “tales” seems to be assumed as the symbol of a theological conception that interprets martyrdom as the result of a constant tension between the preliminary, baptismal salvation and the final, eschatological dimension.

The eschatological value of the frescoes is apparently reinforced by the presence of birds, disseminated in the whole iconographic project not just to perform a decorative function but mainly in quality of images of the saved souls⁸⁸. At the same time, the possible eschatological reading of the skylight strengthens the interpretative option proposed for the fourth, problematic scene of Jonah cycle: as in the third level of the program the saved-martyr (Daniel) is linked with a type alluding to Christ’s resurrection (Lazarus), also in the intermediate section, the “traditional” image of Jonah under the pergola, evoking the rest in a Christological perspective, is combined with a “second pergola”, that may be interpreted as a reference to Christians’ access to such rest.

⁸⁸ About the symbolic value of doves and birds see *supra*, chapter 2, n. 93.

In other words, it cannot be excluded that the pergola with ivy assumes in the vault the same “preliminary and preparatory” function displayed by the scene of Lazarus in the skylight: that one to bring believers, together with Christ, toward eschatology⁸⁹.

⁸⁹ Nor can be excluded a connection between the figure of Daniel in the skylight and the naked subject sitting on the rock under the *cucurbitae*, as to establish a direct link between the martyrs and the saved ones. The association between the prophet and a cycle with the so-called “sad Jonah” would not after all represent a specificity of this cubicle of Pietro and Marcellino catacomb, since it also returns in the case of NR 77, p. 63, always in the vault. Here the scenes of the cycle are three, since the expulsion of the prophet from the *ketos*’ jaws does not show: curiously, the image of the rest - possibly “duplicated” in the representation of the “sad prophet” - is directly connected with the symbol of death, without the mediation of the theme of resurrection. A. FERRUA, *Una nuova regione della catacomba dei ss. Pietro e Marcellino*, “Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana” 46 (1970), pp. 7-83, in part. p. 15, offers a scheme of the iconographic program of the section; Daniel is placed in front of the first scene of Jonah cycle, that one of the prophet thrown in the sea from the ship, so that Jesus’ death is associated with martyrdom, in a “Quartodeciman acceptance” (see *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 27-29); moreover, the theme occupies the area of the vault corresponding with the entrance of the cubicle, where also Noah is historiated. In this way, the eminent symbol of martyrdom maintains a special relation with *Pascha-passio* and with the baptismal-salvific theme of the patriarch. Also in this case, the allusion to community does not just emerge from the cited reference to the ark, but it seems strongly remarked by the presence of orant figures in three out of four corners of the iconographic program; the fourth area is significantly devoted to the representation of an *avis* alluding to the saved soul.

4.2.4. Daniel and the community: the cubicle of Nicerus

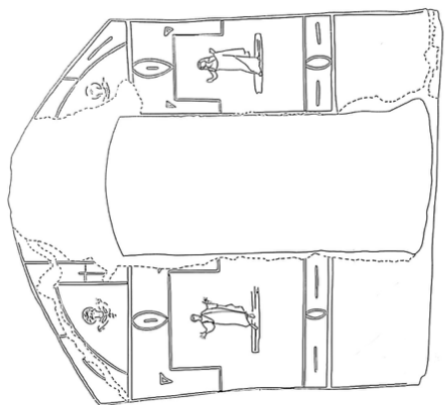
The themes and the theological outcomes developed in the articulated program of the cubicle of Susanna seem to return also in the so-called “cubicolo di Nicerus”⁹⁰, where the figure of Daniel in the lions’ den performs, once again, an eschatological function, in association with three subjects alluding to Christians’ salvation and resurrection.

If the principal characteristic of the cubicle XIII seemed to be represented by its “vertical” structure, the plan of Nicerus area principally extends in an horizontal disposition: the sections in which the program can be scanned actually consist in three walls with arches surrounding a central vault⁹¹. The entrance to the whole chamber is marked by two orant figures, a male and a female, probably evoking the entire community⁹².

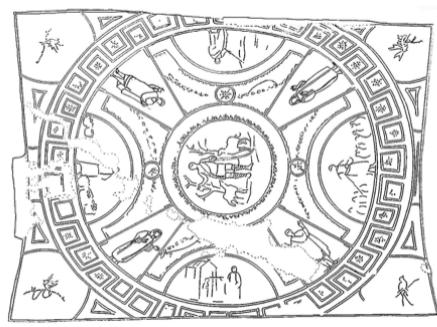
⁹⁰ J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, RCLau 65, pp. 312-318; *tab.* 44-46; *farbtaf.* 43-46; in part. the figure of Daniel is *farbtaf.* 44a. About the frescoes see also G.P. KIRSCH, *Un gruppo di cripte dipinte inedite del cimitero dei ss. Pietro e Marcellino*, “Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana” 7 (1930), pp. 203-234, in part. pp. 210-220. The “Datierung” proposed by J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 381, for the area is, generically, “mittelkonstantinisch”; also in this case scholars oscillates between 3rd and 4th century (for bibliographical references see IBID., p. 318.)

⁹¹ The scheme *infra*, see *fig.* 16, tries to show the organization of the iconographic program.

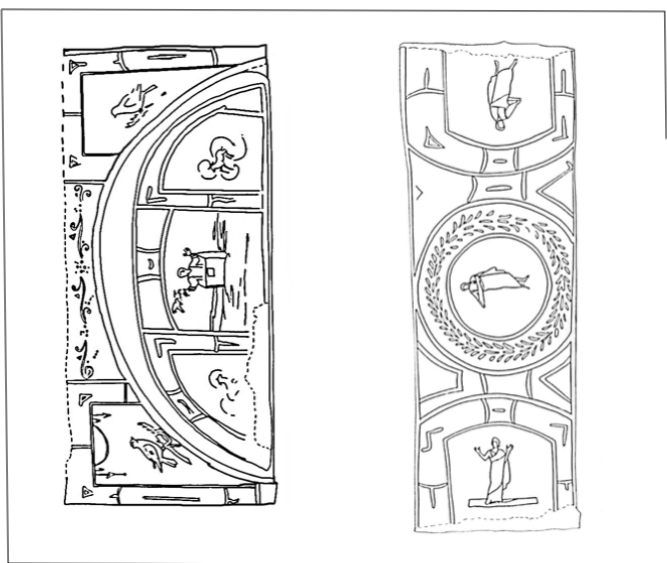
⁹² See *fig.* 17, “Entrance”.



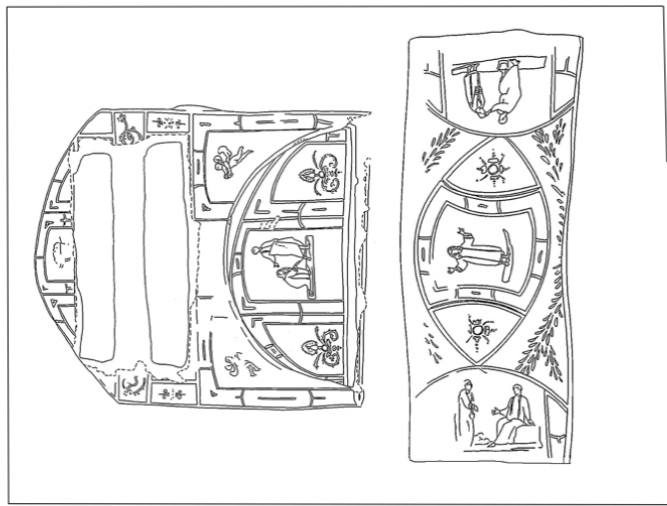
Entrance



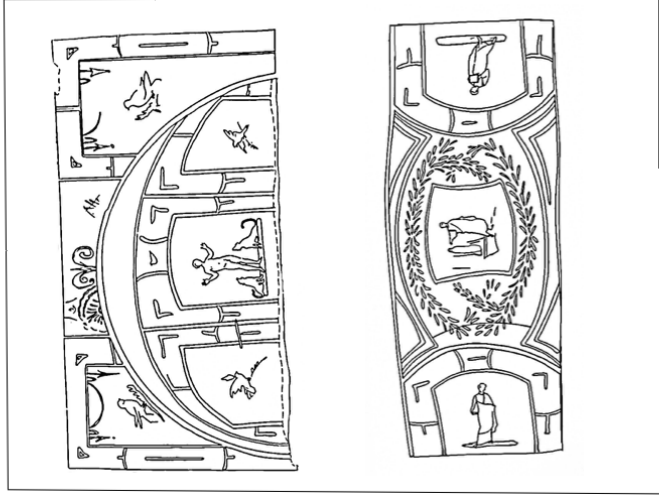
Vault



Right wall



Bottom wall

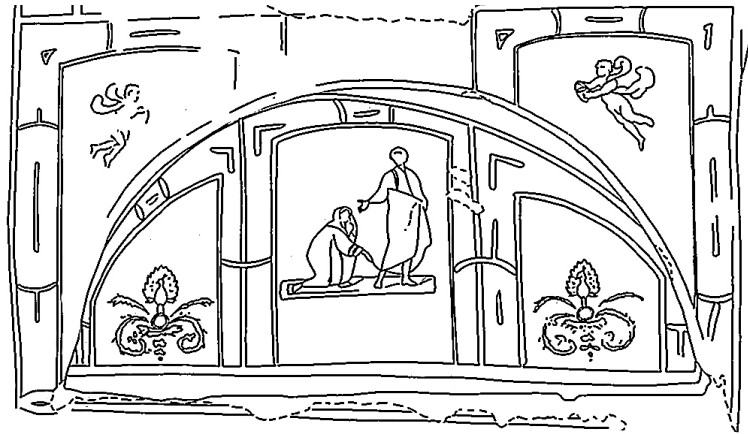


Left wall

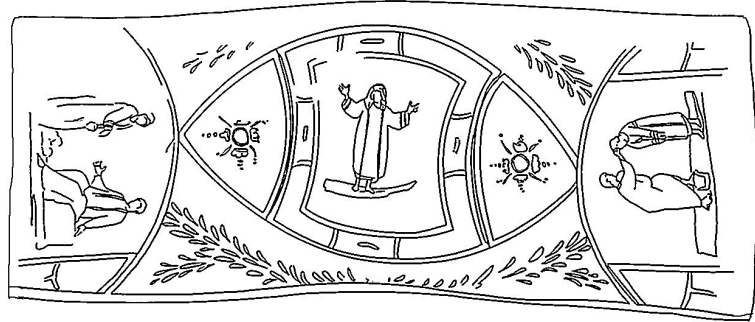
(Fig. 17)

a) *The bottom-wall*

THE ARCH (*Fig. 18*)



UNDER THE ARCH (*Fig. 19*)



In the area of the bottom wall, which is immediately visible to the believers who accede to the chamber, the lunette of the arch shows the type of Christ healing the bleeding woman. Due to its prominent position in the whole figurative plan, the image can be considered as the real focus of the section.



(*Fig. 20*)⁹³

⁹³ Detail of Christ with the bleeding woman.

The scene, which represents a woman caught in the action of touching Jesus' clothes, can be interpreted as an allusion to the strength of faith, whereby a single contact vehicles salvation; in this sense, it is possible to affirm that the real protagonist of the scene is not actually Christ, but rather the woman, who becomes herself the same symbol of the *vera fide*⁹⁴. The kneeling figure, by which Jesus accepts to be touched, may also evoke the theme of the emancipation from law and from the concept of purity and impurity characterizing New Testament economy⁹⁵.

⁹⁴ The type of the bleeding woman is derived from the narration of *Mt* 9:20-22; *Mk* 5:25-29; *Lk* 8:43-48 and is interpreted by scholars as “emblema della fede nella divinità taumaturgica del Maestro”, since the protagonist was moved by such a strong faith that she could reach salvation only by touching Christ (see M. PERRYMOND in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 171-173. About the theme see M. PERRYMOND, *Il miracolo dell'emoirissa nell'arte paleocristiana*, in F. VATTIONI [cur.], *Sangue e antropologia. Riti e culto. Atti della V Settimana di Studi*, Roma 1984, pp. 1719-1728). In addition to such interpretative option, early Christian literature receives the synoptic passages also as a symbol “del peccato annullato dal perdono...della vittoria su Satana...dell'importanza fondamentale del pentimento...della chiesa che mette a nudo le sue piaghe e chiede che vengano sanate” (M. PERRYMOND in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 172). In spite of this, since the prevailing element in iconographic context is undoubtedly the gesture of the woman, it seems reasonable to consider the strength of the faith evoked by it as the real core of the figurative reception of the scene. The same gesture represents the element that allows to distinguish this type from the miracle of the daughter of the Canaanite woman: in spite of “elementi simili che caratterizzano l'impianto figurativo delle rispettive scene”, a sensible difference seems to be represented by the fact that “la Cananea si prostra e supplica il Maestro, indipendentemente dall'azione compiuta da quest'ultimo, di salvare la figlia (*Mt* 15:21-28; *Mc* 7:24-30), mentre l'emoirissa tocca o fa l'atto di sfiorare il lembo del pallio di Cristo” (M. PERRYMOND in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 140-141. About the peculiarities of these subjects see M. PERRYMOND, *L'emoirissa e la Cananea nell'arte paleocristiana*, in “Bessarione” 5 [1986], pp. 147-174). In this context it seems necessary to simply underline that such distinctive gesture belongs as well to the figure of difficult interpretation placed at Christ's feet in the image of Lazarus (an exception can be found in the representation of Jonah sarcophagus; about this peculiar case see the convincing interpretation of G. PELIZZARI, in R.E. GUGLIELMETTI 2011, in part. pp. 50-52); such detail suggests to consider the possibility that the feminine figure in the resurrection type actually is the bleeding woman. If so, the interpretative *tertium comparationis* of the *crasis* Lazarus/bleeding woman could be connected both with the role of faith in salvation and, more punctually, in resurrection (about the scene of Lazarus see *supra*, chapter 4, n. 69), and with the link between the emancipation from law (about this meaning of the bleeding woman see *infra*, chapter 4, n. 95) and the emancipation from death (about the possible interpretation of such combining see G. PELIZZARI, in R.E. GUGLIELMETTI 2011, p. 52-53). Though a real inspection about the kneeling figure cannot be conducted here, it is important to consider that the bleeding woman episode is “wrapped” in a story of resurrection also in synoptic tradition, where it is included in the episode of Jairus' daughter (*Mt* 9:18-26; *Mc* 5:21-43; *Lk* 8:40-56). In this sense, the figurative source would not have radically changed nor “betrayed” the nature and the vocation of the synoptic stories: extrapolating the episode of the woman and associating it with “another” story of resurrection, iconography simply operates a sort of “different stitching” of evangelic materials, whose intrinsic meaning is anyway preserved: the link between faith and resurrection is confirmed, but the context chosen by visual documents to express this theological content would not be “a” generic resurrection, but rather “the” resurrection *par excellence*, that is Lazarus' one, whose specificities and whose special connection with Christ's *Pascha* have already been exposed (see *supra*, in part. pp. 180-181).

⁹⁵ As M. PERRYMOND in F. VATTIONI (cur.) 1984, pp. 1719-1720, underlines, “essa...che secondo la tradizione ebraica era ritenuta in stato di impurità, per cui non poteva né avvicinare né essere avvicinata da alcuno, non supplicò il Cristo di imporre le mani e tanto meno chiese qualcosa; essa credette in maniera totale nel Maestro con la certezza di salvarsi”. At the same time, the status of bleeding women in first economy suggests the exceptionality of this figure's integration in Christ's salvific project: “..con quel «figlia mia», *unicum* nei vangeli,...il Cristo la toglie dal suo esilio sociale e religioso e la reintegra nella famiglia dei credenti. E' la fede della donna, quindi, che permette il miracolo; Cristo, pur guidando l'avvenimento, dato che la guarigione sopravviene quando lui la decreta, è il solo mezzo della salvezza” (such development

Under the arch, the scene of Christ with the Samaritan dialogues with an image of the same Jesus with the cripple woman (the themes are placed in specular positions)⁹⁶.



(Fig. 21)⁹⁷



(Fig. 22)⁹⁸

If the type of the Samaritan is usually considered by critics as an allusion to the extension of the promise of salvation to *ecclesia ex gentibus*⁹⁹, the representation of the *mulier inclinata* can be associated with Christ's openness toward "marginal figures" of the society¹⁰⁰.

emerges with particular evidence from *Mt* version of the story, as M. PERRYMOND in F. VATTIONI [cur.] 1984, p. 1720). G. PELIZZARI, in R.E. GUGLIEMMETTI 2011, p. 53, affirms that the bleeding woman used to represent in first economy "tame", vittima di una forza uguale e contraria al *gōdesh* - il "sacro" -, che ne demonetizzava l'umanità...solo il ragione della sua malattia". The allusion to the emancipation from this condition can be iconographically evoked by the same gesture of the kneeling figure; concerning literary outcomes see M. PERRYMOND in F. VATTIONI (cur.) 1984, pp. 1719-1728, and, more generically, P. SACCHI, *Sacro/profano; impuro/puro nella Bibbia e dintorni*, Brescia 2007 [Il pellicano rosso - nuova serie 56], pp. 35-38). About other representations of the bleeding woman in Pietro and Marcellino catacomb see M. PERRYMOND in F. VATTIONI (cur.) 1984, pp. 1724-1725.

⁹⁶ The scene is derived by *Lk* 13:10-13. For an analysis of this rare figure, that does not seem to know more than two other attestations on documents of Museo Nazionale Romano, see L. DE MARIA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 280-281. See also L. DE MARIA, *Una discussa scena nella catacomba dei Santi Marcellino e Pietro: battesimo o guarigione?*, "Bessarione" 9 (1992), pp. 141-153.

⁹⁷ Christ with the Samaritan.

⁹⁸ Christ with the cripple woman.

⁹⁹ As D. GOFFREDO, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 275-276 underlines, the scene, extracted from *Jn* 4:4-42, represents one of the less diffused types of the entire iconographic production (the earliest in roman context is attested in Pretestato "cubicolo della *coronatio*"), and does not attest a fix structure. The presence of the water jug, held by the Samaritan in her hands, is one of the elements that allow to define a precise interpretation of the scene. About the figure see also G. BINAZZI, *Cristo e la Samaritana al pozzo nella iconografia dei primi secoli*, "Bessarione" 4 (1989), pp. 161-172.

¹⁰⁰ Due to the exiguity of attestations, it is impossible to formulate a more specific and conscious interpretation; the literary exegesis of the theme remains as much vague, but it seems to be focused on the fact that the healing happened on Saturday (see L. DE MARIA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 280).

In the light of the entire section, it seems possible to interpret this portion of the cubicle in a double sense:

- as an allusion to the powerful role of Christ who operates miracles on behalf of figures that would have been excluded by any salvific perspective in First Testament;
- as a reference to the strength and the power of these protagonists, who become themselves the symbols of that *vera fide* which guides toward salvation¹⁰¹.

In addition to the semantic meanings here mentioned, an evident *tertium comparationis* linking all the representations is certainly the gender of the characters. The arch is indeed fully devoted to women, in a way that bears witness to their fundamental role in paleochristian iconography¹⁰². The fact that the central area under the arch is dedicated to the portrait of an orant woman stimulates the hypothesis that the entire figurative development of the section implicitly alludes to the owner of the cubicle, “probabilmente una donna”¹⁰³, whose identity (and, consequently, whose destiny) may have seemingly been overlapped with that one of the synoptic “exemplary” figures. In other words, as it happens in Susanna cubicle, also in this case a member of the community, who evokes the entire group of the believers, performs an active and important role in the theological manifest.



(Fig. 23)

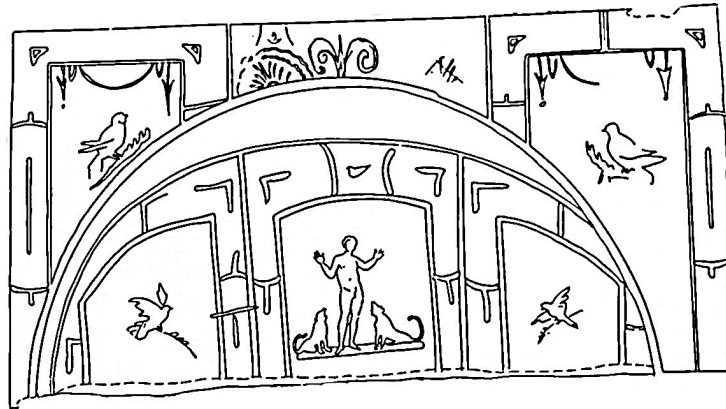
¹⁰¹ The presence of peacocks at both sides of the central lunette confirms that the final goal of this program is represented by salvation - and signally resurrection. Those “decorative” elements are not actually lacking in semantic value. About the symbolic meaning of the peacock see *supra*, chapter 4, n. 39.

¹⁰² The importance of feminine figures mainly emerges from the study of Susanna’s type, see *infra*, chapter 6, pp. 318-334.

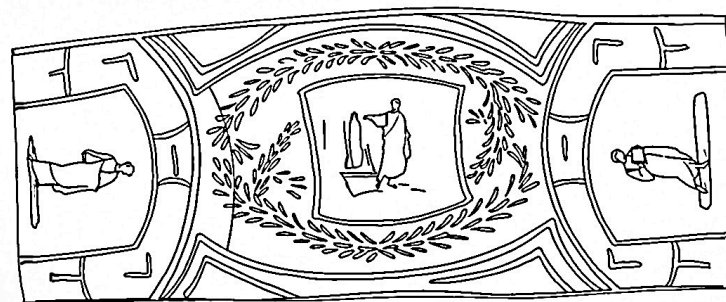
¹⁰³ See L. DE MARIA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 280.

b) *The left-wall*

THE ARCH (*Fig. 24*)



UNDER THE ARCH (*Fig. 25*)



If the program of the bottom wall seems to articulate, so to speak, a theological discourse concerning the condition and the destiny of the community members already portrayed at the entrance of the area, mainly stressing the centrality of faith in their evolution toward salvation, the left and the right walls, though developing an internal and individual iconographic program, are also involved in a more complex, reciprocal dialogue.

The composition of the left wall lunette includes the scene of Daniel in the lions' den, which can be considered as the real figurative core of the section, principally because of its central location. The presence of doves around the type immediately suggests to attribute to it an eschatological character: accompanied by the most diffused symbols of the soul (all of them keeping an olive branch in the paws and two of them historiated while flying), the prophet should not be interpreted

as a generic martyrial figure, since he rather assumes the specific connotation of the saved martyr¹⁰⁴. This interpretative proposal may be confirmed by the presence of the type of Lazarus under the arch¹⁰⁵: as it happens in Susanna cubicle, Daniel *ad bestias* maintains a specific and direct connection with the privileged symbol of resurrection¹⁰⁶.



(Fig. 26)

In the left and right areas under the same arch, both a feminine figure with a closed roll and a male subject reading are represented: in a generic sense, they seem to reaffirm the absolute centrality of the community members in the theological manifest in which they are actively included since the very beginning. In this perspective, it becomes possible to wonder whether the figures represent a reiteration of the same portraits placed at the entrance of the whole cubicle¹⁰⁷; if so, they could probably be interpreted as a sort of “mirror” in which the believers gathered in the area could reflect themselves. Historiated at the entrance of the chamber and then included in the core of the same iconographic program, these subjects may evoke the essential role of *catechesis*¹⁰⁸ in the path that guides toward resurrection; more precisely, they may refer to the exact “figurative” *catechesis* opened out in the face of the community reunited in Pietro and Marcellino catacomb and conceived as an instrument of salvation.

¹⁰⁴ The role of the doves will be further clarified in connection with the analysis of the “figurative couple” formed by Daniel and Noah, see *infra*, pp. 195-197. An interesting figurative parallel for this representation of the scene of Daniel can be identified in plastic production and signally in the sarcophagus of Lungara, where the portrait of the dead is surrounded by seven doves clearly alluding to a condition of salvation. About the document see G. PELIZZARI 2013, pp. 125-127.

¹⁰⁵ NR p. 60, puts a question mark next to such interpretation, that seems anyway to be acceptable and coherent with the scene preserved, as confirmed by J. DECKERS-H.R. SEELIGER 1987, p. 313 (“Auferweckung des Lazarus”).

¹⁰⁶ About the interpretation of Lazarus scene see *supra*, pp. 180-181.

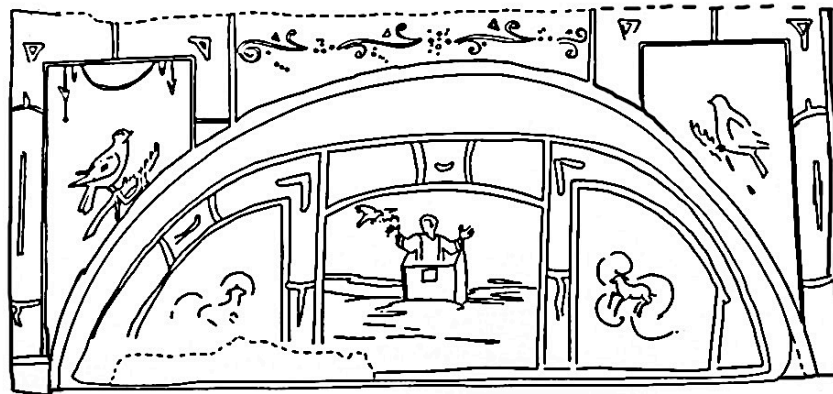
¹⁰⁷ See *supra*, in part. 187.

¹⁰⁸ About the use of the roll to elaborate scenes alluding to *catechesis* see M. BUSIA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 274-275.

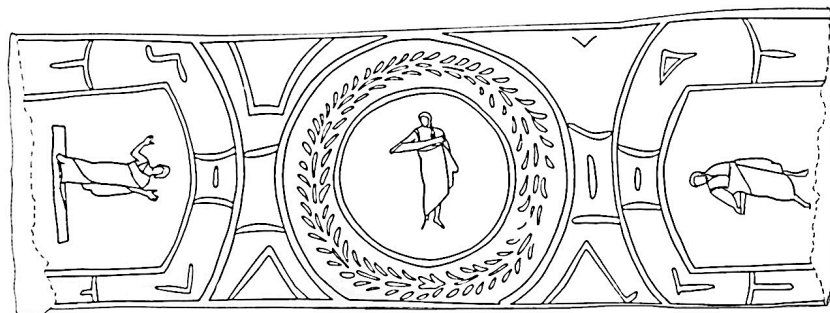
In conclusion, the left section of the cubicle seems to expose an essential eschatological discourse in which a protagonist of *Dn* “tales” performs the role of symbol of the saved martyr, the privileged beneficiary of that resurrection predisposed by Christ both for himself and for believers and evoked by the paradigmatic miracle of Lazarus. In this panorama, the *consortium* of believers is directly involved in the eschatological discourse; such participation is preliminary determined by the necessary passage represented by *catechesis*.

c) *The right-wall*

THE ARCH (Fig. 27)



UNDER THE ARCH (Fig. 28)



The right wall of Nicerus cubicle seems to represent a prosecution and an evolution of the specular left portion. Before investigating the specific traits of such connection, it is necessary to linger on the single section, whose lunette is devoted to the most traditional reproduction of Noah type, the already described “eschatological figure” which frequently obtains, especially in the context of catacomb paintings, a “baptismal” interpretation¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁹ See *supra*, in part. pp. 164-165.

Above this subjects stands a male character with an open roll, flanked by both an orant woman and a man holding a closed roll: the integration of community in the figurative *catechesis* seems to be once again remarked. In this case, men and women do not occupy a marginal position, but rather become the real protagonists of the entire area under the arch, directly dialoguing with the scene of Noah: the final destiny predisposed for those who accede to *catechesis* is here clearly identified with that salvation guaranteed since the access to the first Christian rite¹¹⁰.



(Fig. 29)

As has been outlined, the present section cannot be properly understood without considering its special connection with the specular left area. The first association involves the scenes of Daniel in the lions' den and Noah in the ark, not just because they occupy the same position in the opposite lunettes and in the balance of the entire cubicle, but also and mainly in reason of the skilful use of the important detail represented by the "salvific marker" of the dove.

First of all, it must be noticed that such specific attribute of the patriarch is reproduced as an independent element around the martyr¹¹¹; at the same time, it twice returns with the function of "decorative" motif also in the right lunette. Here, together with the doves, two gazelles with haloes are reproduced as baptismal symbols that strengthen the allusion to the saved souls of Christians¹¹². Both the iteration of the bird, and the structural connection between Daniel and Noah confirm the prevalence of the eschatological perspective in the reception of the biblical story of the prophet exposed to lions, who becomes, once again, the *alter ego* of the patriarch with which it is so often linked in Pietro and Marcellino's frescos.

The specular reading of the arches is moreover confirmed by the reproduction of the figures of the community members, which seem to be the protagonists of a sort of path: the feminine

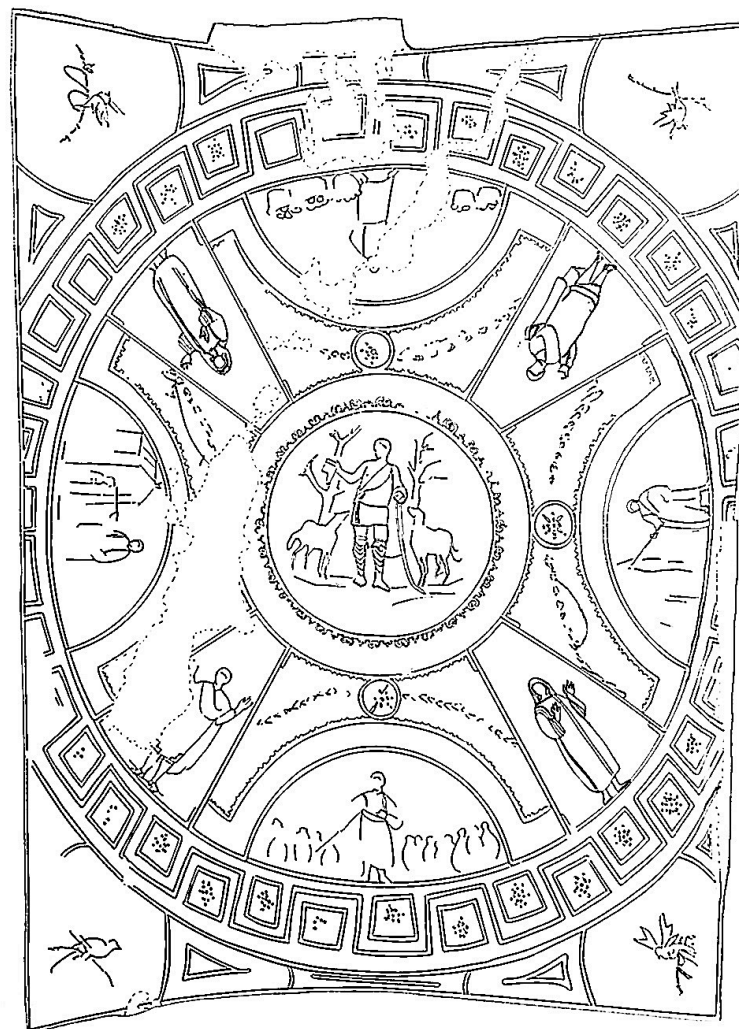
¹¹⁰ Considering the centrality of the community in the entire program, it is plausible to think that the image of Noah has to be connected here with the theme of the ark-church (see *supra*, chapter 3, n. 155). Any further attempt to attribute a specific meaning to each subject above the patriarch would seem incautious.

¹¹¹ See *supra*, pp. 193-194.

¹¹² About the meaning of the gazelle see *supra*, n. 36.

subject holding a close roll next to Lazarus under the left arch may actually “evolve” in the image of a woman in orant position placed in the right area; at the same time, the man disclosing the roll in the left portion of the chamber may be twice reproduced under the right arch, where he first keeps a close roll and then an open one, in the central *clipeus*¹¹³. It would certainly appear too hazardous to try to introduce a definite interpretation of such passages: it is enough to notice here how those figures contribute in establishing a connection between the single areas of the cubicle, whose iconographic program should be considered as unitary; moreover, the reproduction of these subjects stresses the essential role played by believers, conceived as *catechumens* directly involved in the whole figurative manifest and in the evolution toward salvation.

d) *The vault*



(Fig. 30)

¹¹³ Such “evolution” of the orant figures can be grasped by the entire scheme of the cubicle, see *fig.* 17.

Placed in the central *clipeus*, the figure of the good shepherd, which represents a symbolic “transcription” of the unity of Christ and the believers, is the core of the vault program. The allusion to *Christi grex* seems to be here enriched by the representations of men and women scanning the iconographic sequence.

At the left side of the good shepherd, the image of Lazarus’ resurrection is once again repeated¹¹⁴ and it dialogues with the scene of Peter striking a rock, the already mentioned symbol of baptism with which the last sign of *Jn* maintains a privileged connection¹¹⁵: assuming this well-attested couple of figures, the fresco expresses the typical iconographic interpretation of the theme of Lazarus, whose *pivot* is represented by the indissoluble link between the “promise of resurrection” announced by the first Christian rite and the “effective resurrection”, that concretely fulfils as a consequence of Christ’s salvific action.

Above and below the central image of the shepherd, the types of the loaves multiplication and Cana miracle are historiated. If the former represents the clearest and most diffused reference to Lord’s Supper in the early iconographic panorama¹¹⁶, the latter, characterized by the symbolic element of wine, implies an Eucharistic allusion, but more specifically refers to the inauguration of the eschatological time disclosed by Christ¹¹⁷.

Considering the entire vault, it seems possible to interpret the iconographic program as a theological discourse concerning the access of believers to salvation, made possible by the liturgical steps of baptism and Eucharist. If baptism, recalled through the figure of Peter, represents the

¹¹⁴ It was already present in the central section under the left arch, see *supra*, pp. 193-194.

¹¹⁵ See *supra*, in part. p. 181.

¹¹⁶ About the scene see *supra*, chapter 2, n. 162.

¹¹⁷ The type of Cana miracle, derived from *Jn* 2:1-11, is principally attested in the context of funerary plastic (for a generic inspection on the theme see C.A. MOREIRA AZEVEDO, *O milagre de Canà na iconografia paleocrisã. Estudo interdisciplinar: exegese, patristica, liturgia, iconografia e iconologia*, Porto 1986). The meanings with which it can be associated go from baptism to the messianic await, to Eucharist (see M.P. DEL MORO, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 232-234). If in the context of literary reception all these meanings certainly play a significant role (apart from the already cited C.A. MOREIRA AZEVEDO 1986, see also A. BRESOLI, *L’esegesi di Giov. 2,4 nei Padri Latini*, “Revue des Études Augustiniennes” 8 [1962], pp. 243-273), the figurative assumption of the type seems to have been studied in the most fruitful way by G. PELIZZARI 2013, pp. 173-183, who attracts the attention on two essential motifs of the miracle narration which may have played a decisive function in its iconographic reception: the symbolic mention of wine and the allusion to the end times. The visual fortune of the theme should probably be connected with the interpretation of the evangelic episode efficaciously presented by R. BROWN 1994, pp. 136: “Il miracolo di Cana poteva venir compreso dai discepoli come un segno dei tempi messianici e della nuova economia”. In the context of plastic production, where the subject knows its most prolific diffusion, the hypothesis may be confirmed by the frequent association with the portrait of the dead, which would obtain to be – so to speak – symbolically placed, thanks to the proximity with the type of Cana, at the very threshold of eschatology. The type of the miracle would assume in this way the role of “door” signing the evolution from the present history to a salvific, transcendent dimension. This seems to be the reason why, as it happens for instance on S. Callisto sarcophagus (REP 1:364), the scene of Cana is often followed by salvific themes, such as Lazarus’ one. In the specific case of Nicerus’ vault, the combining with the image of the loaves multiplications suggests to grant a special relevance to the eucharistic value of the type.

starting point of such path and already includes the salvific promise destined to be fully achieved in the final resurrection evoked by Lazarus, Eucharist seems to be here characterized – so to speak – by “two natures”: an “historical/liturgical dimension”, immediately expressed by the scene of the multiplication which alludes to the celebration of Supper, and an “eschatological projection”, evoked by the type of Cana miracle and signally symbolized by the element of wine included in it¹¹⁸.

e) From the single sections to the whole program

The analysis of the entire program of Nicerus' catacomb reveals a rich, exegetical elaboration in which *Dn* “tales” perform a significant role. The entrance of the cubicle immediately stresses the centrality of the community, introducing the portraits of a man and a woman in the orant attitude: they both return in other passages of the visual project as if they were the real protagonists of it. The bottom wall is eminently devoted to an elaboration in which feminine figures (the bleeding woman, the Samaritan and the cripple) are presented as the exponents and the symbols of the *vera fide*, the instrument that grants them salvation. The real heart of the section is the portrait of the dead, a woman standing with open arms in the central area under the arch: this subject, evoking the entire group of the believers, obtains to be implicitly associated through a typological connection to the neotestamentary feminine figures symbolizing the faith in Christ.

The left and right walls develop, through a reciprocal connection, an eschatological discourse evoking, this time, male subjects of First Testament: the fundamental cores of the argumentation, as it emerges from their location and exposure, is represented by the images painted on the lunettes, which are Daniel in lions' den and Noah in the arch, associated by the reiterated representation of doves. The persecuted prophet, placed under the type of Lazarus and surrounded by birds, clearly assumes a strongly eschatological connotation, becoming the symbol of the “saved martyr”; in this sense, it is further connected with the theme of Noah, alluding to the integration of the entire church in that salvific perspective, made possible by the instrument of baptism.

The images of the community members placed at the entrance of the chamber seem to be reprised, once again, in the lateral areas of the cubicle, where the destiny of Christians, with no gender distinction, keeps on assuming a role of pre-eminence: under both arches, images of Christians are portrayed while acceding to the *catechesis*, which becomes, together with baptism and

¹¹⁸ The case of Nicerus' vault seems particularly interesting also to understand the instruments used by iconography to convey peculiar meanings: the placement of connected scenes in specular positions (Lazarus/Peter; loaves multiplication/Cana's miracle) is sustained by the structural identity between types, that present the same composition: in the case of Lazarus/Peter, a subject in profile tends the *virga* respectively toward the temple and the rock; in the case of the link between loaves multiplication and Cana, a frontal male figure is surrounded by baskets and wineskins.

martyrdom, a fundamental stage toward salvation. The progressive connection among the three sections of the cubicle is pointed out by the use of symbolic markers “decorating” the sides of the lunettes: the peacocks – performing their role of generic symbols of resurrection¹¹⁹ – frame the type of the bleeding woman, while doves – the most diffused and strong allusion to the saved souls – clarify the eschatological range of Daniel; in the same way, the scene of Noah, apart from sharing the attributes of the prophet’s type, is further characterized by the presence of gazelles, a possible allusion to Christians’ baptism¹²⁰.

The representation of the community members’ path continues in the area of the vault, whose central *clipeus* is devoted to the image of the good shepherd with his *grex*. If the symbolic allusion to *Christi* sheep can be considered as the theological background underling the repetition of orant subjects to scan the iconographic sequence, the long hike of Christians toward God’s kingdom is here once again evoked by two pair of subjects reciprocally placed in specular positions:

- Lazarus and Peter striking a rock reveal two prerogatives of baptism: respectively, its development in the dimension of salvation and resurrection, and its historical consistence as a liturgical step in the life of communities;
- the multiplication of loaves and Cana miracle seem to allude to both the “cultural value” of the Lord’s Supper in the present of the believers, and its eschatological function as “door” introducing new times inaugurated by Christ.

¹¹⁹ See *supra*, n. 39.

¹²⁰ See *supra*, n. 36.