

## 6. THE “TYPOLOGY OF THE CHURCH” IN ICONOGRAPHY:

### *DANIEL TYPES AND THE PERSECUTED COMMUNITY*

The exegetical method defined as “typology of the church”<sup>1</sup> can be considered as a typical and diffused instrument adopted by iconographic interpretation. The members of the community play indeed a fundamental role in the theological discourses elaborated on figurative documents, both in quality of audience and spectators, and in quality of active protagonists directly associated with scriptural types.

In general, it is possible to affirm that the systematic introduction of the “portrait of the dead” in visual programs represents the first and clearest example of the massive application of an interpretative perspective that wants to include the historical church in the hermeneutical process, trying to define its theological characterization through a constant dialogue with the biblical scenes. Such element typically emerges, for instance, from the analysis of catacomb paintings, where the image of the prophet Daniel is often associated with orant subjects to develop a reflection concerning the eschatological destiny of Christians<sup>2</sup>.

It is substantially possible to say that the widespread figurative connection between scenes from “tales” and images of the dead generically reaffirms the attribution of a “martyrial character” to the experience of the believers and of the entire community<sup>3</sup>. Notwithstanding this, the study of such link does not actually lead to relevant outcomes, since the portraits of the documents’ owners are also indistinctively associated with the entire range of figurative types and do not apparently perform any privileged relation with them.

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<sup>1</sup> About the specific acceptance in which the expression should be assumed see *supra*, chapter 5, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> See *supra*, chapter 4, in part. pp. 287-200.

<sup>3</sup> An exemplary case is represented by those documents in which the scenes from *Dn* are placed under the central *clipeus*, in a way that suggests to assume martyrdom as the “grounding” of both the earthly experience and the eschatological glorification of believers. Among the other examples, see in part. the case of sarcophagus from Museo Lateranense nr. 189 (REP 1:40; *fig. 1*).



(*Fig. 1*)

At least in order to show a specific development of this relation, it becomes interesting to mention the paradigmatic case of San Callisto sarcophagus (REP 1:364, *fig. 2*)<sup>4</sup>, in which the link between the figure of Daniel in the lions' den and the community emerges with striking evidence. The structural parallelism between the image of the prophet with Habakkuk<sup>5</sup> and the portrait of the orant dead between the apostles immediately allows to grasp the intentional continuity of the representations, which seem to evoke a sort of figurative equivalence: the biblical protagonist is here apparently conceived as the type, the exegetical “matrix”, the theological *alter ego* of the young owner of the document<sup>6</sup>, who obtains to be in this way characterized as a martyr.



(Fig. 2)

If the connection between community members and figurative types is spread in the entire documentation and represents for this reason a generic expression of a typological exegesis involving the church, it appears important, for the purposes of the present research, to wonder whether a more specific acceptance of such interpretative technique can be identified in the context of *Dn* “tales” visual fortune.

In order to answer such question, it becomes necessary to assume a different analytic perspective, since the most specific *data* concerning such issue do not actually seem to come from the study of iconographic programs or “figurative couples”, but rather from the “deconstruction” and

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<sup>4</sup> Here follows a short bibliography about the document, dated on the first fourth of 4<sup>th</sup> century: G. B. DE ROSSI 1877, p. 446, *tab. 40*; J. WILPERT 1932, p. 336 n. 5, *tab. 226:3*; H.U. VON SCHÖNEBECK, *Beiträge zur Religionspolitik des Maxentius und Constantin*, Leipzig 1939, p. 25, n. 1; F. GERKE 1940, pp. 351 I 23, 355 I 23, 378 XII 18; J. FINK 1955, p. 40, n. 181; p. 68, n. 323; *tab. 30*; U. FABRICIUS, *Die Legende im Bild des I Jahrtausends der Kirche: Der Einfluß der Apokryphen und Pseudoepigraphen auf die altchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, Kassel 1956, p. 16, *tab. 4:3*; J. HOOYMAN 1958, p. 116 n. 7; M. SOTOMAYOR 1962, p. 97, n. 34; REP 1, p. 173, *tab. 66*.

<sup>5</sup> About this scene see *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 71-75.

<sup>6</sup> The dimensions of the sarcophagus (79·117 cm) reveal that it was attributed to a young man.

the “decomposition” of the same scenes extracted from the “book”. As it will be possible to notice, the “building process” of *Dn* themes seems to depend on the intention to recall the condition of persecuted communities – and it cannot be excluded that exactly this evocative potential played a central role in determining their extraordinary fortune and diffusion. In other words, the most significant traces of the historical life of the church would not surface from the external study of the relation between *Dn* types and other figures, but rather from an insight into the iconographic options and choices that have progressively determined the features of those scenes.

In the following exposition three significant “iconographic dynamics” will be analysed:

- 1) the “elaboration process” of the Hebrews’ type, in connection with historical persecutions and signally with the motif of “idolatry refusal”;
- 2) the complex relation between the type of Susanna and the portrait of the dead, as a possible expression of the “martyrial configuration” of the community;
- 3) the peculiar features of Daniel in the lions’ den on African plates, as a possible allusion to the theme of the athlete martyr.

## 6.1. “DECONSTRUCTING” ICONOGRAPHY: THE ELABORATION PROCESS OF THE THREE HEBREWS’ TYPES

In the process of elaboration of the figures extracted from *Dn*, and in the same choice and selection of the biblical material, a fundamental role seems to have been played by a perception of continuity between the events narrated in the Bible and the circumstances characterizing the condition of early Christian communities. In other words, the importance attributed to the historical persecutions and the modalities in which they manifested can be assumed as the principal reasons underling the selection of *Dn* “tales” in quality of typical and spread “martyrial types”<sup>7</sup>.

The overview of those themes sheds light on an important preliminary consideration: though illustrating a specific passage of the biblical stories – mainly corresponding with the moment of the sufferance of the persecuted (the exposition to flames, to lions or to the elders’ menaces) – each figurative type seems to be meant to recall the “entire event” to which it belongs. Exactly from such “entire event”, each scene could fully derive its “martyrial value”, which actually presupposes the memory and the consciousness of all the phases of the scriptural narration preceding the specific torture; the experience of martyrdom appears to be presented in this way as a sort of repetitive “liturgy”, which goes from the order of the emperor to the opposition to idolatry, to the profession of faith<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> This is the opinion efficaciously expressed by J. LASSUS, *Daniel et les martyrs*, “Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana” 42 (1966), pp. 201-205, who notices: “Comment pouvaient-ils (*scil.* the Christians) ne pas penser à la menace qui pesait sur eux? Ne risquaient-ils pas d’être eux-même suppliciés, brûlés vifs, ou livrés aux bêtes?”.

<sup>8</sup> In some cases the passages which go from the moment of the confession of faith to that one of persecution seem to be exegetically described. It seems to happen for instance on Albani sarcophagus, where the image of Daniel in the lions’ den turns to the scene of the nativity, evoking the recognition of the real Messiah – and implicitly presupposing the denial of idolatry (see *infra*, in part. pp. 302-305). In this composition the type of the nativity is characterized by the peculiar attitude assumed by child Jesus in the arms of Mary: he actually seems to “bring” something to the first wise man instead of receiving his gift. The detail may allude to the reward predisposed for those who recognize the real God and manifest their faith against idolatry (it would be hazardous to specifically interpret the element as a crown, but it is possible at least to suggest such option). Through the association with Daniel, the composition obtains a martyrial acceptance, so that the scene of the prophet becomes – more than a generic symbol of martyrdom – the representation of the destiny that immediately discloses for those who open themselves to Christian faith. About the scene see also *infra*, pp. 311-312.



(Fig. 3)

This tendency is clearly testified by the progressive advent, in iconographic panorama, of scenes which describe the moments anticipating the effective persecution, and which appear to be treated and considered as already involved in the path of the martyr, such as that one of the Hebrews' refusal to adore Nabuchadnezzar's statue and that one of Daniel feeding the dragon.

In this sense it becomes possible to say that the adoption of *Dn* protagonists as privileged types of the martyrs mainly depends on the entire development of their experiences narrated in Scriptures; at the same time, the individual and internal study of the elaboration process of each scene allows to grasp in a more specific sense the conceptual priorities that early iconography has progressively felt the necessity to stress<sup>9</sup>.

### 6.1.1. “Building the furnace”: the first step in the visual adoption of the Hebrews’ “tale”

The earliest representation derived from the story narrated in *Dn* 3 shows the three young companions of the prophet exposed to the fire of the furnace. It is attested for the first time in Priscilla catacomb<sup>10</sup>, ascribable to a period between the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.



(Fig. 4)

The fresco of Priscilla demonstrates that the scene was characterized since the beginning by the elements it constantly maintains during the entire preconstantinian period; notwithstanding this, the peculiar representation of the Hebrews *on* the furnace (rather than *in* the fire) suggests to wonder whether, at this stage of its evolution or at least in this document, the figure was meant to allude to a condition of salvation from flames rather than the moment of the sufferance.

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<sup>9</sup> C. CARLETTI 1975 offers a full analysis this process.

<sup>10</sup> J. WILPERT 1903, *tab.* 13.

Among the first representations of the type, some peculiar cases show sensible deviances from such structure<sup>11</sup>. It happens for instance in San Ermete cemetery, on the vault of the fishes' cubicle<sup>12</sup>, where the furnace is not reproduced and Daniel's companions are directly placed on the ground, in the flames.



(Fig. 5)

This representation, traditionally known as *vivicomburium*<sup>13</sup>, may be interpreted as an attempt to reinforce the realism of the scene and – consequently – the allusion to historical persecutions.

Apart from specific details, it must be noticed that the “tale” of *Dn* 3 is first of all assumed in iconography as the narration of Daniel's companions' exposition to fire, and that the core of the entire event described in Scripture is associated with Ananias' Azarias' and Misael's *passio*.

The original meaning attributed to the scene is apparently “martyrial”, and it is recalled in the most essential way, namely through the simple representation of the three men exposed to the flames. As the case of the *vivicomburium* attests, the exegetical intention to allude to the sufferance in the fire prevails on the illustrative urgency to reproduce the circumstance of the furnace as it was narrated in Scriptures.

The “martyrial core” of the type is progressively enriched by the addition of accessories elements which orient the interpretation of the subject toward more specific outcomes: a “fourth figure in the furnace” – a possible allusion to God's intermediary<sup>14</sup> – is introduced to clearly stress the theme of the salvific and eschatological value of martyrdom; a man fostering the fire in the kneeling position<sup>15</sup> may represent an allusion to the role and the function of those who persecute the

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<sup>11</sup> The number of the figures, their dresses and hats leave no doubt about the identification of the scene.

<sup>12</sup> J. WILPERT 1903, *tab.* 114.

<sup>13</sup> Some parallels can be found in sarcophagi production, see for instance the documents REP 1:750 and the already mention fragment from Camposanto Teutonico (REP 1:894, see *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 44-46).

<sup>14</sup> See *Dn* 3:49. Both the fact that the “mediator of salvation” has been introduced in the scene only in a second moment, and that it will never become a fix element of the composition seem to confirm that the “salvific” perspective, often mentioned by scholarship (see C. CARLETTI 1975, p. 111), does not actually represent the principal core of chapter 3 figurative reception, whose essential vocation is evidently “martyrial”.

<sup>15</sup> The allusion is to *Dn* 3:19.

righteous men<sup>16</sup>; a standing man with a roll in his hands has been interpreted by scholars as the Hebrews' accuser, a probable inclusion of a "realistic element" alluding to historical persecutions<sup>17</sup>.

If the introduction of the first two figurative details (the "fourth in the furnace" and the man fostering the fire) may derive from the deepening of the theological reflection about martyrdom, the third figure (the man with the roll) can be interpreted as attempt to stress the connection with present events, evoking the imperial laws promulgated against Christian faith<sup>18</sup>.

The specific representation of the *volumina* can be connected with the very first attempt to include a reference to the moments anticipating the consummation of martyrdom, such as the confrontation between believers and earthly authorities; in a certain sense, it is possible to consider such subject as a *trait d'union* between the scene of the furnace and that one of Nabuchadnezzar's statue.

### 6.1.2. From the three Hebrews to the three wise men: from refusal to adoration

As has been mentioned, the unitary conception of the "martyrial event" that imposes since *Acta martyrum* as a character of Christian theology and as a liturgical and catechetical *datum* of primary importance, may have led figurative source to the elaboration of the second scene extracted from *Dn* "tale" of chapter 3, that one of the Hebrews' refusal of Nabuchadnezzar statue.

It does not seem a case that such figure appears at a later date, exactly at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in conjunction with the happenings that brought to the last persecution, in the *Sitz im Leben* of the tetrarchy, "epoca in cui il culto imperiale raggiunse il suo apogeo"<sup>19</sup>.

Among the first representations of the scene it is possible to mention the case of a sarcophagus from Florence (REP 2:10; *fig.* 6), in which the type is already endowed with the features it will maintain during the entire preconstantinian period<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> See *supra*, chapter 3, in part. p. 135.

<sup>17</sup> Derived from *Dn* 3:8.

<sup>18</sup> The scriptural starting point for the elaboration of this detail can be represented by Nabuchadnezzar edict (it is the hypothesis of C. CARLETTI 1975, pp. 44-45); according to J. WILPERT 1932, p. 259, such element would have been introduced in the scene to evoke the laws promulgated against Christians.

<sup>19</sup> C. CARLETTI 1975, pp. 64-65.

<sup>20</sup> Other slight modifications of the scene occasionally attested – such as the introduction of a fourth figure next to the Hebrews – do not actually seem to have a real semantic value. An example of those possible developments is offered by San Sebastiano sarcophagus, REP 1:338, first fourth of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.



(Fig. 6)

Also in this occasion, the spread of the scene can be probably connected, on one side, with the deepening of the reflection about the reasons and the circumstances determining the same martyrial option and, on the other, with the necessity to attribute a sense and a biblical grounding to the critical experience of persecutions which community was facing<sup>21</sup>. The denial of idolatry, the confession of faith and the opposition against the emperor's worship must have represented sensible arguments demanding to assume a certain role in the exegetical reflection. Also concerning those critical points, the experience of the Hebrews clearly offered conspicuous material, which allowed to establish a direct link between a story narrated in First Testament and the condition of the threatened church of present times.



(Fig. 7)

At least a figurative detail seems to support such interpretative framework concerning the *genesis* of the refusal scene. In the biblical passage of *Dn* 3:1, the statue requested by the emperor is characterized as a golden colossus, certainly connected with the imperial cult<sup>22</sup> but lacking of specific connotations. In its iconographic reception, such generic statue becomes the portrait of the same king, of whom it assumes the features: such interpretation can possibly depend, once again, on the attempt to trace a connection with historical persecutions, arising from the opposition against the emperor himself. In other words, the identity between the statue and Nebuchadnezzar may

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<sup>21</sup> It does not seem possible to agree with C. CARLETTI 1975, pp. 64-65, when he passes from structural and chronological *realia* to the formulation of an interpretative option. According to the scholar, the introduction of the refusal scene would mark the passage from preconstantinian to constantinian art, the first completely devoted to the expression of the eternal price predisposed for Christians, and the second open to new meanings. Such conception, attributing a merely salvific value to the scene of the furnace, seems to depend on the problematic attribution of an "eschatological character" to paleochristian images, as already inspected in chapter 4, pp. 155-157.

<sup>22</sup> G. RINALDI 1962, p. 62. The element is cursorily mentioned by K. PRÜMM, *Der christliche Glaube und die altheidnische Welt*, I, Lipsia 1935, p. 192 and deeper examined by C CARLETTI 1975, pp. 80-87.

underline “in termini espliciti l’atteggiamento polemico delle comunità nei confronti del culto imperiale”<sup>23</sup>.

The cogent link between a peculiar, historical condition and the elaboration of the type of the refusal may be further confirmed by an interesting “iconographic dynamics” that deserves to be described. In concomitance with the diffusion of the statue’s scene, another theme with the same figurative structure knows its most consistent spread<sup>24</sup>: that one of the three wise men adoring the infant Jesus.

The visual proximity between the two types surfaces in a striking way, as revealed, for instance, from a comparison between the already mentioned document of Florence and the coeval sarcophagus from Lateran, nr. 137 (REP 1:33).



(Fig. 8)



(Fig. 9)

The principal points of contact visibly involve the protagonists of the scene: Nabuchadnezzar is sitting on his *sella curulis* as Mary on the *suppedaneum*, while the three Hebrews and the “Magi”<sup>25</sup> share the same, typical hats<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> C. CARLETTI 1975, p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> C. CARLETTI 1975, p. 83.

<sup>25</sup> In this peculiar case the first wise man is represented with the attribute of the beard (a possible allusion to Peter, typically historiated with such characteristic?); the exceptional detail, that cannot be further analysed here, does not compromise the perception of continuity between the scenes.

<sup>26</sup> See C. CARLETTI 1975, p. 70: “E’ interessante notare come questo inusitato tipo di abbigliamento caratterizzi anche le prime rappresentazioni dei tre fanciulli nella fornace”. The fact that the type of the nativity strongly differs from the neotestamentary episode can be considered as a further proof of the fact that the iconographic representation retraces that one of Nabuchadnezzar. F.P. MASSARA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 205-211, describing the image of the adoration, underlines that the number of the wise men has probably been inferred from the number of the gifts brought by them in gospel of *Mt*. It must be anyway noticed that the earliest representations of the scene show a sort of fluidity in the definition of such number: at the very beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century the wise men are actually two in a fresco of Marco and Marcellino’s catacomb (see NR 34, p. 54), while they are four in Domitilla catacomb (NR 61, p. 129). It seems reasonable to admit that the early incertitude about this detail has been overtaken through an operation of comparison with the image of the Hebrews in front of Nabuchadnezzar: in other words, the exegetical intention to stress the connection between the scenes may have played some role in the “crystallization” of the three “Magi” in the adoration scene. For a further reflection about the theme see A. HULTGÅRD, *The Magi and the Star: the Persian Background in Texts and Iconography*, in P. SCHALK-M. STAUSBERG (edd.), *Being Religious and Living Through the*

Both the structural proximity and the coeval diffusion of the figures suggest to reflect about their possible exegetical connection. The *tertium comparationis* may be represented by the theme of the emancipation from idolatry, conceived as strictly linked with the recognition of the real God, though expressed in an opposite perspective: if the Hebrews' type shows the moment in which the emperor and the false divinities are refused, the "Magi" scene reveals "the other side" of such choice, which necessarily consists in the recognition of Christ's messianic prerogative<sup>27</sup>.

If, on one side, the similarity between the figures seems to represent the visual consequence of an exegetical combination, their diffusion at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century may depend on the concrete urgency of a context in which the choice between martyrdom and idolatry was perceived as a fundamental issue. The *genesis* of both the type of the refusal and that one of the furnace apparently results from an hermeneutical approach that associates biblical narrations to the present condition of the community, so that the elaboration process of both subjects can be considered as an efficacious expression of the so called "typology of the church".

In the following chapters the specific relation between the type of the "Magi" and that one of the Hebrews will be further investigated, in order to rebuild in a more accurate way the "iconographic answer" to an historical condition.

a) *The "coexistence" of the Hebrews and the wise men: San Damaso sarcophagus*

The link between the type of the refusal and that one of infant Jesus' worship is not simply expressed by their already described structural proximity: it also involves the modalities of their association and use in the iconographic programs in which they are included.

A first development of such connection is attested on those documents in which the scenes are contextually present and perform a reciprocal dialogue. A paradigmatic example is offered by San Damaso sarcophagus (REP 1:625; *fig.* 10)<sup>28</sup>, which is relevant for two principal reasons: first of all,

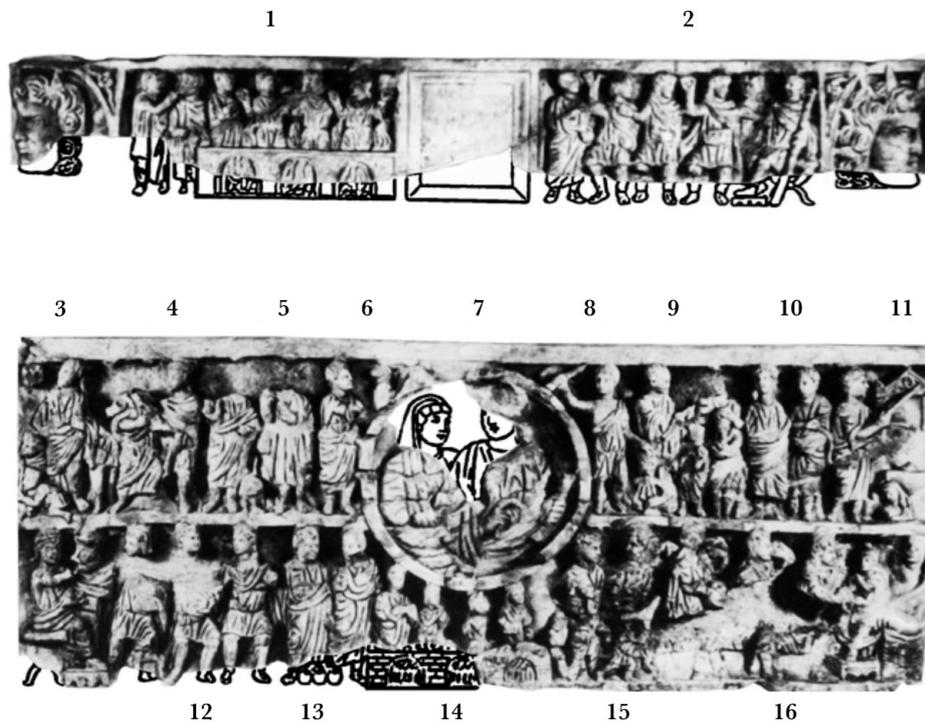
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*Eyes*, Uppsala 1998 (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Historia Religionum 14), pp. 215-225, and T. HEGEDUS, *The Magi and the Star in the Gospel of Matthew and Early Christian Tradition*, "Laval Théologique et Philosophique" 59 (2003), pp. 81-95.

<sup>27</sup> The concept seems to be expressed in the fullest way in the interesting document of San Celso, see *infra*, n. 35. About the meaning of the scene of the wise men adoration see H. LECLERCQ, s.v. "Mages", in DACL 10, coll. 979-1070; A. QUACQUARELLI, *La conoscenza della natività dalla iconografia dei primi secoli attraverso gli apocrifi*, "Vetera Christianorum" 25 (1988), pp. 199-215, and F.P. MASSARA, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 205-211.

<sup>28</sup> Dated to the first fourth of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Here follows a short bibliography on the document: R. KANZLER, *Relazione degli scavi della commissione d'archeologia sacra: 1903-1904*, "Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Sacra" 10 (1904), p. 247; E. BECKER 1909, p. 38, nr. 104; G. STUHLFAUTH 1925, p. 35, nr. 21; J. WILPERT 1929, p. 128; J. WILPERT 1932, pp. ii, n. 3, 12; 296, n. 3; 308, n. 2; 338, n. 3, 5, 32; F. GERKE, *Der neugefundene altchristliche Friessarkophag im Museo Archeologico zu Florenz und das Problem der Entwicklung der ältesten christlichen Friessarkophage*, "Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte" 54 (1935), pp. 24-25; H.U. VON SCHÖNEBECK, *Die christliche Sarkophagplastik unter Constantin*, "Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts,

the cycle derived from *Dn* 3 is here represented both in the antefixes (1,2) and in the body of the sarcophagus (12,14); secondly, the scene of the refusal (12) is placed in a specular position to that one of the adoration (16).



(Fig. 10)

On the cover of the document both types extracted from the story of Daniel's companions are historiated: the scene of the Hebrews exposed to flames (1) dialogues here with the image of the refusal (2). Many "accessories" characters are included in both representations: apart from God's intermediary, two other standing men are placed next to the furnace, while a fourth subject is introduced in the type of the statue. It cannot be excluded that those subjects (except for the fourth figure in the furnace, which has a salvific value) have been added in order to generically increase the realism of the scenes, through an allusion to imperial officers and authorities.

The themes placed on antefixes generate a frame that attracts the attention – as a sort of "programmatically title" – on the semantic core of the entire document, which is the event of martyrdom, from the refusal of idolatry to the consequent, unavoidable *passio*. In this sense, the real

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Römische Abteilung" 51 (1936), pp. 269-270; A.C. SOPER 1937, p. 155, n. 12, nr. 9, *fig.* 8; E. DINKLER 1938-1939, pp. 40-49; 58-66, *fig.* 18, *tab.* 3, nr. 2; H.U. VON SCHÖNEBECK 1939, p. 25; F. GERKE 1940, pp. 353 II 12; 355 I 25; 373 X 1; M. SOTOMAYOR 1962, pp. 18, n. 26; 19, n. 30; 62, n. 104; 63, n. 106, 66, n. 120; 181; REP 1, pp. 252-253.

protagonist of the theological manifest is not just a “tale” from *Dn*, but also the present of the community, of which the Hebrews represent the biblical antecedent.

The centrality of the church in the economy of the document is suggested by the sequences placed in the upper register of the central body. The left area is fully devoted to Peter’s cycle, from the miracle of the rock (3), to the *ter negabit* (5), passing through the type of the arrest (4): the apostle, typically considered as the same symbol of the community guided by him, is mentioned to evoke the fundamental coordinates of Christian life, from baptism to martyrdom, and to recall the same process of formation of the earliest groups of believers<sup>29</sup>; it is certainly not a case that the sequence is sealed by Moses (6), here conceived as a typological antecedent of Peter, probably mentioned in quality of leader of the first Israel.

The right area of the document marks the passage – so to speak – from Peter to Jesus. The sequence is introduced by Isaac (8), a scriptural type of Christ which mirrors the figure of Moses (6) as to sign the perfect semantic parallelism between the two areas. The action of Christ is included within the polarities of faith (evoked by the healing of the blind man [9]) and salvation (symbolized by Lazarus [11]), while the central position is occupied by the scene of multiplication (10), alluding to the centrality of Lord’s Supper.

The development of the inferior section can be easily put in relation with such superior area: under the left sequence devoted to Peter and to the community, it is possible to find a large representation of the refusal to adore Nabuchadnezzar (12), so that a theory symbolically scanning the entire life of the church is here connected with the decisive moment of the opposition against idolatry.

The consequent martyrdom, alluded by the furnace (14), is introduced by the type of Cana miracle, which evokes the beginning of the time inaugurated by Christ, already endowed with an eschatological value<sup>30</sup>. Since the miracle of the wine is often assumed in iconography to mark the passage “from history to eschatology”, it is possible to underline how, on San Damaso sarcophagus, such evolution is propelled by the scene of the emperor’s denial, which immediately anticipates the type of Cana: still placed in “history”, the choice of the community in favour of the real God is the element which discloses new times, so that the subsequent martyrdom is already included in such dimension. It is also interesting to highlight that the furnace is placed exactly under the *clipeus* of the dead (7): the condition of salvation to which the sarcophagus’ owner can accede appears to be, so to speak, sustained by martyrdom and grounded on it.

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<sup>29</sup> About Peter cycle see *supra*, chapter 3, n. 157. It must be anyway noticed that in this case the real protagonist is not that much the specific meaning of the single scenes, but rather their *tertium comparationis*, namely Peter himself, symbol of the community.

<sup>30</sup> About the meaning of Cana scene see *supra*, chapter 4, n. 117.

In the right area of the document, corresponding with the upper “Jesuan section”, another symbol of *fide*, that is the miracle of the paralytic man (15), is followed by the large scene of the wise men adoration (16), which clearly mirrors that one of the Hebrews’ refusal. The action of the community against false idols corresponds, according to San Damaso manifest, to the recognition of Christ as Messiah, whose prerogatives actually represent the central argument of the entire portion<sup>31</sup>.

In conclusion, if the document of San Damaso fully testifies, on one side, the strong connection between the image of the “Magi” and that one of Daniel’s companions in front of Nabuchadnezzar<sup>32</sup>, it also expresses, on the other, the fundamental role of the community in the exegetical reception of both themes. Through the hermeneutical perspective here described as “typology of the church”, they become the symbol of the condition of the Christians in front of the secular menaces.

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<sup>31</sup> A similar development is attested on Domitilla antefixes. Also in this occasion, the linear representation of the story narrated in *Dn 3* dialogues with two images of the nativity: that one of the shepherds derived from *Lk* and that one of the wise men extracted from *Mt*. Significantly, the second scene is placed in specular relation with the figure of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, while the first one seems to have been included in the document as an additional reference to the same meaning, detached from an autonomous value.



(Fig. 11)

<sup>32</sup> San Nazaro (late 4<sup>th</sup> century) combines the iconographic type of the adoration with both scenes extracted from *Dn 3*.



(Fig. 12)

b) *The “substitution” of the Hebrews with by wise men: Cherchel antefixes*

The connection between the image of the refusal and that one of the adoration is further confirmed by the subsistence of another figurative tradition that – instead of summing and combining the themes in a reciprocal dialogue – immediately substitutes one another.

In a generic sense, it must be noticed that the type of the nativity is often connected with martyrial representations<sup>33</sup>, and mainly with the image of the furnace, as it happens on Cherchel sarcophagus<sup>34</sup>.



(Fig. 13)

Sacrificing the narrative coherence, which would have required to associate the scene of the fire exposition with that one of the refusal, the document pursues a deepest exegetical objective: the martyrial condition of Ananias, Azarias and Misael, deriving from the denial of every god but their own one, implies the adhesion to Christ, so that the young protagonists devoted to their Lord end up being typologically linked with the wise men who addressed to the real Messiah. In turn, both the Hebrews and the “Magi” can be implicitly considered as the antecedent of the community members, who are supposed to renew the same choice of faith in the present circumstance of the persecution.

In this way, through the substitution of the refusal scene by that one of the wise men, the exegetical stratification of the document is enriched by an intermediate level: between the First Testament “martyrs” and the historical believers, the neotestamentary subjects find their place, as to both sanction the unity of salvation history and remark the identification between the God of *Dn* and the same Christ.

A detail in the scene of adoration seems to further orient the interpretation of this type: though historiated in front of infant Jesus, the “Magi” are actually pointing out a star, as to

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<sup>33</sup> The scene is connected with the type of Daniel in the lions’ den on Albani sarcophagus (REP 1:241), Lateran document nr. 137 (REP 1:33), San Lorenzo sarcophagus (REP 1:662). It is associated with the type of Peter arrested in the sarcophagus of Museo delle Terme (REP 1:770).

<sup>34</sup> J. WILPERT 1932, *tab.* 202:4.

underline that the real meaning of their option has to be researched in the identification of the eschatological Messiah with Christ<sup>35</sup>.

*c) The “fusion” of the Hebrews and the wise men: St. Gilles-du-Gard fragment*

Another modality adopted by iconography to combine the type of the three Hebrews with that one the “Magi” is paradigmatically attested by two fragments from St. Gilles-du-Gard<sup>36</sup>, which can also be assumed as an important testimony of the functioning of iconographic source in a generic perspective.



(Fig. 14)



(Fig. 15)

The preserved pieces of the sarcophagus – a portion of the refusal (*fig. 14*) and a small section of the adoration (*fig. 15*) – testify, indeed, another case in which the types are put in reciprocal connection, this time through a relation of figurative contiguity. The real specificity of the document should be anyway researched in a detail included in the representation of the Hebrews: Daniel’s companions

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<sup>35</sup> A deep exegetical reflection involving the detail of the star is developed on the most ancient paleochristian document of Milan, the so-called San Celso sarcophagus. Here the group of the wise men turn away from infant Jesus and point at a star that marks, as a sort of an attribute, the figure of Christ between the apostles, with a roll in his hands. In this case the document seems to remark a sort of contraposition between the “historical” and the “messianic” representation of Christ, and the whole figurative program can be conceived as oriented toward the celebration of the eschatological and divine connotation of Jesus. For an articulated interpretation of the document see G. PELIZZARI 2013, pp. 112-113.



(Fig. 16)

<sup>36</sup> REP 2:492.

are not simply turning away from the emperor, but they are also pointing at a star. A distinctive element of the adoration scene (the star) is here “extrapolated” and set in the scene of the refusal, as to confirm both the identification between the First Testament figures and the New Testament protagonists, and the exegetical interdependence between the themes. According to the fragment here analysed, denying the earthly emperor would exactly mean turning to Christ<sup>37</sup>.

In reverse, a possible *crasis* between the theological meanings of the types may be attested on the already mentioned case of Albani sarcophagus (REP 1:241), where the image of adoration is flanked by the figure of Daniel in the lions’ den, as to evoke the continuity between *fide* and martyrdom<sup>38</sup>. More than the remarkable attitude of the first one of the “Magi”, who is apparently pointing out three circular elements which may be interpreted as stars or equivalent symbols<sup>39</sup>, the interesting *datum* is here represented by the figurative link between him and infant Jesus.



(Fig. 17)

In order to fully grasp such specificity, it may be useful to compare the scene with the similar one recurring on sarcophagus from Museo Lateranense nr. 104, another document attesting the rare motif of the “three circles” substituting the common star.



(Fig. 18)

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<sup>37</sup> The use of the star to allude to Christ Messiah has already been described through the example of San Celso sarcophagus, see *supra*, n. 35.

<sup>38</sup> For the entire scene see *supra*, n. 8.

<sup>39</sup> J. WILPERT 1932, p. 128, hypothesize an allusion to the trinity.

The document perfectly shows the most diffused composition of the type, in which the first wise man holds in his hands the gift he has brought for Christ, according to *Mt 2:11*. On the contrary, on Albani antefix, it is infant Jesus who holds the gift and apparently brings it to the wise man. Every interpretation of such a subtle detail may appear weak, also because of the undeniable difficulty to decide whether Christ is either “giving” or “receiving” something, but at least the comparison between these compositions suggests to assess the possibility that the “Magus” of Albani cover is receiving a reward, directly granted by the same Jesus and possibly connected with his choice against idolatry. The nature of such reward can be possibly identified with that “martyrial crown” that typically symbolizes the destiny of the persecuted in ancient Christianities<sup>40</sup>, and the background of such interpretation should be researched in the overlapping between the wise men and the Hebrews-martyrs.

Summarizing what has been so far exposed, it seems possible to affirm that the study of the iconographic building process of the scenes extracted from *Dn 3* sheds light on the massive importance of the “church typology” in the elaboration and use of these figurative motifs.

<sup>40</sup> It seems particularly interesting to recall here a fragment from Alaoui Museum, described in *Catalogue du Musée Alaoui (Catalogue des Musées et Collections archéologiques de l'Algérie et de la Tunisie: Musée Alaoui)*, I: *Catalogue*, 1897, p. 196, nr. 511, representing the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace with three crowns above their heads. At the same time, in a “carreaux de revêtement et tuiles”, the figure of Daniel is placed “entre deux colonnes...les bras étendus en tenant deux couronnes, au milieu de deux lions qui se prosternent. Sur une des couronnes, à gauche, un X; sur l'autre, à droite, une croix” (see *Catalogue du Musée Alaoui [Catalogue des Musées et Collections archéologiques de l'Algérie et de la Tunisie: Musée Alaoui]*, II: *Supplément*, 1910, p. 280, nr. 86). Such evidences allow at least to confirm the existence of a tradition linking *Dn* “tales” with the martyrial symbol of the crown, and it is even more interesting to notice here that those evidences are particularly attested in African context, where the theme of persecution performed a role of great relevance. An eloquent use of this symbol returns on “un vas de plomb...trouvé en Tunisie”, where an orant figure with a crown is included in an iconographic program characterized by a strong martyrial value. The document, described by F. CABROL, s.v. “Afrique”, in *DACL* 1, coll. 591-657, can be considered as a paradigmatic example of the use of such element in iconography (*fig. 18*; the image is derived by P. GARRUCCI, *Storia dell'arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa*, VI, Roma 1880, pp. 33-34, *tab. 178:1-2*). About the symbol of the crown see in part. F. SEVERINI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 155-156.



(Fig. 19)

First of all, it has been necessary to search for the earliest element on which visual focused its attention and which probably oriented the same choice of the scriptural materials: it is represented by the *acme* of the “liturgy” of martyrdom, that is the moment of the exposition to flames. Sometimes represented “without” the distinctive element of the furnace, the type of Ananias, Azarias and Misael in flames may have known such a widespread fortune since the beginning of iconography in reason of its perfect congruency with the historical condition of the Christian victims, often exposed to the same dramatic destiny.

With the progressive deepening of the reflection concerning the sense of martyrdom, iconography seems to have felt the necessity to directly mention those phases which anticipates the specific moment of the sufferance but are already perceived as part of the entire “martyrial event”. A first trace of this tendency may be found in the introduction of male subjects in the scene of the furnace, such as the character holding rolls: more than “illustrative” reproductions of Nabuchadnezzar’s men, these figures may represent an attempt to enrich the composition with realistic elements, capable to evoke the context of Christian persecutions.

Such process results in the creation of the type of the Hebrews’ refusal, which is adopted to articulate an exegetical reflection concerning the link between martyrdom and idolatry denial. Substituting the “biblical *colossus*” with the image of the same Nabuchadnezzar, iconography once again stresses the connection between the biblical event and the historical condition of those who had to endure in front of the emperor.

The special connection between the refusal scene and that one of the “Magi”, expressed by a range of different figurative options – from the simple combination of the themes to their *crasis* –, confirms the interpretation of the former as an allusion to the experience of the entire community in front of its choice between the earthly authorities and the faith in Christ.

In the light of what has been presented, the assumption of the time of the church as antitype of the biblical themes can be considered as a relevant and determinant aspect in the iconographic manipulation and use of the “tale” narrated in *Dn* 3, which becomes, in turn, an essential instrument to give sense and significance to the present condition of the persecuted believers.

## 6.2. *EXCURSUS. THE BODY OF DANIEL: FROM THE TYPE OF THE LIONS' DEN TO ECCLESIA MARTYRUM*

If the analysis of the three Hebrews' types clearly offers the richest elements in this perspective, it is interesting to mention a peculiar tradition in which the scene of the prophet between lions seems to presuppose a serried allusion to the historical dimension of martyrdom, to the detriment of that "eschatological value" which is more commonly assigned to the subject, especially in catacomb frescoes<sup>41</sup>.

In order to better grasp such specificity, it is useful to keep in mind that the influence of historical conditions has been considered, in a generic sense, as one of the reasons justifying and explaining the extraordinary diffusion of *Dn* types on the production of African ceramic plates and lamps. A fruitful study of those material categories has been properly conducted by J.W. SALOMONSON, who manages to underline how, "au point de vue «historique», l'apparition de scènes de martyre sur les plats à reliefs africains du 4<sup>ème</sup> siècle, semble s'accorder avec la place éminente et centrale qu'occupait l'idée du martyre dans la pensée des communautés chrétiennes africaines de cette époque. N'oublions pas que l'une de ces communautés – l'Eglise «Donatiste» – n'hésitait pas, à l'occasion, par considérations polémiques à l'égard de ses adversaires les «Catholiques», de se qualifier elle-même comme l'«Eglise des Martyrs»"<sup>42</sup>.

The scholar efficaciously resorts to the *Sitz im Leben* in order to explain the extraordinary importance of the themes evoking persecutions in that peculiar geographic perimeter, in a way that sheds light, once again, on the immediate perception of correlation between biblical characters and early church.

It has already been possible to shortly mention two specific traditions concerning Daniel's "African" representation: the prophet is sometimes historiated both in the "cruciform pose"<sup>43</sup>, which symbolizes the connection between martyrdom and *Pascha Christi*, and emerging from a *cantharus* ark, as to recall the link between martyrdom, baptism and salvation<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> See *supra*, chapter 4, pp. 158-200.

<sup>42</sup> The issue has been efficaciously studied by J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, in part. p. 51. The work of the scholar represents the principal reference about this documentation. The present exposition will start from this study, which seems remarkable for both the method adopted (see *supra*, chapter 1, p. 14) and the brilliant selection of the most interesting documentary categories. For a material classification of those figurative documents see also M. GRAZIANI ABBIANI, *Le lucerne fittili paleocristiane nell'Italia settentrionale*, Bologna 1969 and J.W. HAYES, *Late Roman Pottery*, London 1972; E. JOLY, *Lucerne del museo di Sabratha*, Roma 1974 (Monografie di archeologia libica 11).

<sup>43</sup> See *supra*, chapter 2, n. 70.

<sup>44</sup> See *supra*, chapter 2, n. 70.

An interesting detail of those figurative schemes seems to activate a sort of “fusion” between the traditional iconographic type of Daniel and the diffused illustrations of *damnatio ad bestias* “que l’on rencontre à plusieurs reprises sur nos plats africains et qui apparemment jouissait d’un intérêt prononcé et spécial jusque là sans précédents”<sup>45</sup>. These “portraits” of historical martyrs – which can be considered, according to the same J.W. SALOMONSON, as realistic illustrations of persecutions<sup>46</sup> and represent a typical expression of African iconography – may actually have in some measure influenced the physical features attributed to the type of Daniel, which exceptionally obtains, in the same context, an “athletic body” characterized by a well-defined muscular structure endowed with a broad and unusual trait of realism.

It is clearly attested by the case of a ceramic plate in which the prophet, flanked by two lions, emerges from the *cantharus*<sup>47</sup>.



(Fig. 20)

Under a merely stylistic point of view, such realistic vocation can be interpreted as an inheritance of the already mentioned scenes of *damnatio*; at the same time, such “athletic body” can be assumed as an attempt to reproduce the “prototype de martyr chrétien”<sup>48</sup> described by the literature coming from the same context: actually, “notamment chez Tertullien et Cyprien”<sup>49</sup> the persecuted is symbolically conceived as an athlete.

In other words, the figure of the prophet in African production does not seem to have been just adopted to elaborate a theological discourse about martyrdom: it may have been rather used as biblical instrument capable to “fill the gap” – so to speak – between the persecutions of Christians

<sup>45</sup>J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 43. See this work also for examples concerning such scenes, which are both attested in ceramic production and in mosaics.

<sup>46</sup>J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 51: “On est tenté, dans le cas des «scènes de *damnatio*»...qui figurent sur les plats africains du 4<sup>ème</sup> siècle, de considérer celles-ci comme des «scènes de martyr»”.

<sup>47</sup>J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 56, pl. 45

<sup>48</sup>J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 82.

<sup>49</sup>J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 81.

and the scriptural narrations. Moulding the prophet into the martyrs' portrait, the iconographic source apparently manages to operate a full overlapping between type and antitype<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, such overlapping between history and Scripture betrays the assumption of a peculiar theological perspective concerning the event of martyrdom, that is presented and described as an *athlesis*, “c'est à dire comme une «lutte athlétique» pour Dieu, contre le Diable”<sup>51</sup>.

Remaining in the perimeter of African production, the representation of Daniel with clothes imposes for its peculiarity, as it appears on an ivory plaque from Carthage<sup>52</sup>:



(Fig. 21)

If the presence of three lions instead of two may reinforce the hypothesis that here the prophet's type is once again assumed to recall a scene of *damnatio*, it must be noticed that the same attribution of clothes to a figure that is generally characterized by nudity may represent another realistic trait which sends back to the members of communities.

More than the numerous parallels of the scene in African context<sup>53</sup>, it becomes here interesting to recall an illustrious case in which Daniel is figured with a vest: it happens on Mas d'Aire sarcophagus (REP 3:18)<sup>54</sup>, a document coming from Christianity of Gaul and probably

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<sup>50</sup> This possibility can be easily supported by a case in which the lions are placed at both sides of a woman, conceived and figured as a sort of “feminine Daniel”. The representation, reported by J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 83, is characterized by that “cruciform attitude” which obtains since martyrial literature a symbolic pregnancy; it does not seem too ventured to connect this scene with the tradition concerning persecuted women, from *Passio Perpetuae* on. Another efficacious example of the continuity perceived between the type of Daniel and the portrait of “historical martyrs” is the representation of Thecla, which is moulded on the theme of the prophet between lions, as exemplary shown by G. PELIZZARI, *Beata corpora virginum. Il culto di santa Tecla tra emancipazione e normazione del femminile*, c.d.s. in part. p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 79.

<sup>52</sup> J.W. SALOMONSON 1979, p. 78, pl. 60.

<sup>53</sup> The documentation has been efficaciously selected and presented by J.W. SALOMONSON 1979.

<sup>54</sup> P. MINASI, *Le sarcophage de Sainte Quitterie*, “Revue de l'Art Chrétienne” 49 (1875), 123-157; R. GARRUCCI 5, 1879, tab. 301: 3-5; F. GERKE 1949, pp. 17 n. 40, 24, 38, 41-42; tab. 4:9; F. VAN DER MEER, *A propos du*

ascribable to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The entire document would require an accurate analysis because of its exceptional figurative peculiarities, but in this context it seems enough to mention the specific treatment of the figure of Daniel, characterized by a long vest that may reproduce the diaconal tunic<sup>55</sup>. Such iconographic choice can be interpreted as an attempt to bestow a “martyrial connotation” on those who were typically attributed of such vest in the historical present, that is the authorities guiding the community<sup>56</sup>.



(Fig. 22)

In conclusion, it seems possible to say that also this peculiar tradition of Daniel’s fortune seems to exploit the biblical figure in order to interpret the experience of *ecclesia martyrum*, anchoring it to salvation history through the mediation of a peculiar scriptural antecedent. Such stratification of iconographic exegesis, which leans on fine variations of powerful significance, testifies and confirms the centrality of the “church typology” in the use of *Dn* “tales”.

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*sarcophage du Mas d’Aire*, in AA. VV., *Mélanges offerts à Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann*, Utrecht 1963, pp. 169-176, *tab.* 1:2; TH. KLAUSER, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage in Bild und Wort*, Olten 1966, cat. 3, p. 24, *tab.* 5; E. DASSMANN 1973, pp. 348, 352, 387, 396, 430-432, *tab.* 39; J. DRESKEN-WEILAND, *Zur Rolle der Auftraggeber frühchristlicher Sarkophage*, “Das Münster” 50 (1997), p. 19, *tab.* 2.

<sup>55</sup> A parallel for the scene appears on the fragment from Naples, REP 2:6.

<sup>56</sup> Another interesting specificity of the scene, this time in a theological perspective, is represented by the substitution of the two traditional lions by a single “big” one lying at his feet, a possible reference to that “apocalyptic enemy” described in early Christianities as a beast. It seems reasonable to wonder whether such beast may be as well evoked by the third, big lion placed under Daniel on the already mentioned ivory plaque, see *supra*, *fig.* 21. For a literary parallel of such linking between hierarchies of the church and *Dn* “tales” see C. VALENTI 2015.

### 6.3. SUSANNA AND THE ORANT: MAKING A “MARTYRIAL COMMUNITY”

The massive importance of the “church typology” in the context of early Christian elaboration cannot be actually grasped without analysing the reception of *Dn* 13, mainly as regards the specific character of Susanna, the woman threatened by the elders and saved by the prophet Daniel. Before proceeding with the survey of this tradition, it is necessary to underline that the “tale” undergoes two different hermeneutical perspectives: a typological interpretation and an allegoric reading.

An interesting evidence emerges from the comparison of the two sources attesting early Christian reflection about Susanna’s story: if in literature the “typological approach” represents a limited tradition and a secondary phenomenon if compared with the predominant allegoric interpretation of the “tale”, iconography seems on the contrary to fruitfully assume the figure of the woman as a type of the community, consigning a possible, allegoric development to a marginal perimeter.

In the present chapter both the literary and the figurative traditions linking Susanna with the ancient church through the instrument of typology will be examined, while the study of the allegoric reading of *Dn* 13 will be left for the devoted chapter.

#### 6.3.1. The “typological” fortune of *Daniel* 13 in literature. Susanna and the “menaced” church

As has been mentioned, the “typological interpretation” of *Dn* 13 represents a marginal phenomenon in the context of literature, where the “tale” is preferably evoked by “formularly expressions” circulating as independent *excerpta*<sup>57</sup>, and the character of Susanna is mainly assumed as a generic and always valid commendation of chastity<sup>58</sup>.

A possible typological reception of the story of the woman seems to be testified by two specific literary cases, ascribable to different geographical context but substantially expressing the same theological content.

The first recurrence can be found in Irenaeus of Lyons’ *Adversus Hareses* IV 26:3, and concerns *Dn* 3:42. In this occasion the author reports the invective pronounced by Daniel against the elders to the presbyters who *serviunt autem suis voluptatibus et non praeponunt timorem Dei in cordibus suis*.

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<sup>57</sup> It mainly happens in Origen, see *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 345-347.

<sup>58</sup> See *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 357-362. Such principal use of the figure is also underlined by M. MINASI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 282.

***Adversus Haereses IV 26:3.*** Those, however, who are believed to be presbyters by many, but serve their own lusts, and do not place the fear of God before the rest in their hearts, but they condemn the others and are puffed up with the pride of holding the first seat, and work evil deeds in secret, saying: “No one sees us”<sup>59</sup>, they shall be reprimanded by the Verb, who does not judge by glory<sup>60</sup>, nor looks upon the countenance, but the heart. And they shall hear those words prophesied by Daniel: “Seed of Cana, and not of Judah, beauty has seduced you and lust perverted your heart!”<sup>61</sup>. You have grown evil with age, now your past sins have come to term: judging unjust judgements, oppressing the innocents and letting the guilty ones go free, while the Lord said: “You shall not kill the innocent and the righteous one”<sup>62</sup>. Of whom the Lord also said: “But if the evil servant shall say in his heart: «My Lord is long delayed», and shall begin to smite the servants and the maidens, and to eat and drink and be drunken, the Lord of that servant shall come in a day that he does not know, and in an hour that he does not hope, and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers”<sup>63, 64</sup>

Though the author simply introduces here a literary quotation of *Dn* 13 circulating also as a fixed *formula* in other contexts<sup>65</sup>, it seems necessary to spot a significant trace of a possible and subtle typological association between the elders and the presbyters who manifest their weakness in front of passions and temptations.

Irenaeus seems to extrapolate from the episode of Susanna a literal expression which allows him to “shape” and fully disclose the negative attitude of the coeval exponents of the church hierarchy. Considering the difficulty to concretely define the typological range of such a detail, it is at least reasonable to simply connect the allusion of *Adversus Haereses* with the tradition which makes

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<sup>59</sup> *Dn* 13:20.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Is* 11:3.

<sup>61</sup> *Dn* 13:56.

<sup>62</sup> *Dn* 13:52-53.

<sup>63</sup> *Mt* 24:48-51; *Lk* 12:45-46.

<sup>64</sup> Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. A. ROUSSEAU, SC 100/2, pp. 720-723; IV 26:3. *Qui vero crediti sunt quidem a multis esse presbyteri, serviunt autem suis voluptatibus et non praeponunt timorem Dei in cordibus suis, sed contumeliis agunt reliquos et principalis consessionis tumore elati sunt, et in absconsis agunt mala et dicunt: “Nemo nos videt”, redarguentur a Verbo, qui non secundum gloriam iudicat neque <in> faciem attendit, sed in cor. Et audient eas quae sunt a Daniele prophetatae voces: “Semen Chanaan et non Juda, species seduxit te et concupiscentia evertit cor tuum. Inveterate dierum malorum, nunc advenerunt peccata tua quae faciebas antea, iudicans iudicia iniusta; et innocentes quidem damnabas, dimittebas vero nocentes, dicente Domino: «Innocentem et iustum non occides»»; de quibus dixit et Dominus: “Si autem dixerit malus servus in corde suo: «Tardat Dominus meus», et incipiat caedere servos et ancillas, et manducare et bibere et inebriari, veniet Dominus servi illius in die qua nescit et hora qua non sperat, et dividet eum et partem eius cum infidelibus ponet”.*

<sup>65</sup> See *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 346-347.

Susanna a type of the threatened community and of the presbyters the antecedent of those who menace it<sup>66</sup>.

A clearer example of such use of *Dn* 13 comes from the African context and from the voice of Cyprian, who alludes to the woman in epistle 43, a passage presenting a far richer exegesis compared with Irenaeus' one. Separated from his church<sup>67</sup>, the bishop sends it his suggestions and admonitions.

**Epistula 43, 4:2.** But a sorrow even more profound besets our heart, ailing as it is, it is that at the time of such anxiety and crisis I cannot hasten to you myself, for we have to stay on our guard lest, through the menaces and plots of these traitors, our arrival might give rise to serious disorder, lest, while it is a bishop's duty to ensure peace and tranquillity for all, he might appear to have been the cause for rioting and to have sparked off persecution once more. **3.** That is why, dearly beloved brothers, I am sending to you from here warning as well as counsel: do not rashly put your trust in pernicious words, do not easily give your assent to guileful phrases, do not exchange darkness for light<sup>68</sup>, night for day, hunger for food, thirst for drink, poison for medicine, death for life. You should let neither their age, nor their authority deceive you, they in their hoary wickedness resemble the two elders: just as they sought to defile and violate the virtuous Susanna, so also they seek by their adulterous teachings to defile the virtue of the church and to violate the truth of the gospel.<sup>69</sup>

In a stronger way than Irenaeus did, Cyprian establishes a link between the elders and two historical figures menacing the church, namely Felicissimus and Augendus, two rebel leaders who were progressively gaining a certain support<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> See immediately *infra*, the case of Cyprian (*infra*, pp. 320-322), and the reading of the figure made by Hippolytus, *In Daniele* (see *infra*, chapter 8, in part. pp. 392-393).

<sup>67</sup> The letter should be ascribed to March 251 (see in part. J.W. CLARKE II, 1984, p. 211; L. DUQUENNE, pp. 147-148; G. TAPONECCO, in C. DELL'OSSO-M. VINCELLI-G. TAPONECCO [cur.], SCAR 5/1, p. 290, n. 1).

<sup>68</sup> *Lk* 11.35.

<sup>69</sup> Cyprianus, *Epistulae*, ed. G.F. DIERKS, CCL 3b, pp. 204-205; 43, 4:2. *Accessit hic tabescenti animo nostro dolor maior, quod in tanta sollicitudine ac necessitate excurrere ad vos ipse non possum, dum per minas et per insidias perfidorum cavemus ne advenientibus nobis tumultus illic maior oriatur et cum paci et tranquillitati episcopus providere in omnibus debeat, ipse materiam seditioni dedisse et persecutionem denuo exacerbasse videatur. 3. Hinc tamen, fratres dilectissimi, hinc admoneo pariter et consulo ne perniciosos vocibus temere credatis, ne fallacibus verbis consensum facile commodetis, ne pro luce tenebras, pro die noctem, pro cibo famem, pro potu sitim, venenum pro remedio, mortem pro salute sumatis. Nec aetas vos eorum nec auctoritas fallat, qui ad duorum presbyterorum veterem nequitia respondentes, sicut illi Susannam pudicam corrumpere et violare conati sunt, sic et hi adulterinis doctrinis ecclesiae pudicitiam corrumpere et veritatem evangelicam violare conantur.* See C. DELL'OSSO-M. VINCELLI-G. TAPONECCO (cur.), SCAR 5/1, pp. 294-295.

<sup>70</sup> Letter 41 had already been written in order to contrast the action of the same leaders, but epistle 43 shows a situation which "has deteriorated" (J.W. CLARKE II, 1984, p. 211). If in *Epistula* 41 the author appeared confident that their activity would have continued to fall away, in Epistle 43 the bishop of Carthage faces the

The author starts with generic admonitions against misleading voices and words, capable to cause disastrous damage to the *consortium* of believers. In order to describe the real meaning of such deceit and its effects, the author builds a sort of *climax* that opposes two antithetic terms, a positive and a negative one, in order to metaphorically describe what believing in those voices would mean, that is confusing darkness with light, night with day, hunger with nourishment, thirst with beverage, venom with medicine, death with life.

Cyprian points out the elements that may easily cheat good Christians, which are *aetas* and *auctoritas*, and resorts to the biblical example of the elders to prove his theory: the old men who tried to seduce Susanna were exactly characterized by both age and authority, but such prerogatives did not impede them to *corrumpere* the chaste woman. In the same way, those men could try to misdirect the *pudicitia ecclesiae* with their *adulterinis doctrinis*.

The elaboration starts, in other words, from the same presuppose of Irenaeus' exposition: the elders seem to anticipate the experience of those who menace the *consortium* of believers - in *Adversus Haereses* the *tertium comparationis* is represented by the weakness in front of passions, while in epistle 43, apart from *aetas*, *auctoritas* and *nequitia*, the principal point of contact is the tendency to mislead the church with false teachings. Moreover, the bishop of Carthage goes beyond the exegesis of Irenaeus, establishing an explicit association between the same church and Susanna: the connection is not simply inferred as a logical consequence from the combining between elders and the "dangerous men", but is further sustained by certain qualities independently shared by the biblical protagonist of *Dn* 13 and the community of believers: first of all, the intrinsic and permanent characteristic of *pudicitia*<sup>71</sup>, secondly, the specific condition of being depositary of an *evangelica veritas* threatened by an *adulterina doctrina* in the present circumstances.

As to further stress the connection between the church and Susanna, the author introduces in the final section of the passage words and expressions evoking the contrast between chastity and perversity; those terms are contextually attributed to both the woman and the community, qualified with the same adjective *pudicus* and equally presented as threatened by those who pervert and violate them (*corrumpere; violare*).

The case of Irenaeus and that one of Cyprian testify, in other words, the subsistence of a literary tradition that does not simply interpret Susanna as a generic symbol of good moral virtues recommended to the Christians, but rather exploits the mention of those qualities as a *tertium*

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fact that five presbyters, "of seniority and authority...have come out openly in support" of them (J.W. CLARKE II, 1984, p. 211).

<sup>71</sup> In this specific perspective the author expresses the most traditional approach to the interpretation of the figure of Susanna which will be described see *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 357-362.

*comparationis* propelling an exegetical connection between the biblical figure and the community of believers, of which the former becomes a type.

The association represents here something more than a generic, allegoric link<sup>72</sup>: Susanna is actually conceived as an anticipation of a specific kind of church, that one threatened by the perverse action of those who menace its chastity, as the biblical *seniores* exactly did with the woman. The biblical character becomes the antecedent of early groups of believers in front of a dangerous situation concerning the integrity of *doctrina*, and the biblical story offers all the instruments to decipher present events. If in the case of Irenaeus the elaboration is apparently endowed with a moral tension – since the menace is represented by those presbyters who let their *voluptas* prevail –, in the case of Cyprian the danger is rather conceived as a deviation in the process of scriptural interpretation, and the section should be for this reason more properly considered as characterized by an apologetic intention directed against Felicissimus and Augendus.

### **6.3.2. The iconography of Susanna. From the “menaced church” to the “persecuted church”**

The panorama concerning the iconographic reception of Susanna’s “tale” can be considered as substantially opposite to the literary one: consistently with the same nature of the source, *Dn* 13 seems to preferably receive in this context a typological interpretation, while its allegoric reading emerges as a possible, secondary outcome.

As K.A. SMITH correctly underlines, the iconographic reception of the “tale” “does not constitute a continuous tradition; it rather appears in geographical and chronological «pockets»”<sup>73</sup> which require a deeper investigation that goes beyond the funerary and salvific meaning mainly attributed by the scholars to the figure<sup>74</sup>. Those heterogeneous developments can substantially be ascribed to two different macro-groups:

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<sup>72</sup> About this perspective of use of *Dn* 13 in iconography see *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 362-365.

<sup>73</sup> K.A. SMITH, *Inventing Marital Chastity: the Iconography of Susan and the Elders in Early Christian Art*, “Oxford Art Journal” 16 (1993), pp. 3-24, in part. p. 3. About the diffusion of the theme in paleochristian iconography see H. SCHLOSSER, *Die Daniel-Susanna Erzählung in Bild und Literatur der christlichen Frühzeit*, Rom-Freiburg-Wien 1966 (Römische Quartalschrift Suppl. 30), pp. 243-249, in part. pp. 246-247.

<sup>74</sup> The same K.A. SMITH 1993, p. 3, mentions the vagueness of the interpretation of the image of Susanna, whose origin should be associated, according to the scholar, with the fact that the biblical story was since the beginning included in the so-called *Commendatio animae*, “the prayer for the dying known in Western ritual from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century”, where the woman was mentioned as an example of “salvation from false witness”. Such direct connection with the funerary liturgy apparently discouraged the inquiry into other possible meanings. A good bibliography concerning studies on the figure of Susanna is offered by the same K.A. SMITH 1993, p. 21, n. 3 and n. 4 (see *IBID.* also for a bibliography about the specific relation with *Commendatio animae*). Though the hypothesis of K.A. SMITH is certainly efficacious, it is necessary to remember that the

- 1) the “narrative” reproduction of extended sections of the story;
- 2) the representation of the so-called “type of Susanna”.

The first category includes the earliest representations of the episode, which do not specifically focus on a peculiar moment of the “tale” – contrary to what happens in the case of the Hebrews in the furnace or Daniel between the lions – but rather assume the entire narration in a range of different acceptations. Those “illustrations”, which will never obtain a definite structure nor a fixed iconographic schema, seem to testify a possible “allegoric” reading of the biblical story, as it will be exposed at a later date<sup>75</sup>.

The present chapter will specifically focus on the second category of representations extracted from *Dn* 13, that one of “Susanna’s type”: the diffusion of the woman’s portrait actually appears to correspond to a typological intention that reveals to be substantially coherent with the literary one, since in both cases the protagonist is strongly associated with the community.

In order to define the specificities of such iconographic reception, it is anyway necessary to take in consideration both the elaboration process of the type and a substantial problem surfacing from it: the ultimate resemblance between the generic portrait of the dead between the apostles and the punctual representation of the biblical character.

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interpretative vagueness represents a critical aspect in the study of iconography in a generic perspective, see *supra*, introduction, in part. p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> See *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 362-365.

a) *The “type of Susanna”*

In the context of the early “narrative cycles” reproducing extended sections of the biblical “tale” of *Dn* 13, it is already possible to identify the presence of specific representations of Susanna’s portrait, as it happens for instance on Gerona sarcophagus<sup>76</sup>.



(Fig. 23)

The fact that in such cases the image of the woman is included in the wide illustration of the biblical story leaves no doubt about the identification of the figure, so that also the distinctive attributes adopted by the source to characterize the representation can be easily determined. They reveal to consist in two principal elements:

- two male subjects flanking Susanna, which clearly reproduce the elders;
- the trees alluding to the garden in which the woman was walking when she met the *seniores*<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> The document and the figurative cycle will be analysed *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 362-365.

<sup>77</sup> The details assumed by iconography and introduced in the “type of Susanna” are mentioned in the narration of both *Dn*<sup>o</sup> and *Dn*<sup>og</sup>. The figures of the elders are protagonists of both versions of the story, and the garden is recalled in the passage of *Dn* 13:7 of both translations. Concerning the text of Susanna and its different versions see the systematic work by H. ENGEL, *Die Susanna Erzählung. Einleitung, Übersetzung und Kommentar zum Septuaginta-Text und zur Theodotion-Bearbeitung*, Göttingen 1985 (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 61), which does not anyway take in consideration the iconographic reception of the episode.

Such portraits of the protagonist, set in the frame of the wide illustration of the episode, can be assumed as the starting point of a process of “contraction”<sup>78</sup> that eventually leads to the isolation of the single “type of Susanna”, destined to spread as an independent theme in paleochristian documentation.

When the type starts circulating in an individual way, its palmar identification presents certain problems: contrary to what usually happens with the attributes chosen by iconography to connote and distinguish its numerous types (such as, for instance, the lions of Daniel or the furnace of the Hebrews), neither the trees nor the male subjects are endowed with a real distinctive power. In other words, the generalness of Susanna’s attributes implies a degree of uncertainty in the recognition of the scene.

The theme can be identified with a certain degree of reliability when both couples of attributes are represented, and mainly when the scene performs an “illustrative” feature, as it exemplarily happens on Arles sarcophagus (REP 3:41), ascribable to the second fourth of the 4<sup>th</sup> century: in this case, both the combined presence of trees and elders and the attitude of the latter – who “spy” the woman – facilitate the interpretation.



(Fig. 24)

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<sup>78</sup> It is possible to hypothesize that such process of contraction was favoured by both the instability of the “cycles” (see *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 362-365) and the necessity to create a “theme” which could be easily introduced in iconographic sequences in order to establish a dialogue with other scenes. As it will be described *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 362-365, the cycle of Susanna’s story generally occupies the entire central body of sarcophagi, and is not typologically linked with other figures.

The type can be easily recognized also in the already mentioned Pietro and Marcellino's lunette, or in the scene of Cimitero Maggiore<sup>79</sup> where, once again, both the *seniores* and the biblical garden are painted<sup>80</sup>:



(Fig. 25)

The difficulty unavoidably increases when Susanna is characterized by just one of those groups of attributes: in such occasions, the possibility to determine in a realistic and definitive perspective whether the scene specifically evokes the biblical tale seems to lose its consistence.

Two good examples of such kind are represented by the fragments coming from Arles (REP 3:108<sup>81</sup>; 3:33<sup>82</sup>; figg. 28 and 29). The presence of trees at both sides of an orant subject cannot

<sup>79</sup> J. WILPERT 1903, *fig.* 220; NR 12, p. 34.

<sup>80</sup> Other examples of that kind come from Museo Nazionale of Naples and Camposanto Teutonico (images from K. SMITH 1993, pp. 17-18).



(Fig. 26)



(Fig. 27)

<sup>81</sup> REP 3:108. Some bibliographical references: E. LE BLANT, *Sarcophages chrétiens antiques*, Arles 1878, p. 24, *tab.* 12:1; F. GARRUCCI V 1879, *tab.* 399:8; E. SMITH, *A source of Medieval Style in France*, "Art Studies" 2 (1924), p. 112, n. 71; J. WILPERT 1929, p. 123, *tab.* 141:4; M. LAWRENCE, *Columnar Sarcophagi in the Latin West*, "Art Bulletin" 14 (1932), p. 167, n. 11; A. SOPER, *The Italo-Gallic School of Early Christian Art*, "Art Bulletin" 20 (1938), p. 170, *fig.* 13; F. BENOÎT, *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, Paris 1954, cat. 85, p. 64, *tab.* 34:2; REP 3, p. 69.

<sup>82</sup> REP 3: 33. About the document see E. LE BLANT, *Étude sur les sarcophages chrétiens antiques de la ville d'Arles*, Paris 1878, pp. 22, nr. 13, *tab.* 11:2; F. GARRUCCI V 1879, pp. 147-148, *tab.* 400:3; E. BECKER 1909, p. 49, nr. 138, *tab.* 5:1; G. STUHLFAUTH 1925, pp. 83-84, nr. 19; J. WILPERT 1929, p. 95, *tab.* 61:3; F. BENOÎT, «Forma orbis Romani». *Carte archéologique de la Gaule Romaine, V: Carte (partie occidentale) et texte complet du département des Bouches-du-Rhône*, Paris 1936, p. 165, nr. 31; E. DINKLER 1938-1939, pp. 31, 33, *tab.* 2, nr. 10; F. GERKE 1940, pp. 247, n.1; 351 I 16; G. BOVINI 1949, pp. 200-201, 321, nr. 133; L. DE BRUYNE, *Materia e Spirito nella plastica paleocristiana*, "Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana" 25 (1949), pp. 30-31, n. 3; F. GERKE 1949,

actually be assumed as a diriment element to decide whether the figure next to Cana miracle and that one looking at the good shepherd are representations of Susanna or, more generally, undetermined portraits of the dead<sup>83</sup>. In such cases, the attempt to assume a definite position would actually appear unjustified.



(Fig. 28)



(Fig. 29)

*b) Susanna and the portrait of the dead: a case of “figurative resemblance”*

The panorama becomes even more complicated when the only attributes associated with the woman consist of the two male subjects evoking the elders.

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p. 17, tab. 4, nr. 13; F. BENOÎT 1954, p. 52, nr. 54, tab. 19:3; T. KLAUSER, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der christlichen Kunst*, “Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum” 3 (1960), p. 129, nr. 8; 131, tab. 8; 132; M. SOTOMAYOR, *Sarcófagos romano-cristianos des España. Estudio iconográfico*, Granada 1975, pp. 49; 194; W.N. SCHUMACHER, *Hirt und “Guter Hirt”*, Freiburg 1977 (Römische Quartalschrift, Suppl. 34), p. 145, n. 158; P.C.J. VAN DAEL, *De dode: een hoofdfiguur in de oudchristelijke kunst. Een iconografische studie over de afbeelding van de dode in de oudchristelijke grafkunst*, Amsterdam 1978, p. 2564, nr. 2:14; N. HIMMELMANN, *Über Hirten-Genre in der antiken Kunst*, Opladen 1980 (Abhandlungen der Rheinschisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 65), p. 162; C.A.M. AZVEDO, *O milagre de Canã na iconografia paleocristã, I: Catálogo dos monumentos*, Porto 1986, pp. 58-59, nr. 9, fig. S 58; G. KOCH, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, München 2000 (Handbuch der Archäologie 6), p. 476; REP 3, pp. 17-18-

<sup>83</sup> The cases in which the trees are reiterated as divisor elements in the whole iconographic theory, as it happens in Narbonne sarcophagus (REP 3:366), are even more problematic.



(Fig. 30)

At least a fresco of Priscilla catacomb<sup>84</sup> gives proof of the existence of an early representation of Susanna flanked by the *seniores*. If the interpretation of the painting is facilitated by the presence of other figurative motifs evoking the biblical narration<sup>85</sup>, the identification of the group becomes very hard when it shows as an “independent type”: in those cases, the scene reveals to be substantially identical to the most diffused “portrait of the dead”, which exactly shows a woman accompanied by the apostles.

Notwithstanding the instability of Peter’s and Paul’s visual features in ancient iconography<sup>86</sup>, some elements which allow to distinguish them from the *seniores* can be indicated. First of all, the presence of rolls offers a firm trace in favour of their individuation: this detail permits to assume the group placed in the central area of Saint Petersburg sarcophagus (REP 2:58) as a representation of the dead between the apostles, keeping Scriptures in their hands and evoking the glorification and the assumption of the document’s owner – symbol of the entire community – in *Christi greges*.



(Fig. 31)

On the contrary, when the male figures clearly grasp the woman’s arms with their hands, it appears realistic to guess a reference to the “tale” of First Testament, as it happens for instance with the central figures of Casauria (REP 2:96) and Barcelona sarcophagi<sup>87</sup>.



(Fig. 32)



(Fig. 33)

<sup>84</sup> See *infra*, chapter 7, p. 363.

<sup>85</sup> See *infra*, chapter 7, p. 363.

<sup>86</sup> For a rich description of the figure of the orant, with iconographic examples see H. LECLERCQ, s.v. “Orant/Orante”, in DACL 12, coll. 2291-2322.

<sup>87</sup> J. WILPERT 1929, *tab.* 110:3.

Notwithstanding this, a grounded distinction between the type of the dead and that one of Susanna reveals in many cases impossible, as the already mentioned Lateran sarcophagus (REP 1:39) shows: here the woman is surrounded by two male figures which are not characterized by the presence of rolls, nor by the assumption of a specific gesture. In this occasion it would seem ventured to attempt an identification of the scene either with the orant or with Susanna.



(Fig. 34)

From the evidences here produced, an issue spontaneously arises: considering the difficulty to associate a real distinctive trait to the figurative subject, it becomes natural to wonder whether the members of the community could actually recognize the woman menaced by the elders in iconographic programs as a specific theme.

In order to answer such reasonable question, which implicitly calls into doubt the same existence of a “type of Susanna”, it appears necessary to resort to the working of the same iconographic source: instead of searching for visual elements capable to “solve” the problem of these figures’ resemblance, it seems fruitful to consider the possibility that exactly such resemblance was not actually meant to be resolved. In other words, considering the “exegetical vocation” of protochristian iconography and the richness of the hermeneutical instruments adopted to convey theological meanings, it seems plausible to think that the figure of the orant and that one of Susanna had been conceived and structured *in order* to be overlapped one another.

In this perspective, their similarity can be considered as the eventual outcome of an interpretative process of identification between these iconographic subjects – a process which reminds in some measure of the already mentioned parallelism between the scene of the wise men and that one of the Hebrews<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> See *supra*, pp. 302-305.

c) From “figurative resemblance” to “exegetical interpretation”: the portrait of the “dead-martyr”

Considering the nature and the modalities of figurative interpretation, it seems possible to “exploit” the concept of “typology” in order to offer an explanation of the visual connection linking the representation of Susanna with that one of the dead. It cannot be actually excluded that the adoption of such exegetical perspective – usually introduced by iconography to associate figures of First Testament with scenes evoking Christ’s economy – has determined the definition of a direct connection between the biblical woman and the portrait of the believer, symbol of the entire church.

The association would unavoidably imply the transfer of the prerogatives and characteristics of the biblical type to the antitype, which means from Susanna to the owner of the document; at the same time, the experience of the latter should be considered as an accomplishment of the events happened to the former. In order to carefully assess this possibility, it becomes necessary to determine the contents on which the interpretation would be grounded.

If certainly it cannot be excluded that such contents deal with the quality of chastity – which means with the principal argument of the literary-allegoric interpretation of the biblical subject – the analysis of the iconographic programs apparently reveals the prevalence of a different perspective.

If, as it will be showed<sup>89</sup>, the extended illustrations of *Dn* 13 are preferably represented as “isolated” cycles, the famous casket from Brescia testifies an exceptional case in which the entire episode is connected with an external type, that one of Daniel in the lions’ den. Such iconographic link can be assumed as a first significant trace of the “martyrial character” attributed to the story of Susanna in figurative source<sup>90</sup>.



(Fig. 35)

<sup>89</sup> See *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 362-365.

<sup>90</sup> About Brescia casket, probably ascribable to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, see in part. C.J. WATSON, *The Program of the Brescia Casket*, “Gesta” 20/2 (1981), pp. 283-298; P.J. BAYENS, *The Brescia Casket: Patristic Exegesis and Biblical Iconography on Early Christian Alms Box*, 2004 and the chapter “Relics, Meaning and Response. Early Christian Reliquaries, Narrative and Not” in C. HAHN, *Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400- circa 1204*, University Park 2012, pp. 45-64.

The same trajectory surfaces from the already mentioned strigilated sarcophagus of Casauria<sup>91</sup>:



(Fig. 36)

The central type of Susanna threatened by the elders<sup>92</sup> is associated with two later scenes: the type of the loaves' multiplication and the image of Peter arrested, another clear allusion to martyrdom in a collective perspective<sup>93</sup>.

The martyrial interpretation of the figure exemplarily emerges from the exceptional fresco<sup>94</sup> of Celerina's *arcosolium* in Pretestato catacomb, which can be considered as the most interesting document including the type of Susanna in a typological elaboration.



(Fig. 37)

<sup>91</sup> See *supra*, p. 328.

<sup>92</sup> It is interesting to notice that the scene, whose interpretation is clearly confirmed by the attitude of the male subjects, occupies the central place in the body of the sarcophagus, which is usually devoted to the representation of the portrait of the dead between the apostles.

<sup>93</sup> About the meaning of the figure of Peter see *supra*, chapter 3, n. 157.

<sup>94</sup> See NR 5, p. 91; J. WILPERT 1903, *tab.* 251.

The scene of the woman undergoes here an efficacious exegetical transcription characterized by the unusual substitution of human figures with those of animals. The elders are represented as wolves, while the feminine subject as a lamb, as explicitly declared by the captions placed above each figure.

A first interpretation of the group derives from the wider analysis of the iconographic program: the lamb/Susanna corresponds, under the structural point of view, to the large image of Christ, overlooking it from the central position under the arch (in the *clipeus*), so that the biblical protagonist, menaced and threatened, is apparently conceived as a type of the same Jesus, whose connotation as lamb is well attested in evangelic tradition<sup>95</sup>.

The propelling argument of such a sensible link, immediately visible to the audience thank to the same structure of the chamber, can be identified in the sacrificial condition evoked by the lamb and contextually associated with both Christ and Susanna. The interpretation here developed is apparently grounded on the already described assumption of Jesus' *passio* as a paradigm and a starting point of the experience of the believers<sup>96</sup>, and it reveals the important role played by martyrdom theology in the iconographic reception of the "tale" of *Dn* 13<sup>97</sup>.

The interpretative range of Celerina's fresco can be enriched in the light of the pericope of *Mt* 10:16-23, a passage in which the same Christ compares the apostles to "sheep among wolves"<sup>98</sup>, with the intention to describe "il pericolo a cui sono esposti i discepoli inviati in missione"<sup>99</sup>. The link between the representation and the saying of Jesus seems to be in some measure sustained by both the presence of Peter and Paul in the right area under the arch, and the reiteration of the sheep on the arch's lunette. Such interesting option does not compromise the association between Susanna and Christ, but rather discloses the possible stratification of different exegetical levels, whose *tertium comparationis* is exactly the theme of martyrdom, which connects the scriptural character to the experience of both Christ and his first followers<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> About the meaning of the figure of the lamb in association with Easter and signally *Pascha passio* see G.H. MOHR 1984, pp. 25-27; P. MIQUEL, *Dictionnaire symbolique des animaux. Zoologie mystique*, Paris 1991, pp. 29-33. For an interpretation of the symbol of the wolf see G.H. MOHR 1984, p. 211, P. MIQUEL 1991, pp. 189-191, where the fresco of Pretestato is mentioned.

<sup>96</sup> See *supra*, chapter 2.

<sup>97</sup> An efficacious interpretation of the iconographic program of Celerina is offered by G. PELIZZARI 2013, pp. 78-80.

<sup>98</sup> *Mt* 10:16. "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves (πρόβατα ἐν μέσῳ λύκων). Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. 17. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. 18. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. 19. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20. for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". It must be noticed that the same connection between the story of Susanna and the passage of *Mt* can be found in Asterius the Sophist, *Commentariorum in Psalmos* 13.

<sup>99</sup> See J. GNILKA II 1986, p. 546. For a bibliography about the passage see *IBID.*, p. 560.

<sup>100</sup> The theme of "persecution" is explicitly cited in the subsequent passage of *Mt* 16:17-18.

In the light of such considerations, it seems possible to affirm that the portrait of the woman menaced by the evil *seniores* mainly obtains in paleochristian context a martyrial value, which may represent the same topic on which also the figurative overlapping with the image of the dead would be based. In other words, through the expedient of the visual resemblance, the representation of the document's owner would gain a "martyrial interpretation" and would perform the role of accomplishment and fulfilment of Susanna's story.

*d) From the "elders" to the "apostles". A problematic connection*

An important issue unavoidably raises from the considerations so far exposed: if the typological connection between Susanna and the orant does not imply theological difficulties, the situation changes for the figurative couple formed by the elders and the apostles, whose exegetical association seems at least problematic.

It actually becomes extremely difficult to explain *how* iconography could admit the definition of a visual overlapping between the biblical "persecutors" and the disciples of Christ, mainly considering that early believers – as "Roman viewers" in general – were strongly sensitive to such stimuli<sup>101</sup>.

If a real explanation for such a critical point cannot actually be offered, the same undeniable resemblance between the portrait of Susanna and that one of the dead allows – in reverse – to ascertain a significant evidence: apparently, the "scandalous" superimposition between subjects such as Peter and Paul and the impious *seniores* did not prevail on the more cogent necessity to connect two "events", that is the biblical martyrial experience of Susanna and the historical martyrial condition of the church. The typological process would reveal, in this sense, to involve the complex theological value attributed to the representations, which must have been assumed in their global meaning, and not the single elements of which they are composed.

This consideration allows to fully understand in which perspective the situation of menace and difficulty evoked by Susanna could be associated with a theme reproducing the dead woman in the peak of her glorification: the heart of the ancient martyrdom theology<sup>102</sup> actually resides in the idea that the moment of the persecution already corresponds with the achievement of the real salvation. The paradoxical association elaborated by iconography expresses through the instruments of visual

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<sup>101</sup> For an overall view about the importance of visual in antiquity and signally in Roman world see P. ZANKER 2006.

<sup>102</sup> The semantic value of the overlapping between the images has been underlined also by K.A. SMITH 1993, p. 11, but the scholar connects it with the elaboration of the ethic theme of "marital chastity". Though such reference to chastity may be implicitly present in those portraits of Susanna, iconography seems to ground its elaboration on the martyrial theme. About the allegoric reception in both literature and iconography see *infra*, chapter 7, pp. 362-365.

source the same paradoxical character of martyrdom, which is the space in which Christians could reach their final glorification in the context of their earthly humiliation<sup>103</sup>.

In the light of these arguments, it seems appropriate to bestow on Susanna's "tale" an essential role in the typological interpretation of the historical condition of the church, mainly because of its privileged relation with the type of the orant which alludes to the entire community.

The reconstruction of the different steps in the elaboration of the scene of Susanna offered an occasion to both confirm the effective existence of a specific "type" of the woman, and delineate the exegetical urgencies that prevailed and determined its structure and use.

If it is true that literary source mainly assumes the biblical "tale" in an allegoric perspective, at least in two cases the story of the woman is linked with the experience of the menaced church; in iconography such tradition strongly imposes itself, so that the type of Susanna obtains an important function in the self-definition of *ecclesia* as *ecclesia martyrurum*.

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<sup>103</sup> The theme of the "ribaltamento assiologico" activated by martyrdom is investigated by R. CACITTI 1993, pp. 128-129, through the analysis of a passage of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* V 32:1, where the martyrial condition is characterized by the polar inversion between what has been obtained on earth and what will be granted in eschatology. An antithetic structure is elaborated by the author to convey the idea of a "ribaltamento prospettico", in which sufferance immediately equals the same sufferance's fruits, death corresponds to life and *servitus* to reign.

#### 6.4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the exam of the documentation, the direct association of *Dn* “tales” with the present life of the communities and with the experience of their members revealed as a consistent and well attested perimeter of their protochristian interpretation. Such perspective seems to find its most fruitful developments in African context, probably because in that area the theological issues expressed by *Dn* protagonists and connected with the theme of martyrdom played a role of great importance.

The experience constantly evoked by the ancient sources through the application of such “typology of the church” is martyrdom in any acceptance. The principal literary outcomes derive from the work of Cyprian and Tertullian: if the former uses the story of Daniel’s companions to sustain and ground his points of view concerning the concrete running of his persecuted community, the latter resorts to the same motifs in order to enrich his theological exposition about the fundamental importance of Christian martyrdom.

In Cyprian’s letters and *De Lapsis*, the three Hebrews’ tale is constantly “manipulated” and adjusted to every problematic circumstance presenting to the bishop. In this way, the protagonists become the types of *confessores* with two different objectives: on one side, they testify the impossibility for those who survived the persecutions to mediate divine forgiveness on behalf of those who lapsed; on the other, they express the full dignity of martyrdom *sine passione*, legitimating the condition of those who would have been ready to sacrifice their lives for God. In Tertullian work, the story of the Hebrews is mentioned both to demonstrate the essential role of martyrdom, predisposed and wanted by God since First Testament, and to particularly stress its “prophetic component”, that is the role of the Spirit in the same activation of such event and its full realization.

The variety of *Dn* “tales” use in African context confirms, in a generic sense, the centrality of martyrdom, which occupied an important space in the balance of the life of those communities; it also reveals in the fullest way the adaptability and flexibility of this biblical sections, which apparently represented a sort of “raw material” meant to be moulded in order to express a range of heterogeneous contents. The effective centrality of persecution in that peculiar *Sitz im Leben* unavoidably incentivized the assumption of a typological exegesis immediately pointed at the community and capable to directly involve its members in the interpretative process.

If African Christianities can be considered as the privileged space to study such hermeneutics, the analysis of figurative documentation allows to identify in the “typology of the church” an instrument that massively determined and oriented the same elaboration process of each type

extracted from the “tales”. If iconographic programs certainly show many cases in which the biblical characters are connected with images of the dead and with symbols of the community, the real specificity of *Dn* types reception should be rather researched in their internal features and in the path that leads from the biblical assumption to the definition of a stable visual composition.

In the case of the Hebrews’ types, such process revealed to be connected with the cogent necessity to evoke the “event” of martyrdom and persecution, stressing the points of contact between the scriptural story and the circumstances of the present history, from the moment of the idolatry refusal to that one of the exposition to flames. In this occasion, the parallelism between the scene of the wise men adoration and that one of Nabuchadnezzar’s statue offered an occasion to both reflect about the working of this source – which combines different themes because of their intrinsic meaning – and fully understand the exegetical process that brought to the definition of an iconographic type.

Concerning the figure of the prophet Daniel, it has been necessary to reflect about a specific district of its adoption, once again in African Christianities: in this context, its image presents peculiar features that seem to mainly depend on the connection between this scene and the portrait of martyrs *ad bestias*.

The most interesting occasion to reflect about the role of “church typology” in visual was offered by the case of Susanna. If the literary approach to *Dn* 13 mainly pursues allegoric solutions connected with the theme of chastity, at least the cases of Irenaeus of Lyons and Cyprian demonstrate the existence of a peculiar tradition that conceives the story of the woman as a type of the threatened and menaced community, though without a specific reference to the reality of persecutions.

The study of iconography, on the contrary, revealed a more decisive “martyrial orientation” in the adoption of this subject, whose representation is substantially overlapped with the portrait of the dead between the apostles. The analysis of iconographic cases such as that one of the “lamb between wolves” in Priscilla catacomb, allow to ascertain the special connection between Susanna and the theme of sacrifice and persecution, so that the parallelism with the image of the orant can be assumed as an attempt to describe the Christian community as *ecclesia martyrum*. The figure of the woman threatened by the evil elders seems to represent the privileged instrument through which the church visually expresses its self-definition, which apparently passes through the assumption of a “biblical event” interpreted in a martyrial sense.

The core of the overlapping should be probably researched in the “paradoxical essence” of persecution, which overturns a condition of sufferance into glorification and eschatological reward. In this perspective, it becomes possible to resolve the apparent difficulty represented by the

iconographic identification between the elders and the apostles: apparently, the real protagonist of the typological connection is not represented by the individual characters of the two compositions, but rather by their global thematic core, that is the “event of martyrdom”, seamlessly attested from First Testament to the present of the church, and assumed as the expression of the contextual achievement of both the extreme humiliation and the final Christian perfection.