The Face of the Dead
and the Early Christian World

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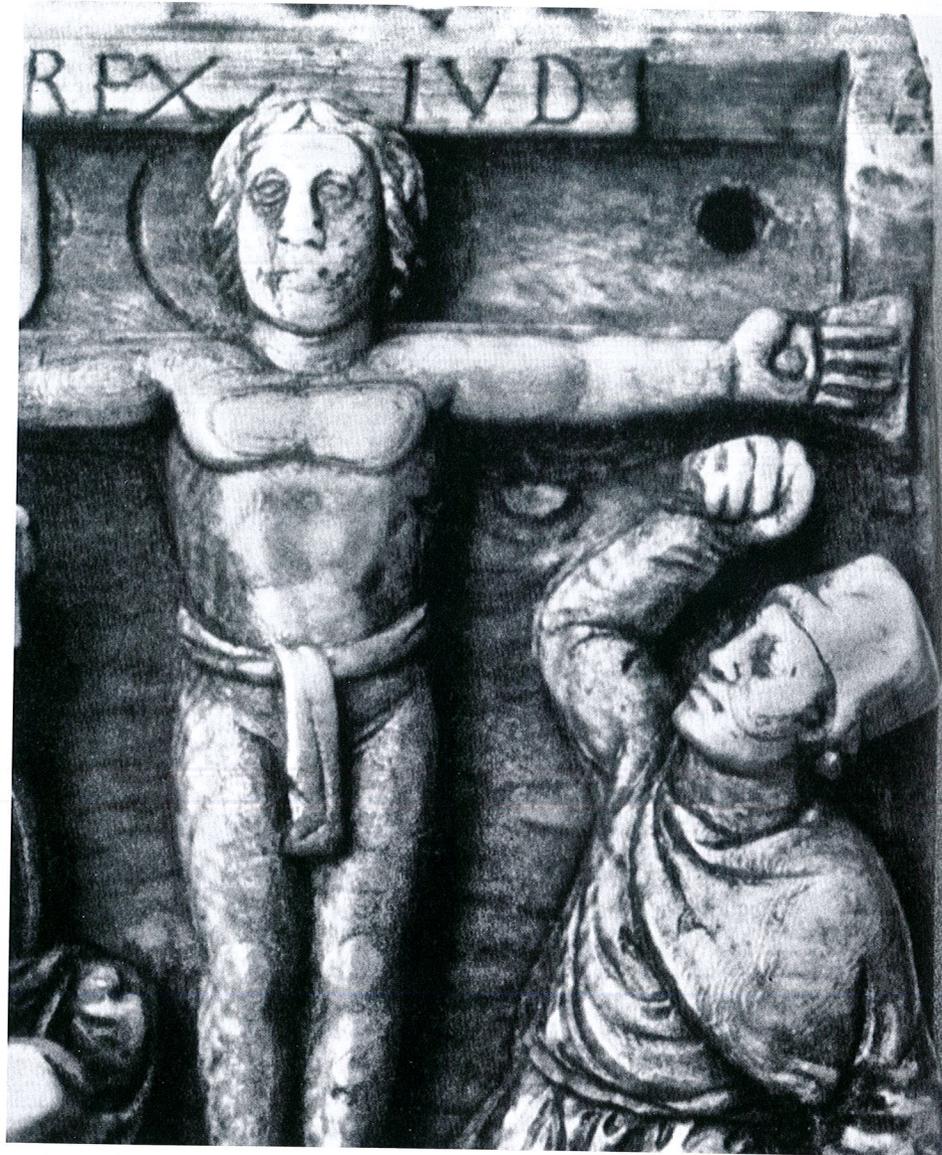
9. London, British Museum, detail of a Crucifixion scene (cf. Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Frühchristliche Kunst*, München 1958, tab. 98).

Manuela Studer-Karlen

The Depiction of the Dead in Early Christian Art (Third to Sixth Century)

It is an established fact that, as on early Christian sarcophagi, the dead portrayed in catacomb paintings could be incorporated into different compositions, thus enabling them to be projected into various biblical contexts to formulate their hopes for a life in the hereafter.[1] Certainly, the cause of death is not depicted and is only extremely rarely mentioned in inscriptions.[2] Also, the dead's outer appearance does not show signs of death. The question is: How, in Late Antique art, can a figure in a scene be recognized as being dead. These figures occur particularly in the context of Christian resuscitation.

Resuscitation in Late Antique art

Christ appears since the third century as a performer of miracles.[3] In compositions representing miracle scenes it is striking that the sick or disabled only rarely bear distinguishing marks that indicate their affliction. Many more stand beside Christ and appear healthy and healed. These depictions do not correspond

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1. Norbert Zimmermann, "Verstorbene im Bild. Intention römischer Katakombenmalerei", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, L (2007), pp. 154-79; Manuela Studer-Karlen, *Verstorbenendarstellungen auf frühchristlichen Sarkophagen*, Turnhout 2012.

2. Concerning these inscriptions, see particularly: Jutta Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen des 4. und 6. Jahrhunderts im Westen des Römischen Reiches*, Città del Vaticano 2003. The mention of the cause of the death in the long inscription on the sarcophagus of Pontia today in the Museum in Spoleto is an exception (second half of the fourth century). Jutta Dresken-Weiland, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage II, Italien mit einem Nachtrag Rom und Ostia, Dalmatien, Museen der Welt*, Mainz 1998, p. 34, n. 107; Studer-Karlen, *Verstorbenendarstellungen* (n. 1), pp. 92-94. For the inscription, see: Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen* (n. 2), pp. 33, 51, 54, 95-96.

3. Concerning the healing scenes, see, for example: Claudia Nauerth, "Heilungswunder in der frühchristlichen Kunst", in *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, Herbert Beck, Peter C. Bol edd., Frankfurt 1982, pp. 339-346; David Knipp, *Christus Medicus in der frühchristlichen Sarkophagskulptur. Ikonographische Studien der Sepulkralkunst des späten vierten Jahrhunderts*, Leiden 1998; Paul Corby Finney, "Do you think God is a Magician?", in *Akten des Symposiums Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, Guntram Koch ed., Mainz 2002, pp. 99-108.

with biblical accounts, in which the emphasis is placed on the portrayal of the illnesses, but instead emphasize the great healing power of Christ who has healed and freed the person from their affliction.[4] The frequent repetition of miracle images, especially on sarcophagi, implies that Christ was identified as a healer, a performer of miracles, and that Christians have represented spiritual purification through images of bodily wholeness.[5]

It is the same for the rendering of various resuscitations in early Christian art. The only reason the different resuscitations are not accounted for is to avoid clarifying the cause of death.[6] It was the healing power of Christ that was meant to be particularly emphasized rather than the already performed miracle. This can be particularly well observed in the examples of resuscitation of the daughter of Jairus through Christ and that of Tabitha through Peter. In both scenes, the sick woman is on a bed.

A figure lying on a bed

Both the resuscitation through Christ of Jairus's daughter[7] and the miraculous cure of Tabitha[8] involve the resurrection of a young woman, and the corresponding texts use similar language to describe the two miracles.[9] Neither episode exists in the catacomb paintings. On the sarcophagi, only two preserved examples of the resuscitation of Tabitha remain,[10] while that of the daughter of Jairus is very rarely to be found[11]. But the miracle is related in all the synoptic gospels, and

4. Justin J. Meggitt, "The historical Jesus and Healing: Jesus' miracles", in *Spiritual healing: scientific and religious perspectives*, Fraser Watts ed., Cambridge 2011, pp. 17-43.

5. Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton 2003², p. 61.

6. With these examples, a full understanding is in no way the objective. However, through the representative choice they offer, a partial understanding transpires.

7. Daniela Calcagnini, "Una scena poco attestata nelle testimonianze del IV secolo: la risurrezione della figlia di Giairo", in *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni*, LIX (1993), pp. 225-246; Daniela Calcagnini, "La risurrezione della Figlia di Giairo", in *Temi di Iconografia paleocristiana*, Fabrizio Bisconti ed., Città del Vaticano 2000, pp. 269-270.

8. Umberto Utro, "Tabitha", in *Temi di Iconografia paleocristiana* (n. 7), pp. 284-285.

9. Christ healing Jairus's daughter: Matt 9:18-26; Mark 5:23-43; Luke 8:41-56. The raising of Tabitha: Acts 9:36-42; for both scenes see also Felicity Harley-McGowan, "Death is Swallowed Up in Victory: Scenes of Death in Early Christian Art and the Emergence of Crucifixion Iconography", *Cultural Studies Review*, 17 (2011), pp. 108-110.

10. Brigitte Christern-Briesenick, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage III, Frankreich, Algerien, Tunesien*, Mainz 2003, pp. 52, 233, ns. 67, 497; Guntram Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, München 2000, pp. 95, 183, 308, 323, 329, 331, 372-3, 470-1, 483, 496; Studer-Karlen, *Verstorbenendarstellungen* (n. 1), pp. 198-199.

11. Each account reports that when Jesus arrived at Jairus's house, the daughter had died. Examples: Hugo Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage I, Rom und Ostia*, Wiesbaden 1967, pp. 7-8, ns. 7; Dresken-Weiland, *Repertorium II* (n. 2), pp. 3-4, n. 10; Christern-Briesenick, *Repertorium III* (n. 10), pp. 15-17, n. 32. In addition, there is perhaps still an unknown fragment from Rome. See: Alejandro Recio Veganzones, "Fragmentos de Sarcófagos Paleocristia-

both scenes were taken up again in ivory works.[12] Particularly worth mentioning in this connection is the Brescia Casket, dating from AD 400, which depicts both scenes (fig. 1).[13]

It is striking that in examples of both sarcophagi and ivory work, the composition focuses each time on the central action. Christ or Peter grasps the wrist of the young woman sitting upright in bed, and the person resuscitated is generally accompanied by apostles. Women, either standing or crouching beside or behind the girl's bed, address the resuscitated person with requests and gestures of mourning to symbolize their hopes of deserving resurrection[14]. The representation of girls not yet wrapped in cerements to identify their corpse is commonly found, but the upright position of the resuscitated girl announces the already successful outcome of the miracle. Neither is the cause of her death recognizable, nor the resuscitated girl characterised by an outward appearance of death (fig. 1).

In contrast, a person lying on a bed is the normal way of representing someone who is either sick or dead if they are not sleeping. An example is the miniature from the Genesis of Vienna,[15] which depicts the death of Deborah in the upper register, and the nativity of Benjamin and the death of Rachel in the lower register (fol. 13 v).[16] Since neither of the dead bodies is characterized by illness or death, it is the known biblical context that dictates the interpretation of their physical state, a lying position (fig. 2).

The rear of the Brescia Casket presents the story of Ananias and Sapphira, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, as an example of deceit and venality (fig. 3).[17] To the left, with Ananias' money bag at his feet, Peter sits in judgment before

nos ineditos, existentes en Roma o della Desaparecidos", *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, LVIII (1982), pp. 348-51, fig. 4.

12. Herbert L. Kessler, "Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles on some early Christian Ivories", *Gesta*, XVIII (1979), pp. 109-19.

13. Wolfgang Friedrich Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, Mainz 1976, pp. 77-78, n. 107; Carolyn Joslin Watson, "The Program of the Brescia Casket", *Gesta* XX (1981), pp. 283-298; Catherine Brown Tkacz, *The Key of the Brescia Casket: Typology and the early Christian Imagination*, Paris 2001, pp. 101-102, 228. As well on the sixth-century ivory pyxis in Pesaro, which presents the resuscitation of the daughter of Jairus. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* (n. 13), p. 114, n. 183; Clementina Rizzardi, "La Pisside eburnea del Tesoro della Cattedrale di Pesaro", in *Atti del IV Congressa Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana II*, Firenze 1986, pp. 609-620; Clementina Rizzardi, "Pisside con scene di miracolo", in *Pietro e Paolo: la storia, il culto, la memoria nei primi secoli*, Angela Donati ed., Milano 2000, pp. 217-218.

14. Nurth Keenan-Kedar, "The New Images of Woman in Early Christian Art", *Assaph*, 2 (1996), pp. 83-92.

15. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. Theol. gr. 31. Barbara Zimmermann, *Die Wiener Genesis im Rahmen der antiken Buchmalerei. Ikonographie, Darstellung, Illustrationsverfahren und Aussageintention*, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 137-139, fig. 27.

16. Death of Debora (Gen 35:8): nurse of Rebecca, death at the oak in Bethel. Nativity of Benjamin and Death of Rebecca (Gen 35:16-20).

17. Two moments from Acts 5: 1-10 are depicted. See: Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* (n. 13), pp. 77-8, n. 107; Watson, "The Program of the Brescia Casket" (n. 13), pp. 283-298; Tkacz, *The Key of the Brescia Casket* (n. 13), pp. 41-43, 103, 106, 223; Harley-McGowan, "Death is Swalled up in Victory" (n. 9), pp. 111-112.

Sapphira, while to the right, four young men carry away Ananias' corpse. When Peter confronted Ananias, the man died. Yet Ananias seems to gesture fully with his left arm and, though his eyes are closed, his face remains turned towards his wife Sapphira. In the biblical account, these two events are separated by three hours, but on the casket, the death and the judgment are simultaneous in the same pictorial space. This device shows effectively not only the surprise and death of Ananias, but also Peter's prophesy, which is signalled quite literally by the portrayal of the young men who carry out the body. Peter prophesied that the same man who buried Ananias would carry Sapphira to her own burial. On a few sarcophagi fragments, scenes can be found which might indicate the punishment of Ananias; however, this is by no means certain.[18]

The shroud

From a chronological point of view, Christ's resuscitation of the young son of the widow of Naim is his first miracle.[19] This scene, however, was used neither in catacomb paintings nor in everyday subjects. The first examples on sarcophagi originate from the first third of the fourth century.[20] The scene is striking due to the following characteristics: the youth appears stereotyped as a shrouded corpse, leaving the face free either on the floor or in a sarcophage, and Christ waves an unbiblical wand (*virga*), which imparts power by touch.[21] The account of this resuscitation scene in the Bible does not refer to the art of enveloping the body in the shroud,[22] since, according to Graffitto in Comodilla, it was definitely part of the duties of the grave-digger.[23] On this marble fissure, the scene is drawn from reality: placed at the feet of the grave-digger, there is a finished, shrouded corpse, ready to be buried.

This way, the shrouded body is concerned with conveying a realistic picture in which the art of burial is known to the common man. It appears to have been crucial to integrate the everyday sphere of the shrouded corpse into the setting of the picture. The youth from Nain is explicitly recognizable as a resuscitated person, as the face shows no individual or gender traits. In most cases, for the resuscitation of the youth from Naim, the shroud is presented in a sarcophagus. Even this aspect on the sarcophagi again describes a real burial form and testifies to a significant reality.[24] In this scene, as in other scenes, there are also secondary figures who are striking due to their particularly imploring attitude. Similarly, this scene uses the occasional woman as a variation, her arms outstretched behind the resuscitated person.[25] Normally, she signifies a widow requesting the resuscitation of her son. Her gesture clearly shows that she inwardly wants to participate in the miracle. The woman can be considered to stand for parental identity, projected into the picture by her situation.[26]

The Raising of Lazarus is by far the most frequent example of early Christian resuscitation, and is encountered in all forms of early Christian art.[27] The most significant moment of the miracle is emphasized by the illustration of Christ standing at the grave of Lazarus whom he has raised from the dead. Lazarus is also shown as a shrouded corpse, although standing in his *aedicule*.[28] In this scene, the contrast is particularly striking, because although Lazarus is still easily recognizable as dead due to his shroud, he is always shown with open eyes, an unmistakeable sign of life and striking proof of the miracle. The proximity to the grave of the kneeling woman suggests she is Lazarus' sister, Martha.[29] If there are two women shown at the grave of Lazarus, they are generally considered to be Martha and Mary. Given that Lazarus' kneeling sister also begs for salvation, she lends herself as a means to identity the figure of the grave owner. This could particularly be the case when the raising of Lazarus is not shown with a kneeling woman, but instead with the figure of a begging woman, whose addition is at the suggestion of the Apostles (fig. 4).[30] Here, the person who ordered this picture was able to project themself into this figure and thus ensure their own salvation.

18. Kessler, "Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles" (n. 12), pp. 90-1; Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (n. 10), pp. 182-183.

19. Luke 7:11-17.

20. For the scene, as in all examples, see: Claudia Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben. Die christlichen Totenerweckungen in der spätantiken Kunst*, Wiesbaden 1980, pp. 5-58; Daniela Calcagnini, "Resurrezione del Figlio della vedova di Naim", in *Temi di Iconografia paleocristiana* (n. 7), pp. 268-269; Id., "La resurrezione della figlia di Giairo", in *Temi di Iconografia paleocristiana* (n. 7), pp. 269-270.

21. Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben* (n. 19), pp. 126-131; Umberto Utro, "Virga", in Bisconti, *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (n. 7), pp. 300-302; Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods* (n. 5), pp. 54-92; Vasiliki Tsamakda, "Eine ungewöhnliche Darstellung der Heilung des Paralytikers in der Domitilla-Katakombe", *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie*, XV (2009), pp. 25-46.

22. The New Testament accounts certainly stress that Christ was wrapped in a linen cloth, or that either or both Christ and Lazarus were in shrouds (Mt 27:59; Mark 15:46; Lk 23:53; John 11:44; 20:7). In reference to shrouds, see in particular: Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben* (n. 19), pp. 34-58. Nauerth makes the comment that shrouds were wrapped similiarly to the swaddling clothes of Jesus in the crib.

23. Johannes Georg Deckers, Gabriele Mietke, Albrecht Weiland, Carlo Carletti, *Die Katakombe "Commodilla": Repertorium der Malereien*, Città del Vaticano 1994, pp. 19-20, fig. 8. See: Giovanni Battista De Rossi, *Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores* 2, pars 1, Roma 1888, p. 6446.

24. Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben* (n. 19), pp. 29, 33.

25. Brandenburg, *Repertorium I* (n. 11), pp. 12-13, 219-220, ns. 13, 527; Dresken-Weiland, *Repertorium II* (n. 2), pp. 47-48, n. 138.

26. See: Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben* (n. 19), pp. 16-20; Studer-Karlen, *Verstorbenendarstellungen* (n. 1), p. 197.

27. John 11:1-44. For this scene, see: Jan Stanislaw Partyka, *La résurrection de Lazare dans les Monuments funéraires des nécropoles chrétiennes à Rome*, Warsaw, 1993; Melania Guj, "Lazzaro", in Bisconti, *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (n. 7), pp. 201-203; Harley-McGowan, "Death is Swalled up in Victory" (n. 9), pp. 107-108.

28. The representation of Lazarus as a shrouded corpse is found in the writings of St John, an acceptance of an equivalent: reality: John 11:44; 19:40.

29. In the catacomb paintings, the identification of a woman assisting the miracle of Lazarus with a sister of the resuscitated Lazarus is not always without problems. See: Jan Stanislaw Partyka, *La résurrection de Lazare* (n. 26), pp. 58-59.

30. Dresken-Weiland, *Repertorium II* (n. 2), pp. 18-19, n. 58; Christern-Briesenick, *Repertorium III* (n. 10), pp. 18-19, n. 34.

In all scenic connections, the shrouded corpse is always associated with someone who has died. A well-known example is the episode from the Book of Kings on the Brescia Casket.[31] In the upper register, on the left-hand side, the disobedient prophet killed by a lion is depicted, as well as his earlier punishment after he disobeyed Jeroboam, a subject unique in early Christian art.[32] The shrouded corpse of the prophet is lying on the ground flanked by a lion and a donkey. In this way, it is immediately clear that it must concern someone who has died.

The small naked figures

A further scene showing the dead is the Ezekiel version.[33] Naturally, this scene can be found in early Christian art, with the exception of the paintings in the synagogue in Dura Europos,[34] on a gold Roman glass[35] and only rarely on some early Christian sarcophagi.[36] This episode presents, as a second picture element, a naked cadaver that can be placed next to the body in a burial sheet to denote a dead person. Likewise, the resuscitation on the sarcophagi, as well as on some presented sarcophagi relics which recall it, orientates itself to the Ezekiel version.

However, as the resuscitation on early Christian sarcophagi is, without exception, performed by Christ, it is clearly taken from the New Testament. For the most part, Christ uses a staff to touch the head of the small, nude figure lying on

31. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* (n. 13), pp. 77-78, n. 107; Watson, "The Program of the Brescia Casket" (n. 13), pp. 283-298; Tkacz, *The Key of the Brescia Casket* (n. 13), pp. 101-102, 228.

32. 3 Kings 13: 24-8 and 3 Kings 12:26-13:4.

33. For the scene in Early Christian art, see: Beat Brenk, *Tradition und Neuerung in der christlichen Kunst des ersten Jahrtausends. Studien zur Geschichte des Weltgerichtsbildes*, Wien 1966, pp. 149-157; Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben* (n. 19), pp. 77-105; Myla Perraymond, "Visione di Ezechiele", in Bisconti, *Temi di iconografia paleocristiana* (n. 7), p. 303.

34. The scene (Ez:37) is displayed in two episodes on the north wall in the lowest register. The resuscitated man here is definitely Ezekiel. See: Beat Brenk, *Tradition und Neuerung* (n. 32), pp. 149-151, figs. 14-15; Bezalel Narkiss, "N. 341 Synagogue wall painting with biblical representations", in Kurt Weitzmann ed., *Age of Spirituality*, New York, 1979, pp. 372-374; Carl Hermann Kraeling et alii, *The Synagogue. Excavations at Dura Europos. Final Report, VIII, 1*, New York 1979, pp. 178-202, pl. XXI, LXIX, LXX; Dieter Korol (in Verbindung mit Jannike Rieckesmann), "Neues zu den alt- und neutestamentlichen Darstellungen im Baptisterium von Dura-Europos", in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, 176*, David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, Øyvid Norderval, Christer Hellholm edd., Berlin 2011, pp. 1611-1672, 1823-1854.

35. The damaged Cologne gold glass shows the scene next to further episodes from the Old and New Testaments. The gold glass is stored in the British Museum in London (Inv. Nr. 628). See: Brenk, *Tradition und Neuerung* (n. 32), p. 152, fig. 52; Josef Engemann, "Bemerkungen zu spätrömischen Gläsern mit Goldfoliendekor", in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, XI/XII (1968-9), p. 21. Brenk sees the awaker as Ezekiel; Engelmann identifies him as Christ. The true meaning cannot, unfortunately, be clarified.

36. For the example on the sarcophagi, see combined and with further reading: Studer-Karlen, *Verstorbenendarstellungen* (n. 1), p. 186.

the ground. A few sarcophagi show a different, rather unusual rendering. In this connection, it is especially interesting to observe that the various body postures of the naked figures (lying; reclining; upright) could explain the different phases of the resuscitation process:[37] the use of the straightening up of the naked person into a fully upright position to depict a complete resuscitation is a particularly visual means of expression in pictorial language. Given that it would be understood that the eschatological resuscitation scene in the New Testament echoes the Old Testament Ezekiel version, it is Christ who resurrects the dead on the Last Day of Judgement.[38] It provides a general reference for the dead person, whose belief in the resurrection is embodied in the small, naked figure. On a fragmented sarcophagus frieze in San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura, a small, naked figure lies directly next to the dead woman or Orans figure, its head seeming to overlap the feet.[39] Such proximity to the dead Orans figure in the resuscitation scene shows that the hope of resurrection is purposely given particular emphasis.

On three Constantine sarcophagi friezes, a link is made between Lazarus and the resuscitated person, resulting in the exceptional addition of a small, naked figure on the Constantine sarcophagus frieze stored in the Montemartini Central in Rome (fig. 5). Following the resuscitation of Lazarus, Christ resurrects two naked figures, one lying down, and the other, standing.[40] The double appearance of the naked figure with regard to the contents of the episodes is consequently the binding typological element between Lazarus' two forms of awakening (resuscitation and resurrection) and expresses, through its repetition, the hope of everlasting life. The very same small, naked figure stands next to Lazarus awaking from the dead on the sarcophagus frieze in the Pio Cristiano Museum in the Vatican.[41] The New Testament resuscitation, which echoes the Ezekiel version, is absent in this example, however. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the naked figure refers to the resuscitation in which he otherwise takes part The phenomenon repeats itself again on the sarcophagus fragment, which can also be found in the Pio Cristiano Museum.[42] Again, the tiny, naked figure stands directly next to Christ as he brings Lazarus back to life.[43] Contrary to the two previous examples, the figure of Christ who referred to the tiny, naked figure is now absent Obviously, the tiny figure

37. See particularly: Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben* (n. 19), pp. 97-105.

38. Mathews, *The Clash of God* (n. 5), pp. 54-91.

39. Brandenburg, *Repertorium I* (n. 11), pp. 288-289, n. 693; Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (n. 10), p. 264.

40. Brandenburg, *Repertorium I* (n. 11), pp. 337-338, n. 807; Nauerth, *Vom Tod zum Leben* (n. 19), pp. 32-33; Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (n. 10), pp. 148, 262.

41. Brandenburg, *Repertorium I* (n. 11), pp. 18-19, n. 21.

42. Brandenburg, *Repertorium I* (n. 11), pp. 21-22, n. 24.

43. The sarcophagus was deeply reworked in the eighteenth century. The figure, however, belongs to the original state. For this, see: Cristiana Gennaccari, "Museo Pio Cristiano: documenti inediti di rilavorazioni e restauri settecenteschi sui sarcofagi paleocristiani", *Bollettino dei Monumenti Musei e Gallerie Pontificie*, XVI (1996), pp. 157, 257-259, Abb. 1; Giandomenico Spinola, "I Sarcofagi paleocristiani del Museo Pio Cristiano Ex Lateranense nei Musei Vaticani", *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, LXXVII (2001), pp. 545-569, figs. 7-9.

gains in independence and can also appear in other compositions to establish the identity of the grave owner.[44]

Concluding remarks

The small, naked figures from the Ezekiel version, as well as the shrouded corpses from different image contexts, definitively refer to the dead, although the deceased in the catacomb paintings or in the sarcophagi do not allow themselves to be depicted as dead. It can be further demonstrated that the deceased on the sarcophagi could identify themselves more or less with the daughter of Jairus or with Tabitha, who, however, are not considered as dead. With the help of different picture elements, it is possible for the dead, as well as their families, to integrate the iconographical context through the pleading gesture and, in this way, partici- pate in the biblical scene with the hope of being given everlasting life through the symbol of Christ.

The conclusion can be drawn that in early Christian art, while the resuscita- tion scenes form the framework within which most dead are depicted, outside this framework, other scene compositions respectively render the unique.

44. In reference to the problem and the examples, see: Studer-Karlen, *Verstorbenendarstel- lungen* (n. 1), pp. 188-189.
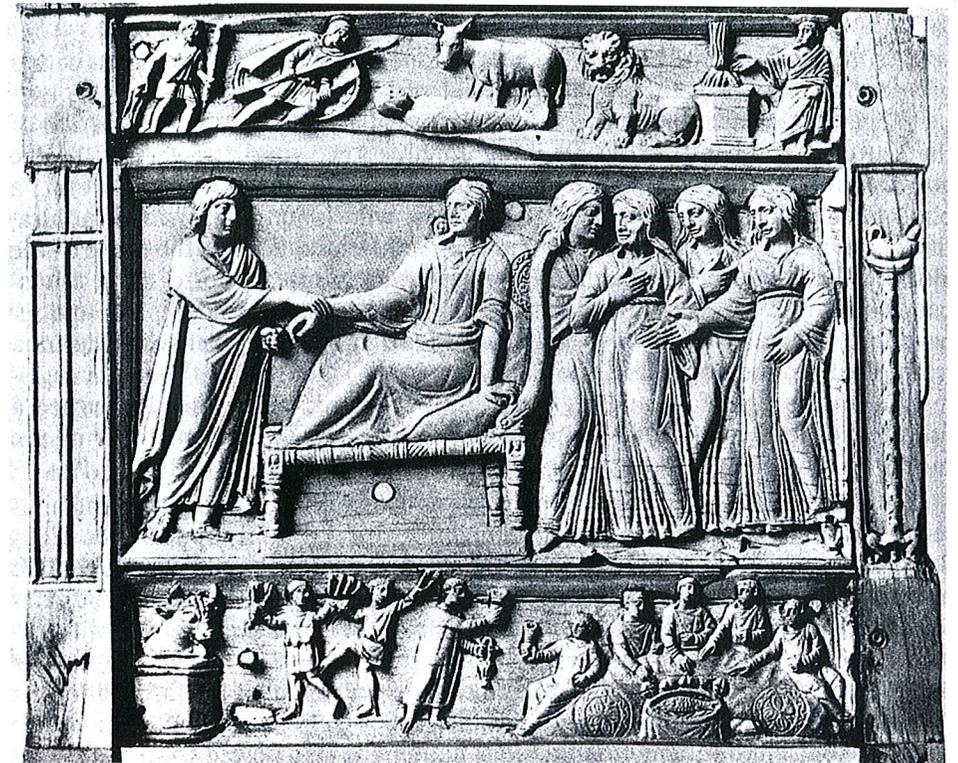
1. The raising of the daughter of Jairus. Left side of Brescia Casket (from Brown Tkacz, *The Key of the Brescia Casket* [n. 13], p. 44, fig. 7).

2. Miniature from the Genesis of Vienna depicting the death of Deborah in the upper register and the nativity of Benjamin as well as the death of Rachel in the lower register (fol. 13 v). Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. Theol. gr. 31 (from Zimmermann, *Die Wiener Genesis* [n. 15], fig. 27).
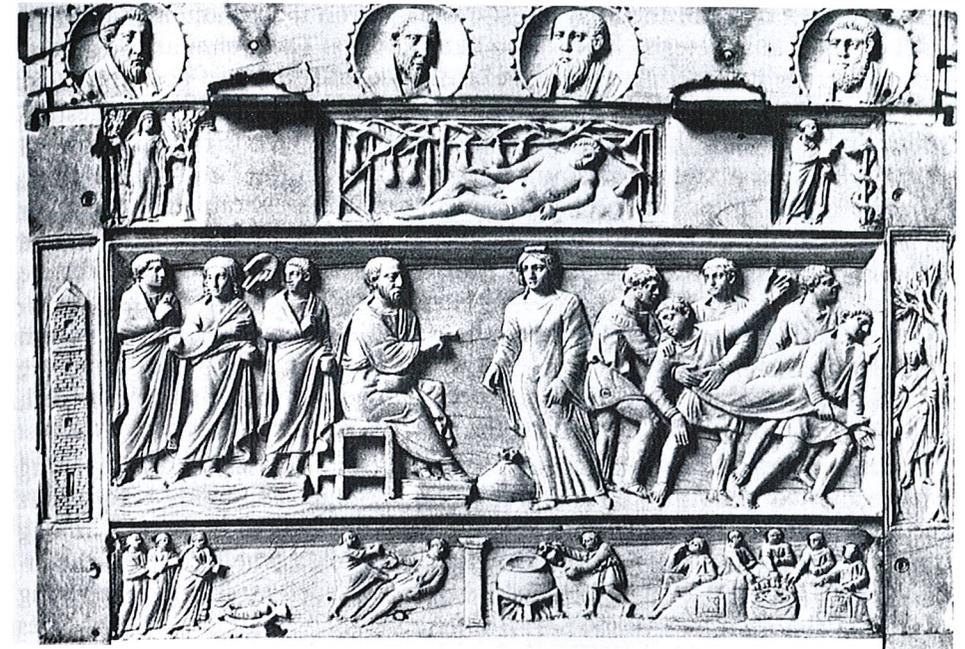
3. Back of the Brescia Casket presenting the story of Ananias and Sapphira (from Brown Tkacz, *The Key of the Brescia Casket* [n. 13], p. 41, fig. 6).
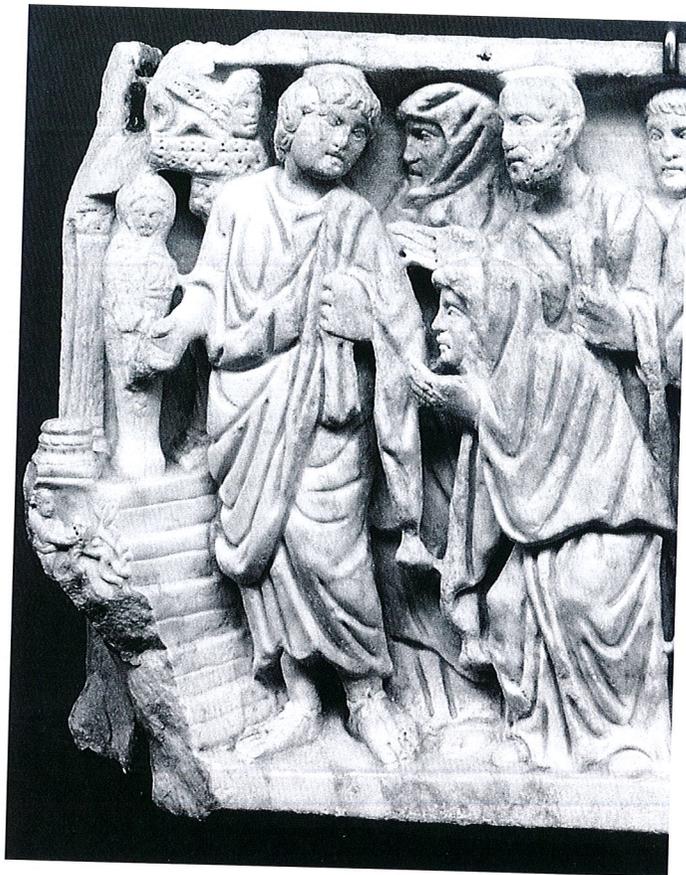
4. The resurrection of Lazarus. Arles, Musée de l'Arles antique (Photo: Musée de l'Arles antique).

5. Rome, Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini. *Neg. D-DAI Rom 55.683.*

Ladislav Kesner

Face and Dead in Early China

I. A brief essay on the face and the dead in classical Chinese culture, appearing in a volume devoted to the face and the dead in the early Christian world, naturally cannot do justice to this vast and complex topic.[1] Moreover, in providing a perspective geographically and culturally distant from that of other chapters, it necessarily highlights disparities, thus running a risk of essentializing difference between early China and early Christian world; this is not intended. For art history as well as archeology, a traditional point of convergence and intersection between the face and the dead was the concept of portraiture, and specifically portraiture as a commemorative medium. Influential accounts posit tight links between portraiture and death, implying that the origin of portraiture, if not all figural art, was tied to the need to reconstitute the presence lost through death.[2] The triad of a face, the dead person and memories of him or her, establishing an ontological coherence of commemorative images, can be considered a universal anthropological feature. But while such a conceptual structure has its explanatory power in early China too, even a cursory look reveals a need for an alternative framework, a somewhat broader scope of inquiry to begin with; not just the (represented) face and the *dead*, but rather the represented face and the *cult of the dead.* Once this is done, a particular pattern begins to emerge. In early China, the cult of the dead had a strategic, pivotal role and elaborate forms and media of visual representation were created to variously sustain the dead, protect them, communicate between the realms of the dead and the living, and to ensure their transition from the state of the living to the afterlife and preserve their memory. Among these artifacts and images, various incarnations of faces (both embodied and disembodied) and face-like motifs feature prominently. They are, however, mostly not faces of concrete human beings. Indeed, what is striking is the absence rather than presence of faces of the dead in early Chinese visual and material culture. The main question on which this essay will focus therefore concerns

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1. More extensive treatment of some of the issues discussed here can be found in my article "Face as artifact in early Chinese art", *RES. Anthropology and aesthetics*, 51 (2007), pp. 33-56.

2. Hans Belting, *Bild-Anhtropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, Munich 2001.