The Sheep Bearer in Early Christian Art

What is the Origin of the Sheep Bearer and in which Contexts Occurs this Image during the first five centuries A.D. in Rome?

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1. Introduction

This essay will examine Early Christian art in a funerary and baptismal context to investigate why certain topics enjoyed popularity over a long period of time and across diverse context. For the funerary context both the frescoes in catacombs and images on sarcophagi will be examined. An example of a baptismal environment is the baptistery of Dura Europos. Since this subject in itself is far too broad, this essay will focus on one specific theme, the sheep bearer. This theme is of interest because it has multiple interpretations, both Christian and pagan, and because it is only possible to make a clear identification based on the context of the image in combination with the other images, and most importantly the perspective of the beholder and/or creator. Another predominant aspect in this era is the use and the perception of the images, hence some textual sources of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria will shed light on the situation.

The period investigated in this essay ranges from the first to the fifth century A.D., a period which encompasses a change in depicted topics brought about by Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. In this essay the changing function, place and role of the shepherd will be examined. The main research question concerns the question: Why is the theme of the Sheep bearer used in both funerary and baptismal context in the Early Christian era?

In order to answer the aforementioned question is it necessary to know the history of this theme, with its rise and decline, different interpretations, written sources and the origin. Since the subject fits in the Early Christian art, an outline of this research area with its history and difficulties is useful for a better understanding of the subject matter. Within the remit of this BA thesis it is not necessary to compile a full catalogue of the imagery under discussion. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate the versatility of the topos some examples of different artistic expressions will be given.

The focus of this thesis are the baptismal and funerary context, hence the examples used come from sarcophagi and catacombs as well as baptisteries. Moreover, since the sheep bearer is rarely shown as an isolated motive it is of important to include related decorations whenever an attempt is made to understand the significance of the image. To gain a better understanding of the
popularity of the sheep bearer, written sources on baptism and funerary practices will be examined in addition to the archaeological material.
2. Theories and methods

This thesis is a literature study into the image of the sheep bearer, based on published archaeological and textual material. To explore this theme both primary contemporary literature and secondary literature concerning the subject will be examined. The focal points are the catacombs and sarcophagi in Rome, however, examples from the provinces, and specifically material from Dura Europos will be included. This thesis is not meant as a full catalogue on the sheep bearer, but examples of different artifacts are given to illustrate and support the different applications of this theme.

The sheep bearer is one of the most common themes used in of Early Christian art; which is part of the discipline of Early Christian Archeology. It seems useful to begin with a brief overview of the history of this discipline, to place the image of the sheep bearer within the context of the research tradition for a better understanding of Christian focus and later shifts to more objective research.

The most common place for Christian art in Rome are the catacombs, the first catacomb was discovered in 1578 at the Vigna Sanchez. (Rutgers 2000, 12) One of the first researchers of the catacombs was Antonio Bosio (1575-1629) after a visit to the Catacomb of Domitilla he started to research and document them systematically. After his death, a book with his results and drawings was published 1632; *Roma Sotteranea*. (Rutgers, 2000, 15) Some of his documented frescoes have been lost, but his drawings are a valuable source.

A man who followed was Giovanni Batista di Rossi (1822-1894), he applied a more modern scholarly approach, besides his focus on dating and chronology he was looking for martyrs’ names. He wrote the of four parts consisting *La Roma Sotteranea Cristiana* starting in 1864.(Rutgers 2000, 29)

Paul Styger (1887-1939) used a more methodological approach than De Rossi and his followers. He focused on dating different parts of the catacombs, based on “*Ausgrabungstheorie*”, historical sources and the style of the frescoes. (Jonckheere 2006, 41)

In the 1930’s Joseph Wilpert wrote “Experience and results in the service of Early Christian Archaeology. *Retrospect of 45 years of scholarly work in Rome*”.
Further on in the 20th century Louis Reekmans (1925-1992) and Francesco Tolloni (1906-1998) were important research names, currently Hugo Brandenburg, Philippe Pergola and Vincenzo Fiocchi Niccolai are working on the catacombs. (Jonckheere 2006, 55)

The study of sarcophagi is a mainly German discipline. Theodor Klauser, Gunthram Koch and Nikolaus Himmelmann have provided catalogues and inventories of sarcophagi. Currently Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson write in English on this topic.

A general encyclopedia on Early Christianity is written by Everett Ferguson. Margareth Jensen and P.C. Finney have written about Christian Art and Arnold Provoost and Graydon Snyder have written publications on general material culture.

The Early Christian culture has been investigated from the 17th century onwards, the early research was applied during the counter-Reformation, in the 18th and 19th century the focus was still Christian, but from the 20th century room for a less Christian approach was made, but only after the 1970’s the Christian tradition was replaced by non-religious and unbiased and research.
3. Christian Art

During the first two centuries, no Christian art or specific material culture is known, however the literary sources are abundant. Finney draws an analogy with prehistory; “The analogy with prehistory is striking. Prehistorians routinely confront evidence that is skewed: all material culture and no literary-documentary sources. Ours is exactly the opposite pattern.” (Finney 1994, 102)

3.1 Development

What could have caused this lack of material culture during the first two centuries? Was Christian art completely absent, did it lose the battle against time, or was it just hard to identify because of the nature of the early religion? In the 19th century the paradigm was that the Early Christians opposed any type of visual representation. It was argued that Early Christians could have had spiritual objections against the use of art. Or, that they purely focused on the next world and hence there was no need to have a material culture. The first argument is the result of misinterpretation of the works of the apologists (Snyder 2003, 3) (Early Christian writers who defended the Christian faith by means of apologetic writings in which they tried to rebuff allegations made by their opponents) (Rutgers, 2000,159).

The other two arguments cannot be proven valid because in later times there was Christian art, despite the Second Commandment from the book of Exodus which forbids making images that can be used as idols.

Although we have to accept that the Early Christian art has some trouble with its archaeological visibility, nevertheless a chronology linked with specific types of themes and images is necessary to gain an understanding of the shepherd’s theme within the wider framework of Christianity.

3.2 Chronology

Christian Art has a chronology with different phases, the first two centuries stand out because of the absence, and this absence could be caused by a material culture that is not distinguishable from the Roman material culture. (Snyder 2003, 3) The chronology of sarcophagi is closely examined by G. Koch, he distinguishes four phases.
The first phase dates is either dated to the 2nd and 3rd century (Rutgers 2000, 84) or as pre-Constantine until 313 A.D. The last option is dated until the Edict of Milan, which seems like a suitable break point. This phase stylistically knows bucolic and maritime scenes, Old Testament and the baptism or works of Christ. The general meaning of these themes is salvation. (Koch 2000, 209)

The second phase is the Constantine phase which last from 312/3 until 340. In this period the power and miracle works of Christ are depicted, in Rome scenes with Petrus are popular. These images reflect consolation. (Koch 2000, 210)

In the post-Constantine period (340-360/70) passion scenes are new, awhile the Constantine images are still used. (Koch 2000, 211) At the end of the 4th century, in the Valentinian-Theodosian phase scenes from the Old Testament revive, scenes from the New Testament become more popular and Christ as heavenly ruler is introduced. (Koch, 2000, 214)

In 391 Christianity is made state religion, there could be a connection between this even and Christ as heavenly ruler.

The frescoes in the catacombs have a similar development, but it is not that closely dated as the sarcophagi. Three different main categories can be distinguished.

The first category consist of neutral images, they are parallel with the Greco-Roman art. Examples are: sheep bearer, fisherman, philosopher, orant and meal and harvesting scenes represented by wheat and wine.

The second category is formed by symbolic art such as: doves, peacocks, vines and grapes, fish and other sea creatures, boats, lambs and olive or related decoration like flowers, garlands, birds and putty.

The third category consists of Biblical subjects and personalities from the Old and New Testament like Jonah and the Whale, Abraham and Isaac and Noah, Moses or Daniel. (Jensen 2000, 17-19)

This differentiation between three categories is made by Margareth Jensen, another way of categorizing is provided by Graydon Snyder, he chooses to make a separation based on themes; 12 known signs dating before the 4th century, are divided over eight themes: 1. Conflict, 2. deliverance (orans), 3. community (Shepherd), 4. satisfaction (Jonah), 5. deliverer (wonder worker), 6. supremacy (Mary), 7. defeat (cross), 8. power of god (invisible but present). (Snyder 2003, 26)
This option is given to show that multiple ways of categorizing images are possible, since this thesis is focused on one specific theme the categorization is not the main concern, but the three categories of Jensen is the most useful in this case. The sheep bearer is part of the first category, together with the *orant* is was the most popular early Christian theme before the edict of Milan. (Jensen 2000, 32)

Early Christian art started with appropriate and suitable images from the Greco-Roman culture, gradually these images were adapted into a specific and identifiable Christian iconography. Original pagan motives were adapted to suit the changing Christian culture. (Murray 1981, 5)

In the first and second century there is no difference in material culture visible whilst in the third and fourth century the distinction between Christian and pagan (material) culture is difficult to establish (Jensen 2000, 61), the separation is not as strict as we assumed. Human virtues such as piety, philanthropy, love of wisdom and hopes of afterlife are expressed in both kinds of art.
4. The sheep bearer

This chapter will discuss the theme of the sheep bearer starting with the origin of the image, the possible interpretations, written sources on the subject and finally when and why the sheep bearer lost its popularity.

4.1 Origin

The most common type of shepherd is the one carrying a sheep on his shoulders, an image derived from the Kriophoros; a male figure who carries an animal on his shoulders which is taken to be sacrificed. The shepherd is usually depicted as a youthful figure in a short tunic with a sheep on his shoulders and sometimes two on either side of him. (Oberman 1911, 49)

The motif of the Kriophoros was known in the 7th century B.C.; throughout this time, statues, paintings, pottery, lamps and glass objects have been made with this decoration. In the first centuries of Christianity both Christians and pagans relied on the same workshops. Clement of Alexandria writes about suitable themes in his Logos Paedagogus. He advises Christians which images can be chosen from a non-Christian workshop.

4.2 Interpretations

The sheep bearer has multiple interpretations, some are similar to both Christians and non-Christian, whilst some are specifically Christian or pagan.

There are a number of possible pagan interpretations of the sheep bearer: firstly the representation of pastoral life as an example of good husbandry and economy.

Another closely related option is the shepherd as a symbol for a month or a season; in this case the shepherd usually represents the months April and May or winter. The combination of Jonas and a sheep bearer does not need to be Christian, but could be explained as a pagan theme related to philanthropy.

Such a theme could be Hermes Kriophoros; he is a guide who leads a dead soul on its journey to the next world acting as a psychopompos (the guider of souls). (Jensen 2000, 37) The role of a psychopompos is a perfect theme to be depicted on a sarcophagus. He is often depicted with a sheep on his shoulders. In Late Antiquity this was a symbol for philanthropy or humanitarianism in both Christian and pagan interpretations. (Jensen 2000, 37)
A number of specific Christian interpretations of the Good Shepherd theme are based on both literature and funerary contexts: the interpretation of Jesus as Good Shepherd has its origin in the New Testament texts from John and Luke. This interpretation is made often in older academic literature. But as Snyder says; “the first portrayal of the Good Shepherd may not have referred to Jesus, but it developed reasonably into a Christological symbol that has endured to this day”. Early materials can lead to later developments, but it is not possible to turn this process around and state that the sheep bearer is the Good Shepherd based on a later development. (Snyder 2003, 11)

A different Christian interpretation is derived from classical Christian literature, “the shepherd of Hermas”, written in the second century A.D.

4.3 Other shepherds

Besides the sheep bearer, other types of shepherds are depicted, sometimes combined with a sheep bearer. A shepherd herding a flock or a shepherd milking a sheep are known types.

The story of Orpheus is a universal theme, and a Christian interpretation is possible but not necessary. (Koch 2000, 24) There is an interesting parallel between Orpheus and Christ; they are both resurrection figures. Christ rose from the death and Orpheus also returned after a violent death, besides his own resurrection, he also tried to get his Eurydice back from Hades. (Murray 1981, 46)

Another quality of Orpheus is his ability to tame wild animals; whereas Christ is capable of taming wild hearts. Perhaps Christ was depicted as Orpheus whose subsequently figure became the basis for the Good Shepherd. (Jensen 2000, 41) As is visible in cubiculum of Okeanos, the music of Orpheus can represent the joy of paradise. (Oberman 1911, 128) Clement of Alexandria writes in his Protrepticus; “but different is my minstrel, for He has come to bring to a speedy end the bitter slavery of the demons that lord is over us”. The shepherd can carry a shepherd’s pipe. (Pope and Davis 1905)
4.4 Written sources

After this general overview of possible interpretations, the literature needs to be investigated. Through written sources it is possible to see how the shepherd’s theme, and art in general, were experienced in Early Christian times. Texts from the Bible and the apologists will be used to give some examples.

One of the primary sources concerning the meaning of the shepherd is an Early Christian work called the *Shepherd of Hermas*. A book written in the 2nd century which had great influence during the 2nd and 3rd century; it was bound with the New Testament in the Codex Sinaiticus and was listed between the Acts of the Apostles and the Acts of Paul in the Codex Claromontanus (*Greek and Latin Pauline epistles, dated to the 5th or 6th century*). (Taylor 1906, 14) The original version was written in Greek and a Latin translation followed soon. It was written by a former slave. The work can be divided in three parts, five *visions*, twelve *mandates* and ten *simitudes* or *parables*. The book calls upon the Christians to repent for their sins. The Shepherd appears to the author as the Angel of Repentance in the fifth vision.

This sentence is the first one of the first chapter of the fifth vision:

“After I had been praying at home and sat down on my couch, there entered a man of glorious aspect, dressed like a shepherd, with a white goats’ skin, a wallet on his shoulder, and a rod in his hand, and saluted me, I returned his salutation. “


The afore stated sentence describes the appearance of the angel.

One of the apologists opposes against the Shepherd of Hermas. Tertullian writes in his *De Pudicitia*, chapter 7, about the lack of morality of the Shepherd of Hermas, in one of the parables a man who committed adultery had been allowed back in the community because he was repentant about it. (Murray 1981, 23)

The written sources can differ from the general practice and could have been only known to literate people, besides these difficulties they still are a valuable source of information.

The Bible sheds light on the meaning and possible interpretation of a Good Shepherd. In Luke (15; 4-7) the parable of the lost sheep is told, this passage which in combination with the passage of John (10; 12-15) offers the archetypal appearance of the shepherd.
Matthew quotes this parable in his chapter (18; 12-13)

4. “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it? 5. And when he hath found it, he relayeth it on his shoulders rejoicing. 6. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 7. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Carroll 1998, 97)

John’s text in which Jesus Christ calls himself the Good Shepherd;

11 “I am the good shepherd: The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am known by my mine. 15 As the Father knoweth Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” (Carroll 1998, 130)

Primary sources can help to identify reasons why Early Christian culture is largely invisible in the archaeological record:

The Second of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20; 4) reads:

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water underneath the earth.” (Carroll 1998, 89-90)

When it is forbidden to make these kinds of images they should not be found either, although in later centuries this rule was applied less strictly. A source that strengthens this Bible text is the work of Clement of Alexandria, one of the Early Christian church fathers (c. 150- c. 215). In his work Logos Paedagogus, written around 200 A.D., he advises the Christians on different aspects of life. He opposes the use of certain images on signet rings e.g. idols, swords, bows, cups and lovers. These images did not correspond with Christian
ideology. He suggests that when Christians buy a signet ring, they should choose an image such as an anchor, dove, fish or fisherman. (Gussen 1955, 106-107) Clement of Alexandria reflects his meaning on the use of images by Christian, this could indicate that Early Christian art is not lost, it is only difficult to identify since it does not differ from contemporaneous Greco-Roman and pagan material culture.

Another factor which makes it difficult to identify an Early Christian material culture are the Early Christians themselves, they were a minority group who lacked a distinct ethnic identity. Oil lamps with the image of a sheep bearer were available on the market, depending on the consumer this shepherd was the Good Shepherd or a presentation of the bucolic life.

The period people lived in, where they lived and what religion they followed, will all have coloured their perspective of images. When a Christian sees an image of a shepherd, he might see image of the Good Shepherd in it, whilst a pagan might see the pastoral life of a shepherd. Since we cannot read the minds of the persons who were buried in the sarcophagi and catacombs, it is up to the archaeologist to come up with interpretations based on the image itself, the related images and the location of the images and other factors.

4.5 Rise and Decline

During the first centuries of Christianity, the two most popular themes depicted are images of sheep bearers and images of a praying figure (orans). They remained popular until the reign of Constantine the Great. In 391 Christianity was made state religion, less ambiguous themes where used; stories and personification from both the Old and the New Testament.

What are possible the reasons for the abandonment of the popular shepherds theme in the fourth century A.D? The Christian religion originated as a small cult for the lower classes. Before Constantine they had to endure persecutions because they did not worship the Roman gods and refused to honour the emperor- who was seen as a living god on earth. Their services were held in private houses which later kept the name of the owner when they were rebuilt to proper churches. After these tumultuous ages, emperor Constantine converted to Christianity only on his deathbed, although being tolerant towards Christians during his life, making donations to churches. When he passed the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D.,
and the Christianity became the religion of the state in 391, the secrecy was abandoned and the church started to gain secular power. This change in power caused a change in the way Jesus Christ was depicted; the last time his image as a shepherd is found in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna of 425 however, there his dress is too luxurious for a simple shepherd (Fig.9); wearing a golden tunic, with blue bands and a purple mantle draped over one shoulder. (Ramsey 1983, 376)

Ekkart Sauser (Sauser 1966, 398) argues in his “Fruchristliche Kunst: Sinnbild und Glaubensaussage “that the church wanted to create an image of Christ as a teacher, since the shepherd had this role as well” (John 21: 15-17). Ramsey finds this argument too simple and he tries to answer the question why the change was necessary.

Three possible reasons are given for the decline of the popularity of the image of the shepherd by Ramsey. (Ramsey 1983, 376-378)

His first suggestion is that the image of the shepherd did not fit with the state of mind of the church, once the power of the church grew, the image of Christ dressed as a shepherd with a simple short tunic and the attributes of a shepherd conflicted with the newly acquired royal status.

A second explanation is the symbolic value of the shepherd. As a shepherd, Jesus Christ conveyed universal love and was a symbol of salvation, which explains the frequency of the theme of the shepherd for places connected either with baptism or with funerary places. The shepherd was also a symbol of humbleness. As state religion the protective function of the shepherd was no longer needed, Christ could be depicted more powerful.

The third argument goes back to the period of persecution and secrecy. Then the “flock” of the church was small and needed the protection of a shepherd in the world outside of the church. During the fourth century, the world of Christianity became universally accepted, so the protecting shepherd had lost it function.

The Catholic Church became the religion of the state and Christ was their Lord. The contemporary literature reflects this image. (Jensen 2000, 40) Based on these arguments it seems that the determining factors for the loss of popularity of the sheep bearer’s motif were the changes which occurred when the early church became the state religion and lost its searching character of the early state. The secrecy was and a new type of material culture could flourish. In reaction to the
previous oppression, the Christians were able to choose their own themes, styles and were ‘freed” from the forced available images.
5. The sheep bearer in material culture

The sheep bearer is one of the most commonly used images of Early Christian Art in the pre-Constantine era. It is impossible to show a complete catalogue of all objects with a sheep bearer as decoration, instead this chapter is meant to give a selection of different objects and contexts to indicate the widespread use of this image. A separation between sepulchral context and objects from the everyday life is made. In some exceptional cases however it is possible that an object was initially made for the living and ended up as a gift for the dead and hence changed to a sepulchral context. First, some objects from the everyday life will be introduced, such as lamps, gems and statues these are followed by sepulchral objects such as slabs from loculi, sarcophagi, statues and mosaics.

5.1 Lamps

Everyone needed light in their homes, the most common and cheap option were terracotta oil lamps. Since the Christian community was a growing, yet still a minority group, they did not have their own material culture and for their everyday objects they relied on the same market as the Roman consumers. Oil lamps were made in workshops where the clay was shaped in a mold and baked. They could choose appropriate decoration. Lamps decorated with sheep bearers have been found, a famous example is the Wulff 1224 in Berlin. Provoost states that there are 40 examples known. (Provoost 1996, 77) Finney has studied lamps that depict a shepherd. Most of the lamps are firma lamps made by six or seven Italian potters that made the “Loeschcke type 8”. Amongst them is the Wulff 1224, stamped with the letters “Florent”. Three potters are known by name; Annius Serapidorus, Florentius and Seaculus. (Finney 1994, 116; Himmelmann 1980, 147)

Who worked in Central Italy between 175 and 225 A.D. Figure 1 shows a lamp made by Seaculus, on the bottom there is a stamp “SAECVL”. The central part of the image shows a sheep bearer, around his feet stands a flock of seven sheep, on both side of the sheep bearer is a Jonah
scene, on the right side he is spat out by the Keton and on the left side he is resting. The box with the dove on it symbolizes the ark. On the top side the sun and moon are personified with seven stars (although six are drawn) in between. This is the Bartoli or Wulff 1224(?) which encompasses a number of Christian references and indicates that the market adapted to the demands of Christian clients.

Figure 2 shows a lamp made by Annius which depicts a sheep bearer in the centre and a floral and vine border on the ridge. The lamps made by Annius were smaller and of lesser quality, he probably produced more lamps for a local market, while Florentius and Saeculus made more expensive lamps of better quality. (Finney 1994, 119-122) They have a more explicit meaning than Annius’ lamps. Since lamps were used both in houses and in catacombs, it is hard to place them specifically in one context. Most of the retrieved lamps come from a sepulchral context, but they probably were similar to the ones used in the house.

5.2 Gems

A gem is a carved (semi-)precious stone, which could be worn as a ring. In the Roman society the gem was used as a signet ring, the ring indicated that the wearer was a free man and the ring could be used to mark property. (Gussen 1955, 106-107) Two gems with a sheep bearer are known. Figure 3 shows two imprints of gems, the upper drawing shows a sheep bearer, a tree with a bird in it, Jonah being cast from the boat and eaten by the sea monster and an Ichtus inscription. This gem possibly dates to the 2nd century.
The lower image shows a gem dated to the 3rd century with a sheep bearer with two sheep at his feet, a bird in a tree, two fish, a combination of an anchor and a Christ monogram, and an undecipherable inscription.

Gems are an area of interest but when working with them one needs to be aware of the special nature of a gem; the meaning of the image is often very personal and hard to interpret. (Finney 1994, 114) One cannot look in the mind of the bearer. Apart from this issue they are also difficult to date and one needs to wary for 19th century copies. (Provoost 1983, 216)

5.3 Coins

Coins with visible Christian influence have been found, for example with a Christ monogram, but examples with a sheep bearer are not known.

5.4 Statues

23 architectural statues of sheep bearers are known, the Museo Capitolino has a group from an architectural context.

Two smaller ornamental statues of a youthful sheep bearer are found in the museum Pio Cristiano, they follow the description of Luke (15; 4-5). They look youthful, have curled hair and they wear a tunic belted at the waist. Both carry a lamb. (Mancinelli 1981, 62)

One statue (figure 4) dates from the first half of the 4th century, he has a knapsack, the other statue (figure 5) dates from the second half of the 4th century and he holds a stick in his left hand. (Mancinelli 1981, 62) The function of these statues could be: depicting a devotee bringing offerings to a temple, as the pagan custom, but these statues probably refer to Christ. (Mancinelli 1981, 62)
One example of a sheep bearer statue will be discussed in detail as a case study in chapter 9; the group is known as the Cleveland marbles of which the origin is unknown, but they are thought to be sepulchral or related to fountains.

In the catacomb of Saint Peter and Marcellinus a connection pillar of a baluster is discovered. It dates to the third quarter of the 3rd century and has a bust of a sheep bearer on it. (Provoost 1983, 143)

5.5 Sepulchral context

Before going to the known sepulchral objects such as sarcophagi, frescoes and inscription it is interesting to take a look at the smaller objects such as grave gifts. Although Christians in a later era did not give grave goods to their relatives, the early Christian used domestic object such as pottery, toys and jewellery as markers for the grave. (Provoost 1996, 39) One example (fig. 6) is a bottom fragment of a cup decorated with gold. This piece dates from the era of Constantine and shows a youth carrying a sheep. (Provoost 1983, 134) It was found in 1716 in the cemetery of St. Agnes. (Morey 1954, 56)
6. Mosaics

Although Early Christian mosaics are rare, in this chapter the ones with a sheep bearer will be mentioned.

A mosaic is an artwork consisting of small pieces of stone, glass or other materials, the tessarae, which are laid out on a floor or placed on a wall, to form an image. Only one pre-Constantine Christian example is known, in mausoleum M, also known as tomb of the Julii, in the Vatican necropolis. This mausoleum has mosaics on the ceiling vault and on the walls. On the ceiling there is an image of Sol Invictus or Helios (considering the other images possibly Christ), he is surrounded by vine leaves. (Figure 7) On the wall are scenes depicting Jonah being cast out of the boat, a sheep bearer and a fisherman. This mausoleum was rediscovered in 1940 during excavations. It was first discovered in the 16th century and forgotten again, it is the smallest tomb in the Vactican cemetery. (Murray 1981, 65) It is the only securely identified Christian tomb apart from the tropheum of St. Peter himself. The mosaic can be dated to the first half of the 3rd century. (Provoost 1996, 35) During this period three burials were placed in the floor. The tomb also contained two earlier cremation burials from the 2nd century and an inscription. Thus, either the family that owned the tomb became Christian.- or a new family took over the tomb. (Murray 1981, 66)

Whereas the ceiling mosaic is intact most of the walls mosaic has come off, however, the contours on the wall are evidence for the depicted images. (Snyder 2003, 73)

The sheep bearer held a sheep on his shoulders and positioned around him was a flock of sheep. They could represent safety from the enemy and happiness in paradise. (Murray 1981, 74, 91)
In Christian house churches no mosaics have been discovered, though when Christians started to build basilica’s mosaics were applied. Although this is not a funerary context it is of interest to mention the church at Aquileia, the mosaic on the floor dates from the time of Theodoro. Although the pavement of the early church on the north of the present structure might be dated earlier, generally it is dated to the 4th century. (Snyder 2003, 73) This mosaic is a combination of non-Christian iconography and decorations. Figure 8 shows some of the depicted images; a cock fighting a turtle, a ram (inscription CYRIACE VIBAS), a lobster and a squid, a parrot, other birds, a goat, a donkey, a rabbit, a young goat with a basket of round objects (possibly bread) and a horse. The central image shows a young beardless sheep bearer who holds a pedum. Next to him stands a sheep, on his shoulder lies a younger sheep. (Himmelmann 1980, 169)

Although the mosaic of the Good Shepherd at Ravenna contains a seated shepherd instead of a sheep bearer with a flock around him, this image needs to be mentioned for the story of the disappearance of the shepherd from the Christian iconography. This mosaic is located in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, the
daughter of Theodosius I. She died in 450 A.D., the building was constructed in the first half of the 5th century and is a mixture of Early Christian and the Byzantine art.

This image could refer to how the Christian church was looking for a new image that fitted the more powerful position that it had gained since the 4th century. Figure 9 shows one of the last images of Jesus as a shepherd, here he looks too royal for a simple shepherd with the golden cross and the fine robes. A transition is taking place.

Figure 9: Mosaic of the Good Shepherd in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, source: http://www.google.nl/imgres?q=ravenna+galla+placidia
7. Sarcophagi

7.1 Introduction

First a brief introduction to sarcophagi; there are five types of caskets and three types of lids. The casket types are: Frieze sarcophagi which have an image along all sides, architectural types with columns and other architectural elements between scenes. The third type of sarcophagi have curved grooves as decoration, and then there are box shaped sarcophagi and , finally, caskets with smooth sides.

The three types of lid correspond with a region; lids with a high frame decorated with relief were the most common in the west, in the eastern part of the empire the lids were roof shaped and in Ravenna were rounded lids.(Koch 2000, 30) Sarcophagi are usually decorated on the two sides and the front, the Attica type is decorated on four sides. Only in the province the interior is decorated. (Elsner and Huskinson 2011, 2)

Sarcophagi are made from stone, clay, lead or wood. There are no written sources on the exact technique, but it is known that they were made in phases. (Elsner and Huskinson 2011, 81) The production costs and prices are unknown; they were made to stock and some were specially made to order. In Rome it was common to use a portrait of the deceased; this was not common in Ravenna.(Elsner and Huskinson 2011, 121) The Christians used fewer inscriptions than their pagan contemporaries, or they are just hard to distinguish.

Sarcophagi were re-used by pagans and Christians: most of the re-used ones do not show any changes, in those cases the context determines whether that the sarcophagus was re-used by a Christian or pagan. Some have inscriptions and crosses, while others have all pagan decoration removed and replaced with crosses. (Koch 2000, 14)

Over the years scholars have worked to compose lists of Early Christian sarcophagi, Deichmann, Bovini and Brandenburg have made overviews of 3rd and 4th century sarcophagi. They came to 1.041 items, with 129 pre-Constantine examples. (Snyder 2003, 76) They are labeled Christian because of their inscription, or the depiction of an orante or Good Shepherd. Their dates are based on dated inscriptions, location in a dated catacomb, style of artisanship, style of imagery and iconographical development. (Snyder 2003, 76)
When a sarcophagus is ordered three parties are involved, the customer, the sculpting workshop and the quarry workshop were the rough sarcophagus is prepared. Factors that influence the production are the distance between the quarry and the Sculptor’s Workshop, the relation between the both and the wishes of the customer. (Russell 2011, 123-124) These relations make a general scheme possible, but the customer’s wishes and possibility to change in each step of the production and the contacts between the workshops were factors of influence. (Russell 2011, 142)

Traditionally a separation between pagan and Christian sarcophagi is made, but most Christian have never been studied other than on typology and iconography, (Elsner and Huskinson 2011, 11) while pagan sarcophagi have been subjected to social, economic and functional analysis.

A sarcophagus gives interesting insight in the Roman culture, Elsner writes: “Their visual negotiation of the ideals, realities and fantasies of Roman people, both the deceased and their mourners, at the interface of the public and personal where death is marked and the rites of burial performed, makes them of quite exceptional importance for understanding Roman culture.” (Elsner and Huskinson 2011, 14) Now it is time to take a closer look at the sheep bearer on sarcophagi.

7.2 Sarcophagi with sheep bearers

The theme of the sheep bearer originated around 120-30 A.D. Although these sheep bearers were not the main theme on the sarcophagi; they were used to decorate sides and corners. The popularity increased during the 3rd century, peaking at around 300 A.D. The sheep bearer is solely depicted or flanked by an orans (praying figures) and philosophers. They are not very often found on fries of column sarcophagi. (Koch 2000, 16)

In the early 4th century a shift occurs from symbolic art to a literal representation. During the 5th century, Christ is depicted as a Lord rather than as a shepherd, the possible reasons are mentioned in the chapter on the kriophoros. (Jensen 2000, 40)
7.3 Examples
To illustrate this story examples of sarcophagi with one or more sheep bearers are shown in this chapter.

A. The sarcophagus of Sta. Maria Antiqua in Rome, is one of the oldest examples of early Christian sculpture. The sarcophagus (fig. 10) shows the Reading of the Law as central image, right of this scene are a sheep bearer, and the baptism of Jesus, on the left side stands an Orante and a Jonah cycle with four scenes. Finally there is a pastoral scene. This sarcophagus is dated to 260 A.D. (Dinkler 1980, 397)

B. The sarcophagus of Julia Juliane has an inscription in the centre, to the left of this inscription stands a sheep bearer, scenes that follow are Jonah cast out of the Boat, above the boat flies a dove with an olive branch to a small ark of Noah. On the right is a pastoral scene with a sheep and a vine, and finally as pendant of the sheep bearer an orante. (Snyder 2003, 79-80) Currently this sarcophagus is in the Museo Pio Christiano, it is dated to the first quarter of the 4th century. (Deichmann et al, 1967, 46)

C. The Velletri sarcophagus.

The three central figures from left to right are a sheep bearer, an orante and a seated figure. In between are numerous smaller scenes including: Reading of the Law, Daniel between the lions, Adam and Eve, Noah in the Ark with a dove, Multiplication of the
Loaves and the Fish and a Jonah cycle with four scenes. (Snyder 2003, 81)

**D. The sarcophagus of Paulina**

A fragment of the sarcophagus of Paulina is in Museum Pio Christiano, although the original origin is unknown, it is dated in the second half of the 3rd century.

The sarcophagus held the image of three shepherds, one seated, one carrying a sheep and one musing. Followed by an inscription and on the other side of the inscription is a part of a ship, which could be a Jonah scene. (Provoost 1983, 124) The inscription is in Greek and translated it reads: “Here lies Paulina, in the land of the happiest. Pakata paid her her last tribute, as her kind nurse, holy through Christ”. (Provoost 1983, 124) These have a bucolic-idyllic meaning. The inscription shows a Christian reference but the motive alone does not give much clues about a Christian or pagan occupant. Maybe there are three shepherds to refer to the Holy Trinity( the seated God, the musing Holy Spirit and the sheep bearer as the guiding Jesus), but that seems quite farfetched.

**E. Seasonal sarcophagi**

Figure 14 is good example of a 4th century sarcophagus depicting the four seasons, the second figure from the right is a shepherd. Because of the neutral theme in combination with the unawareness of the original context is impossible to state
whether this is a pagan or Christian sarcophagus. The Velletri sarcophagus (7.3) has a similar juxtaposed sheep bearer and a peasant holding a hare/rabbit.

F. Sarcophagus of the Good Shepherd

Figure 15 shows a sarcophagus with three sheep bearers on the front side, the sheep bearers stand on pedestals. The central one has a beard and wears a ram, the other two are beardless and carry an ewe. (Mancinelli 1981, 60) Between the sheep bearers is a scene with a vineyard and genii harvesting grapes. The smaller sides have symbols of the four season on them and the back has a transenna-like decoration with scale motifs. This sarcophagus was found in the cemetery of Praetextatus and dates to the latter part of the 4th century. (Mancinelli 1981, 60)

The combination of both themes can be seen as an interpretation of the bucolic life. Koch argues that multiple bearers and shepherds that do not carry a sheep are not Christian. (Koch 2000, 17)

G: Sarcophagus of the Via Salaria

This oval tub shaped sarcophagus has two rams on the sides, the central image is a sheep bearer between two trees, he carries a ram on his shoulder and two other rams stand next to him. On his left stands a praying woman with next to her a seated woman holding a scroll with another woman behind her. On the right of the sheep bearer are three men, two standing and in the middle one seated with an open scroll. The seated couple could be the commissioners of the sarcophagus. This sarcophagus is dated to the period of Galienus (253-260) and was found in 1881 in the Via Salaria.
7.4 The Velletri sarcophagus

Another sarcophagus from Velletri was discovered in 1955. (Schumacher, 1979, 19) This example is quite extensive and therefore given its own paragraph.

This sarcophagus is decorated on all sides and has a lid shaped like a roof decorated as well. Each scene is placed in architectural elements. Amongst the many smaller scenes is a sheep bearer which is juxtaposed by a farmer holding either a rabbit or hare. Since there are so many different scenes the sheep bearer most likely represents a season, in combination with the farmer.

The sarcophagus is richly decorated and carved in high relief. It contains both Asiatic and western influences. The marble garland on the roof of the tomb can refer to the funerary custom of placing garlands of fruits and flower on the tomb. (Lawrence 1965, 207) Between all richly decorated architecture many smaller scenes are depicted. In total, the sarcophagus encompasses 60 human and divine figures, 43 fantastic animals, 40 animals, 14 Caryatids and 12 Telamon. (Lawrence 1965, 209) It is not unusual to have Caryatids on the corners, but this sarcophagus has ten extra.

The decorative program is not randomly chosen; on the front side in the upper register are Olympian god with in the central image Hades and Persephone seated on a throne. (Lawrence 1965, 210) The lower register shows the Rape of Persephone. (Lawrence 1965, 212) The right end of the sarcophagus depicts an ancestor and the deceased in the centre of the upper register. Beside these scenes, two works of Hercules are placed. The lower register shows a procession. (Lawrence 1965, 213) At the rear in the upper register are seven other works of Hercules, in the lower register are; (from left to right) two women and a tree,
Sisyphus, a boating scene, Tantalus and the Danaides. The combination of these five scenes could be the voyage to the Hades, passing the punished Sisyphus, Danaides and Tantalus. Which would make the women and the tree Hesperides. (Lawrence 1965, 213) The scene on the front in the upper register could be interpreted as the Gods passing judgement, and more sarcophagi with the works of Hercules are known. (Lawrence 1965, 220) On the left end are on the upper register the two last works of Hercules and in the lower register is a pastoral scene with two shepherds. (Lawrence 1965, 217)

This is a unique and interesting sarcophagus that could easily cover the full size of this paper, however the focus lies with the sheep bearer so it is necessary to explain the entire iconography brief and take a closer look at the sheep bearer and the other two shepherds.

These two images show the two figures at the ends of the upper register of the front side. Figure 18 shows the sheep bearer, figure 19 the man in simple clothing, like a peasant, and in his hand he holds a hare or rabbit. They are placed in the same line as the Olympian gods, this could be local custom which also occurs on Endymion sarcophagi (. Lawrence 1965, 211) Or they were made to fill a small space, they are placed as pendants, both at the end, near a Caryatid.
The other scenes depicting a shepherd is on the lower register of the left end. Figure 20 shows two goats eating leaves of a tree, followed by a Telemon on each side and ended with a shepherd. One holds a lamp in the fold of his mantle, the other holds a fragment of a leafy branch. (Lawrence 1965, 217) Both shepherds have a ram or sheep next to them. This scene is in my opinion just a pastoral scene with no ambiguous meaning.

The central theme of the front side is on the upper register the Olympian gods with Hades and Persephone as central figures, the lower register is about the Rape of Persephone in this context the two shepherds can represent winter and spring, to indicate the different houses of Persephone during the year. The combination of a sheep bearer with another type of shepherd as pendant is not uncommon, they occur often as figures on the corners, they can be interpreted as symbols of rest. (Schumacher 1977, 28)

This sarcophagus is discovered in Velletri in 1955, but it has not been possible to date it to a specific period, and the style is a mixture of influences as well, which makes it hard to ascribe it to a workplace or era. But that does not make this sarcophagus less interesting. It has no signs of a Christian meaning, but the role of the sheep bearer in this lot of images is quite small.
7.5 The sarcophagus of Brignoles La Gayole

This example is not from Rome, neither from Italy but from France. The sarcophagus of Brignoles la Gayole is found in an old estate, parts of the sarcophagus are still in situ but the front side is in a museum in Brignoles. This sarcophagus is of the Attical type, with an acanthusfrieze on the bottom and a profiled list on top. The images between frieze fit in with the Roman or western tradition. From left to right the scenes depict; A helios bust, a fisherman, a tree with a bird in it, 3 lying rams and an anchor, an orante, another tree with a bird in it, a seated person and a smaller standing person, a sheep bearer with a ram on his shoulders and one behind him, another tree with a bird in it and finally a seated man with a long stick and another ram. (Schumacher 1977, 89) It is generally dated to the first half of the 3rd century, perhaps even before 240 A.D.

![Figure 21: The sarcophagus of Brignoles la Gayole. Date 3rd century](http://www.transenprovence.org/article-la-sarcophage-de-la-gayolle-a-brignoles-39850949.html)

The trees separate the sarcophagus in 5 different panels that hold groups of scenes. The upper body of the seated person is missing, but the person is seated on a chair appropriate for an elderly man, and his clothing resembles that of a philosopher. Probably features the central scene a meal, which makes the smaller person a female servant. (Provoost 1983, 68-69) The seated man at the end can be interpreted as a ruler-shepherd, similar to the Cleveland shepherd. (Provoost 1983, 71) When considering these single scenes, what could be the global interpretation of these scenes combined? All scenes convey a bucolic or pastoral elements, the central meal scene can be interpreted bucolic as well. The ram that
stands next to the orante looks at the seated man, the single scene have connections. Which leads to this interpretation of the central scene; the deceased was familiar with or taught the “true belief” (clothing), which was a source of peaceful togetherness (meal scene) for him and his family. (Provoost 1983, 73) The scenes of the sheep bearer and the orans are both to be seen as bucolic and refer to piety and hope for the next life. The seated man indicates that the deceased was a good and kind leader, like a shepherd. Possibly a local leader, (Provoost 1983, 73) the luxuriously worked sarcophagus indicates that he was not without means.

The scene with the Helius bust and the fisherman who catches a dolphin indicates the rural and bucolic life as well. The Helius bust refers to the light (of Christ, when Christian) the fisherman is a Roman maritime theme and for a Christian it could refer to St. Peter as the fisher of man. (Provoost 1983, 74)

This pre-Constantine sarcophagus is a perfect example of the Christian use of pagan and Roman elements. (Provoost 1983, 74) Besides, the main theme shows the happiness for the next life after death. The birds in the trees and the rams are a red thread through the different scenes and the continuous acanthus decoration on the frieze below the sarcophagus shows that the scenes might look like single scenes they do reflect coherence and have a combined meaning.

7.6 Children’s sarcophagi

In her study on Roman children’s sarcophagi Janet Huskinson compares children’s sarcophagi with adult sarcophagi. She looks at Roman and specifically Christian examples. The motive of the sheep bearer is placed in the category bucolic or as a symbol of a season. (Huskinson 1996, 15) When children’s sarcophagi of pagan and Christian children are compared the generic images are replaced by Christian images such as a sheep bearer or an orans. Whereas in pagan sarcophagi this place was filled by young-orator types, cupids or seasonal figures. (Huskinson 1996, 68) Frieze sarcophagi differ more because of the narrative structure; the Roman types show mythological or biographical scenes where the Christian frieze sarcophagi show images identical to the adult version. The chosen scenes are the cycle of Jonah and Peter’s denial and arrest. The Roman children sarcophagi can depict scenes of the child’s life or activities; Their
Christian counterparts depict sometimes the teacher/philosopher is shown. (Huskinson 1996, 68)

The Christian children’s sarcophagi do not differ as much with their adult version as the Roman sarcophagi do. The size is different, but the same decorative scheme is applied on the smaller sized sarcophagi. Both have a preference for religious over secular images. Sometimes the orans or sheep bearer is depicted younger than he or she would be on a sarcophagus for adults. (Huskinson 1996, 69)

The difference between the Roman-pagan and the Christian children’s sarcophagus is reflected in the prospects of the afterlife, the Christians look forward to the next life, while the Romans grieve the loss. The commemoration of the child occurs only on the Roman sarcophagi, Christians choose religious themes over secular. (Huskinson 1996, 119) There is some continuity in the used images for example scrolls and scroll-boxes are used on Christian sarcophagi as well, possibly because of the workshops. On rare occasions several clues on the status of the deceased are given through the chosen images. (Huskinson 1996, 121)

Since there is not so much difference between the Christian children’s and adults sarcophagi one example will suffice, this sarcophagus (fig. 22) dated early in the 4th century and is found in Rome, on the cemetery of Novatian. The sarcophagus belongs to the strigilled type, the central image is a male orans, on the corners are sheep bearer figures. The inscription on the lid is dedicated to the 8 year old Atronius Fidelicus. (Huskinson 1996, 70)
8. Dura Europos

8.1 Introduction
The city of Dura Europos lies in on the banks of the Eufrate in modern day Syria. This site is of archaeological importance because of its location near the frontier of the Roman Empire and the destruction and abandonment of the town in 256 A.D. after the Sassanian incursions. (Snyder 2003, 129)

The site was discovered by British soldiers in 1920 and in 1922 the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters started an excavation with Yale University, lasting until 1939. The city comprises 3 temples dedicated to Greek, Roman, Parthian and Palmyre deities, three other religious sanctuaries were discovered; a synagogue, a mythraeum and a Christian house church. (Ferguson 1990, 283) This house church is possible the oldest Christian church in existence. (Provoost 1983, 86)

The city is founded in 300 B.C. by the Seleucids, and in 113 B.C. the Parthians took over, they flourished in 50 A.D., from 115-117 Trajan occupies the city for two year and in 165 A.D. the Romans take over the city until the Sassanians destroy the city. (Mell 2010, 86) The city roughly knows three periods; Hellenistic, Parthian and Roman.

The reason for mentioning Dura Europos in this paper is because of the house church, here a baptistery is found with the fresco of a shepherd above the baptismal font. This shows that the shepherd does not only occur in funerary context, but also in a baptismal one.

8.2 House church

The house church lies on the east side of the town (block M8), near the city wall, and certainly is pre-Constantine. Luckily, the Romans have filled the

Figure 23: Map of the city of Dura Europos, the lowest blue marked building is the house church. Source: Bradford Welles 1967, 4
area near the city wall with sand to reinforce the wall; this has helped the Dura Europos church preserve until the discovery. So far this has been a unique find.

Dura Europos had a house church in the 1st century, which was in bad condition in the 2nd century, and in 240 A.D. the known house church, it was the house of Dorotheos, is adapted and in use until the destruction. (Mell 2010, 86) Before the adaptation the house (18 meters square and 5.2 metres high) consisted of eight rooms and a courtyard. A number of changes were made, such as; the courtyard was tiled, benches were installed around the walls, a wall was taken out, the baptismal font, a basin and a canopy, were constructed on the west wall. The only change on the outside was a bench on the house. (Snyder 2003, 132-134)

8.3 The baptistery

The room that clearly indicated that this house was used as a church is the baptistery; this is the only room in the house that has decorative frescoes on the walls. The wall above the baptismal font has a sheep bearer and a smaller Adam and Eve scene on it. The vault of the canopy and the ceiling of the vault were painted dark blue with stars.

The central image in this room is the sheep bearer but the other walls are decorated as well. On the south wall are frescoes of the Woman at the well, David and Goliath and a garden scene. (Perkins 1973, 52) On the north wall the Healing of the Paralytic, Peter and Jesus walking on water near a boat, women near a tomb are depicted. (Dinkler 1980, 396) It is important to note that these eight remaining images might have been part of a bigger narrative program, however due to the importance of this house church it is
still relevant to take a closer look at the iconography per scene and the eight scenes combined. Apart from the troublesome preservation the issue of the obscurity of meaning rises. Early Christian art is hard to ascribe a certain meaning to, especially when it concerns an eastern outpost of the empire, since Christianity can differ per region. (Bradford Welles 1967, 177) When interpreting these images one needs to be aware of the historical and cultural context, the function of the room and contemporary sources. (Bradford Welles 1967, 178)

These images are in an almost certainly Christian environment so the meaning of the sheep bearer can be seen as philanthropy and guidance or as a Good Shepherd, there are some scenes from the Old Testament and some from the New Testament, the garden can be bucolic or a reference to the life in Paradise before the Fall.

The central image is the Good Shepherd with his flock, in this baptismal context of baptism it can symbolize “being guarded from the wolves” as described in the Acts of Thomas, one becomes part of the flock of Christ and he protects it as a shepherd. Bradford Welles 1967, 181) J. Quasten (Quasten 1939,231) has argued that the shepherd can symbolize the hope for a new life. As the story unfolds all images relate to baptism. (Mell 2010, 291)

The image of Adam and Eve refers to the Fall, which makes baptism necessary, as argued before, the garden scene on the south wall could be paradise, it might even be a deeper reference to the Eucharist after baptism; because wheat, grapes and pomegranate are all depicted. These sacraments are the foretaste of the new life after death. (Jensen 2000, 61)

Other images show the Healing of the Paralytic and the Walking on Water, they can represent the forgiveness of sins and the power of faith. The women at the well possibly is the Samaritan woman who offers Jesus water and in return receives his words, the speaking or living water. This scene is related to this life and the next, a transition such as baptism. (Mell 2010, 174)

The other scenes in the lower register can be related to baptism as well; the story of David and goliath shows how the faith in God can win over evil forces. The scene of the women near the tomb has been assigned different interpretations; the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, a procession, the act of baptism or the resurrection of Christ have all been opted. The last one is the most probable.

( Bradford Welles 1967, 190-191) The women go to the tomb of Christ to
oil his body, but when they get there the grave is open and Christ has risen. All scenes on the lower part of the wall are related to water and oil, which refer to baptism. (Bradford Welles 1967, 197) David was blessed with oil, before his battle with Goliath, the woman at the well is blessed with words. The eight scenes together refer to the act of baptism and the character of Christianity as a σωτηρος. The images are both narrative and symbolical.

Ulrich Mell argues that the order of the scenes has been painted to guide the neophyte through the ritual of baptism. The first images one sees are the garden scene and David and Goliath, which show what it means to be part of the Christian community. The next scene is the woman at the well, who has “living water”, after that follows the baptism with the fresco of Adam and Eve and the sheep bearer, but the Sin of the neophyte is washed away through the act of baptism. The neophyte sees the north wall next, here are the miracle works depicted, which show the good works of Christ and should encourage the freshly baptized person to trust the help of Christ. The final scenes show the women at the tomb, which shows the resurrection of Christ which remind the neophyte of the eternal life for every Christian. (Mell 2010, 292-293) This seems an interesting theory but a little too farfetched, since the possible other frescoes have not outlasted time.

The art of the house church has the same tradition as the frescoes in the catacombs, both use themes for the Old and New Testament. The art gives a limited impression of time and space, shows no visible interactions between different persons in a scene, only because they are juxtaposed their relation is visible, there are some personal traits but the images are based on stereotypes. (Bradford Welles 1967,163)
8.4 Other examples of baptisteries

The archaeological difficulty of house churches lies in the fact that the building still resemble ordinary houses on the outside and that minor adaptations such as knocking down some walls to create larger rooms are made. But no mayor constructional changes are made. So it is possible that other house churches may not have been recognized, a less likely option is that they did not exist or that they have not outlasted time. (Provoost 1983, 31) The piscina could have been a fountain or the frigidarium. (Snyder 2003, 205)

Another early example is found in San Giovanni in Fonte in Naples, but this baptistery is dated to the early 5th century, a Christogram is the main image, (Jensen 2000, 39) but other mosaics show; the women at the well, Jesus at the

Figure 26; Drawing of the decorations on the north and south wall. Source: Snyder, 2003, 133
wedding in Cana, the Traditio Legis, a sheep bearer and a shepherd between two drinking deer. (Ferguson 2009, 839)

Snyder lists in his Ante Pacem, 2003 possible other baptisteries: “the house with the fish” in Ostia is based on the presence of an unusual mosaic; a goblet with one fish inside and two fish outside. But if this is the only clue and with no specific furniture or graffiti it is hard to prove, that this house was used as a church.

Another example is the chapel of San Gregorio, but this chapel was demolished and rebuilt in 1576.

Finally, at Gabi La Grande in Spain a villa with a Christ-monogram was discovered with an octagonal piscina, but once again this is the only evidence. (Snyder 2003, 206-208)

These potential baptisteries neither support nor weaken the presence of images of a shepherd in baptismal context. Hopefully with the knowledge of the invisibility of house churches current archeologist are more aware of the signs.
9. Cleveland marbles

9.1 Introduction

The Cleveland marbles is a group of statues consisting of a Jonah cycle with four scenes, a sheep bearer and six portrait busts- (3 the same males and 3 similar females).

Since 1965 they are in the Cleveland museum of Art, the original origin is unknown. They generally are dated to the final quarter of the 3rd century A.D. and probably come from Asia Minor. Donald A. McColl, of Dumbarton Oaks, has taken samples of marble in Asia Minor and he wants to prove the origin of these statues by the analysis of stable isotopes. (http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/byzantine-fellowship-reports/signs-of-the-times-the-cleveland-marbles) His research is still in progress, he has searched for comparanda and has taken samples from different quarries. The hypothesis states that these marbles come from a workshop in ancient Docimium in Phrygia (modern day Turkey). Inscriptions mention travelling workmen and Christian funerary monument of Docimian marble are known.

Although their exact function is not known, generally it is thought that they come from a Christian family tomb. (Jensen 2000, 20) Dinkler argues that these statues do not come from a sepulchral context. (Dinkler 1986, 396) Provoost argues that this group of statues does not form a group because the portraits busts are three times the same man and women, he thinks that these were ordered by a ruler and given to affiliates. The figurative statues could be an assembly but do not necessary need to be one. (Provoost 1983, 220) Provoost argues that they are to be looked at just from the front, while Wischmeyer describes them as statues to be seen from all sides. (Wischmeyer 1981, 253)

The portrait busts are 35 x 20 x 12 centimeters and carved from one piece of marble, based on the woman’s hairstyle her bust can be dated to the last quarter of the 3rd century. The hairstyle of the man can be dated in the second half of the 3rd century. ( Wischmeyer 1981, 254) The faces are the same, but the clothes differ, as the two depicted women’s busts show.

The other marbles are a sheep bearer and a Jonah cycle consisting of four scenes, Jonah is swallowed by a sea monster, he is spat out again, Jonah in a praying stance and finally Jonah resting under some leaves.
The statue of the sheep bearer is 50x26x16 centimeters in size, the back is more rough than the front side. (Wischmeyer 1981, 256) The shepherd is a young beardless man, who wears a tunic.

The Jonah cycle consists of four statues, two of them are made to be seen from all sides, these are the scenes in which Jonah gets eaten and is spat out again by the sea monster. This sea monster has a pig’s head with sharp teeth, the body of a fish, it has lion paws and wings. The statue of Keton eating Jonah is 52 cm high, the highest statue of the group. (Wischmeyer 1981, 256)

The other statues show a praying Jonah and a Jonah resting under the vines. The statue of the resting Jonah is 32x46x18 cm, it is wider than it is tall (Wischmeyer 1981, 257) The statues are similar in working method, material and style, they come from the same workshop, probably in Asia Minor.

**9.2 Three or four scenes in a Jonah cycle**

In the catacomb of San Callisto is a Jonah cycle with three scenes, the Jonah *orans* is the added fourth scene. The most common scene of three is 1. Jonah thrown (standing as orans) in the sea or swallowed by Ketos 2. Spit out by ketos 3. Jonah resting. (Speigl 1978, 6) In the catacombs these scenes are based on pagan and Roman images. The resting Endymion is similar to Jonah resting under the vine, both are common in a sepulchral context. (Snyder 2003, 92) The Ketos is based on Roman sea creatures.

**9.3 Function**

Where do the Cleveland marbles come from? One possibility is that they served as table feet, a second option is as ornaments in a nymphaeum or near another water source, and finally, as mentioned before from a funerary context. The two most likely options are near a source of water or funerary. (Wischmeyer 1981, 265) Although it is currently impossible to give a clear answer, it is interesting to see a possible reconstruction of how these statues stood in a mausoleum. (Wischmeyer 1981, 275-276)
Figure 27: Woman’s portrait bust. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 279

Figure 28: Woman’s portrait bust with different clothes. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 278

Figure 29: One of the three males portrait busts. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 279

Figure 30: The sheep bearer. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 282

Figure 31: Jonah swallowed by the Ketos. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 280

Figure 32: Jonah spat out by the Ketos. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 281

Figure 33: Jonah in praying stance. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 282

Figure 34: Jonah resting under the vines. Source: Wischmeyer 1981, 283
9.4 Reconstruction
When considering the number of statues and the subjects of the statues it is likely that between every set of figurative statues a pair of portraits was placed.
The aforementioned is an option if this is done in a rectangular space with an entrance that is accessible.
In the first composition two of the portraits do not look at each other, but when the option displayed in brackets is chosen with two man and two women together they do look at each other. (Wischmeyer 1981, 276)
10. Catacombs

10.1 Introduction

The first catacomb was discovered in 1578 at the Vigna Sanchez. (Rutgers 2000, 12) The literal translation of the catacombs comes from the Latin name “ad catacumbas” meaning near the hollows. Hypogea means “under the earth”.

The catacombs developed in four phases; first the original part from the 2nd and 3rd century, these parts are close to the hypogea from which the developed. In the 3rd century, catacombs with their own entrance emerged and these were expanded until the 4th century. Finally, from the 5th to the 9th century A.D., they stopped being used as a burial place. (Rutgers 2000, 53)

The oldest catacomb is St. Callixtus; where nine 3rd century popes are buried. (Mancinelli 1981, 21)

At the beginning of the 2nd century the popularity of cremation decreased whilst the number of inhumations increased. Mausoleums and hypogea developed underground. It should be noted that inhumation is not merely a typical Christian affair, it occurred amongst pagans as well. (Rutgers 2000, 60) Unlike pagan catacombs, most Christian catacombs did not have a mausoleum as entrance, instead they had a complete underground complex with an independent entrance. Another difference is that the Christian catacombs were open to the whole community and not meant for a specific family. Two thirds of all catacombs date from the 4th century. (Rutgers 2000, 64)

The Early Christians believed that they would be in heaven sooner when they would be buried close to a pious person such as a martyr or saint.

As the house churches, called tituli, the catacombs were private property. The names were derived from the owners and later confused with saints or martyrs with a similar name. The underground of tuff stones were hollowed out to create graves and passages. Sometimes old quarries were used.

Different types of funerary spaces were possible, rectangular cavities in the wall (loculi) were used for single burials but cubicula were another option; which were rooms with multiple vault for relatives. A third type of grave is called an arcosolium, a hollowed out cell with a horizontal lid and an arch above, often decorated with frescoes. In a loculus, the body was wrapped in a sheet and placed
in the cavity, with an oil lamp for guidance to the next world. Floor graves were
dug in passages and rooms.

In the 4th century the *loculi* were arranged in regular rows in order to
accommodate as many people as possible. (Rutgers 2000,68) After the 5th century
other funerary practices such as burials in and near churches were common, the
bones of martyrs and saints were taken from the catacombs as well and were
placed in shrines in churches.

10.2 Why is archaeology of catacombs different from regular archaeology?

Suburban land was costly around Rome and a large number of people were
in favour of inhumation which resulted in the catacombs being excavated to a
height of 5 metres below surface. Based on regular archaeology, efforts have been
made to date the catacombs on stratigraphy, which proved to be impossible
because graves were not always dug in a regular order and various extensions
were excavated at different points in time. Furthermore, most of the finds are not
found in situ and the ones that are, are hard to date. Nevertheless coins
inscriptions and pottery can be helpful. (Rutgers 2000, 48) Iconography is difficult
to apply because of the long term use of catacombs and later applications within
the same space, the depicted architecture does not always reflect reality of that
period and brick walls have no specific chronology. (Jonckheere 2006, 66)

10.3 Art

The catacombs are richly decorated with frescos, many have survived due
to the stable climate in the catacombs and the absence of building activity.
(Rutgers 2000, 82) The chronology of Early Christian art has been mentioned
earlier in this thesis, but a short summary will not do any harm. From the 2nd
century onwards there are three phases, the first phase used similar decorations as
the Romans, in the 3rd century scenes from the Old Testament are depicted and in
the 4th and 5th century the New Testament is depicted in the catacombs. (Rutgers
2000, 84)

Sarcophagi were placed in catacombs or mausoleums, most of them have
been taken out of their original context and there are many different types which
makes it worthwhile to write a separate chapter just on sarcophagi.
As mentioned before, the plates that cover the loculi may contain images such as a sheep bearer. Another art form that occurs in the catacombs is the art of wall painting; frescoes. Especially in the mausolea, hypogea and cubicula frescoes were frequently applied on walls, vaults and on the arcosolia above the resting place. Since most Christian catacombs did not have an entrance through a mausoleum, the examples given here come from cubicula.

The possible subjects for images are portraits of saints, Christ, Mary, the Apostles and the deceased. Other scenes come from the Old and the New Testament. Images that depict the life of the deceased, the ritual around the dead and life in antiquity are an option too. (Provoost 1983, 139) Simplified symbols such as the Christ monogram can be found and there are a lot of bucolic-idyllically images, and many different Roman mythological scenes. (Provoost 1983, 140)

The most common scenes are the bucolic-idyllic scenes, -they represent feelings of happiness and luck for the next life-, followed by orans figures (piety) and other common images feature musicians. (Provoost 1983, 140) In the catacombs are 12 scenes that depict baptism. (Ferguson 2009, 123)

10.4 Examples of Frescoes

A. Catacomb of St. Callixtus

This sheep bearer is painted on the ceiling of the cubiculum of the sacraments, also known as Nestori -4, it is the central image, the remainder is decorated by him floral motives, decorative lines and a dove. (Provoost 1983, 141) The walls are decorated with roses and different birds; the left wall with peacocks, the back wall with a dove and the right wall with decorative lines. The decoration is dated to 250-275 A.D.

The catacomb of Pamphilus holds cubiculum Nestori-3, where another ceiling is painted with a combination of a sheep bearer and dove. The walls are
decorated with floral motives, a flying dove with an olive branch and in the arcosolium Noah and the ark is depicted. (Provoost 1983, 142)

**B. Nestori 9, Via Anapo**

In an anonymous tomb at the Via Anapo there is a wall tomb (Nestori-9) with on the middle of the arch a sheep bearer, surrounded by roses and other flowers. The front is decorated with more roses, but the left wall has a fresco of Jonah cast out of the Boat. On the lunette are Daniel and the Lions depicted, with doves near a vase. It dates to the Constantine era. (Provoost 1983, 142)

**C. Nestori 51, catacomb of St. Peter and Marcelinus**

In the cubiculum Nestori 51 of the catacomb of Saint Peter and Marcellinus the *lucernarium* decorated as well.

![Figure 37: Ceiling with frescoes from cubiculo Nestori-51, date 310-320. Source: http://studydroid.com/imageCards/card-14296359-front.jpg](http://studydroid.com/imageCards/card-14296359-front.jpg)

On the light shaft itself are images of Daniel, the Raising of Lazarus, a dove with an olive branch and birds near a fruit basket. On the ceiling, figure 37, frescoes of a sheep bearer, Jonah being cast out of the Boat, Jonah spat out by the monster, Jonah resting, angry Jonah, 4 orans (2 male, 2 female), birds and flowers are depicted. These fresco’s dates from 310-320. (Provoost 1983, 142-143)

**D. Nestori 39, Inter duas lauros**

Another example of a sheep bearer is found in *arcosolium* Nestori-39 in the catacomb *inter duas lauros*. In the lunette is a meal scene with flying birds next to it. On the front are genii holding a garland. On the arch above the lunette are depictions of Jonah spat out by the monster, two decorative heads with a sheep bearer in between, birds, flowers and a resting Jonah. Provoost give a new
interpretation to the sheep bearer here, he perceived the sheep bearer to be a “naughty genius or even a garden gnome“.(Provoost 1996, 49)

**E. Rock grave, Cyrene**

Although all the examples stated above come from Rome, in Cyrene a rock grave, possibly from the 3rd century is known with a sheep bearer on the lunette. The sheep bearer wears a laurel, a flock of sheep stands around him, and is flanked by two trees. Around this image seven fish are painted. When interpreting these two images together, one could explore mystical interpretation or consider the shepherd and the fish as two juxtaposed symbols for luck and invigorating food. (Provoost 1996, 56)

**10.5 Examples of slabs to seal loculi**

Finally some examples of stone slabs to seal loculi with sheep bearer will be shown below. These slabs can hold both inscriptions and carved in drawings.

**A. Inscription of Apuleia**

This inscription is dedicated to a small girl, Apuleia Crysopolis, she died when she was seven years old. The inscription is in the catacombs of San Callisto. Next to the inscription, are a flower and a sheep bearer depicted. (Mazzolini 2003, 169)
B. Loculus of Adolius

This slab closed the loculus of a boy called Adolius, it is interesting that besides the sheep bearer tools are depicted. These might give a clue of the occupation of the deceased. (Provoost, 1983, 137)

![Figure 39: Plate with a sheep bearer, tools and an inscription, museo Pio Cristiano.](image)

source: Provoost 1983, 146

C. Loculus of Florentius

Figure 40 is another example of a plate with a sheep bearer on it, this loculus belonged to Florentius, it is dated around 300. (Provoost 1983, 137)

![Figure 40: Plate with an inscription, a tree and a sheep bearer.](image)

(Dated around 300)
Museo Pio Cristiano. Source: Provoost 1983, 146
11. Rites of passage

This chapter will describe the rite of baptism and the funerary practices. At the end of the chapter Van Gennep’s theory on rites of passage such as baptism and funerary practice will be used to explain the function of baptism and funerary practice.

11.1 Etymology

The word baptism is derived from the Greek word Βάπτισμα, which means “washing”. (Ferguson 2009, 38) The Christian ritual might be influenced by the Jewish rite of immersion (tebilah). (Ferguson 2009, 76) The practice of Christian baptism is based on Matthew 28:19 and the baptism of Jesus himself. There is little relation to pagan washing or the Roman bath culture. The Christians used the word baptisma, while the Jews and pagan used baptismos. (Ferguson 2009, 853)

11.2 Origin and Function

The act of baptism could have originated as a consequence of the habit to purify oneself at sacred sites? Or is derived from the mystery religions or the Roman bathing culture. A mythological baptism is the dipping of Achilles in the Styx by his mother Thetis. (Ferguson 2009, 25-36) In the Near East water rituals were used for purification and celebration of new life.

One of the functions of baptism is the forgiveness of sins. (Ferguson 2009, 83) Luke mentions in the Bible the forgiveness of sins, in John and Peter a new birth. (Ferguson 2009, 164) The baptism of John was also a moral cleansing. (Chidester 2001, 68)

11.3 Practice

Hippolytus (c.170-c.235) describes the rite of baptism. At first the initiates took three years of catechises. (Chidester 2001, 68)

Before the rite of baptism was conducted one was kept separate from the community, bathed on Thursday, on Friday the candidate fasted, on Saturday he
or she underwent an exorcism. The baptism was performed at dawn. (Chidester 2001, 69)

Both the baptizer and the baptized were naked, the body was anointed before baptism. Both males and females were nude, this could be interpreted as a radical freedom from gender differences and human sexuality. The baptism consisted of three immersions. (Chidester 2001, 71)

Through baptism the baptized shared in the death and resurrection of Christ, and it had a regenerating function. Faith, repentance and nudity were important, just as the triple immersion (in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) and the anointment, after baptism one could participate in the Eucharist. (Ferguson 2009, 855)

11.4 Sources

Chapter seven of the Didache describes the administration of baptism; “…concerning baptism, baptize in this way: after speaking all these words, baptize into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in living water. If you do not have living water, baptize in other water; if you are not able in cold water, in warm. If you do not have either pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Before the baptism, the one baptizing, the one being baptized, and others if they are able are to observe a preliminary fast. Command the one being baptized to fast beforehand for one or two days”. (Ferguson, 2009, 340).

11.5 Children’s baptism

Tertullian opposes to the baptism of children. Infant baptism was unusual before the 4th century and became common in 5th century. (Ferguson 2009, 857)

11.6 Funerary practice

It is hard to reconstruct the early Christian funerary practice. Since the contemporary Christian literature does not explicitly write about funerary practice, only some short references are made. (Volp 2002, 97) Before the catacombs were used they were probably buried in the same grounds as their pagan contemporaries (Volp 2002, 10) The ritual environment of the Mediterranean world shows a plurality of rituals. Different peoples and different regions have kept (traces of) their own rituals. This applies to the funerary
customs too, in the 1st century A.D, for example, three options were available; cremation, balmign or inhumation. (Jonckheere 2006, 369)

The Christians probably had the same funerary practice as their pagan contemporaries though the pagans opted for cremation whereas the Christians preferred burial. The pagans remember the day of birth while the Christians celebrate the date of the death. (Reekmans 1968, 518). Although Christian were not supposed to give grave goods (they were useless in their afterlife) this pagan ritual continued as a habit in the provinces until the 7th and 8th century. (Provoost 1996, 21)

Most Christians were buried in catacombs, cemeteries above the ground (sub divo) were present as well. These cemeteries were outside of the city along roads. They were walled gardens, it is possible that Christians were buried here, but the early symbols are hard to identify as Christian. (Provoost 1983, 122) The graves were pits where the body was placed in and the pits were filled up again afterwards. Most graves are oriented to the east, the bodies were protected from the soil by placing terracotta slabs on them before filling up the grave. These protective slabs evolved to roof like structures. (Provoost 1983, 123) They could be made from marble, other types of stone or bricks. Coffins were possible too, made from marble, terracotta and on rare occasions lead. (Provoost 1983, 123) The most luxurious types were decorated sarcophagi, which could have roofs constructed over them.

As a cemetery was used more and more people had to be buried in one grave, which were dug vertically and filled up from the bottom, the bodies were placed on top of each other protected by masonry with sometimes a marble slab on top. Only the top grave remained visible. Another solution used was multiple graves horizontally next to each other with a brick wall in between, and a lid for each grave.

When one was cremated, the ashes were either stored in an ash chest, common among the wealthier classes, or placed in a columbarium. Inhumations were buried in cemeteries outside of the city or placed in mausolea. The word ‘coemetarium’ is derived from the Greek word κοιμητήριον coimētērion, and translates to “sleeping chamber”. (Volp 2002, 151) At the times of epidemics such as the plagues the bodies of the victims were buried in mass graves called “piticuli”. (Jonckheere 2006, 228) The catacombs were used from
the 2nd century onwards. Inhumation is cheaper than cremation, although it requires more space to place the death. (Volp 2002, 193)

Everyone had the right to have a proper funeral (Ius Sepuli) and the final resting place was protected by law. Although these were not always respected. (Reekmans 1968, 518) Cases of reused slabs and vandalism to Christian graves are known. (Provoost 1996, 24)

Under pope Fabian (236-50), the city of Rome was divided in seven districts with deacons responsible for cultural, instructional and charitable activities. They were also responsible for the funerary rites (Mancinelli 1981, 6). The church paid for the funeral and the independant fossores dug the loculus.

11.7 Ritual

“All Roman funerary practice was influenced by two basic notions; first, that death brought pollution and demanded from the survivors acts of purification and expiation. Secondly, that to leave a corpse unburied had unpleasant repercussions on the fate of the departed soul.” (Toynbee 1996, 43) The forestated indicates that the funerary rite was important for both the relatives and the deceased. Van Gennep shows three phases within each rite of passage, a funerary is such a transition. When a person died the rite started and it did not finish with the funeral, remembrance and mourning are also part of this process. When a person died he would be washed and dressed, and the eyes were closed. The deceased was placed in a room and could be visited by family and friends. The chosen dress, visitation, and customs such as coins for the ferryman Charon differ per region and are too broad to specify here- though noteworthy is an important different between a Christian and a non-Christian funerary rite is the lamentation. Where the Romans would lament their death, the Early church fathers opposed this custom, because it was a Pagan custom and they opposed anything pagan. It was inappropriate to act this uncontrolled and emotional. A third argument is the optimistic perspective of the afterlife. The deceased has gone to a better place, so one should be relieved. (Volp 2002, 183)

After this period the funeral took place, which could be a cremation, a burial or a local custom such as mummification. Christians were forbidden to cremate their dead, consequently their ceremony was a burial. Before the catacombs were used Christians were lain to rest in the cemeteries, in a similar manner as non-
Christian. It is unknown whether Christians used instrumental music, they probably used vocal music such as psalms and hymns. (Volp 2002, 147) When a burial was placed in the catacombs, the shelves were sealed with tiles, slabs of stone, marble or terracotta. (Curl 1980, 67) Which could contain could contain markings of the occupant and inscriptions.

The living had to maintain relations with their deceased ancestors. (Chidester 2001, 78) In addition to, they probably, praying for the dead, they celebrated the date of dead with a meal at the cemetery called a refrigerium. Fish, bread, cakes wine were shared. They reaffirmed their bond of kinship and community. (Chidester 2001, 78) They could also pray and speak to the dead. In catacombs, frescoes depicting meal scenes have been found, which indicate when the catacombs were used this custom was maintained. (Volp 2002, 100)

11.8 From cremation to inhumation

The shift from cremation to inhumation has four possible explanations the rise of Christianity, the Eastern mystery cults, the influence of Pytagorism or economical causes. All four explanations are invalid; the mystery cults adapted themselves to the habits of the region, the revival of Pytagorism was in 60-70 A.D. ,which is too early to have any impact in the 2nd century. The supposed economic reasons are contradicting, since those who could afford the wood for a cremation pile opted for inhumation. In addition, there is no evidence of any religious let alone Christian influence. (Jonckheere 2006, 371) More likely is a trend among the rich to have mausoleums built and luxuriously carved sarcophagi, to publically display their wealth. It was a matter of personal choice; within a family both cremations and inhumations could be placed in a mausoleum. (Jonckheere 2006, 372)

11.9 Rite of passage

A rite of passage marks the transition from one life phase to the next, such as from child to adult or from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Rituals connected with these changes are split up in three phases; separation, transition and incorporation. (Van Gennep 1960, VII)

Funerary rites vary through time and space, and within one community differences based on gender, age and social position are made. During the
mourning period, the deceased and the mourners stand between the world of the living and the dead. (Van Gennep 1960, 147)

In rituals, purity and impurity are important. Dealing with a death makes the family impure which needs to be overcome by performing rituals to become pure again. (Volp 2002, 268)

An example is the use of specific colors for ritual purpose in the early church. Since medieval times different celebrations of the Eucharist (Easter or Christmas) have a different colored robe for the priest. (Volp 2002, 128) In Ancient Greece black was the color associated with mourning, and in many cultures the color white is often associated with purity. The main color used in catacombs is red. (Volp 2002, 128) One could conclude this color to have a symbolic meaning with respect to the funerary rite.

The function of a rite of passage, is done to stabilize a situation which has become unstable, for example a dead in the family. A more festive example is the rite of baptism or a reaching certain age like puberty. The three phases provide a structured way of dealing with these events.

The sheep bearer was together with the orant the most used image in the 2nd and 3rd century A.D. Their interpretation of philanthropy and piety are suitable in both a funerary and baptismal context. The attendants at a baptism or funeral could have been reminded of these human virtues during the rituals of a rite of passage.
12. Discussion

In this essay the Christian culture in Rome has been examined on the basis of a recurring theme; the sheep bearer. During this research, many difficulties concerning interpretation have become apparent.

At first, the theme of the sheep bearer has multiple pagan and Christian interpretations, it is not always possible to ascribe one certain meaning. Different beholders both then and now are likely to give their own interpretation based on their own background.

Secondly archaeology of catacombs does not rely on stratigraphy as opposed to regular archaeology, which troubles the dating of objects and places. Graves have been dug in an irregular pattern; new passages were made when necessary.

Thirdly, the trouble with sarcophagi is the fact that most of them were removed from their original context and that makes the interpretation of ambiguous images difficult or even impossible.

Fourthly, due to the indistinctiveness of Christian art in the first two centuries is archaeologically hard to identify because of the similarities with pagan counterparts, however the literary sources are abundant. The development of Christian art relied heavily on contemporary art forms. In the third and fourth century the distinction between Christian and pagan (material) culture is difficult to establish, the separation is not as strict as researchers assumed. Human virtues such as piety, philanthropy, love of wisdom and hopes of afterlife are expressed in both kinds of art. Gradually a distinct style developed.

Finally, although primary written sources are rich and provide a good insight in the lives of early Christians, these sources also contain reactions on each other and give contradicting opinions. Written sources can differ from the general practice and could have been only known to literate people, however besides these difficulties they still are a valuable source of information.

The shift from cremation to inhumation has four possible explanations: the rise of Christianity, the Eastern mystery cults, the influence of Phytagorism or economical causes. All four explanations are invalid; the mystery cults adapted themselves to the habits of the region, the revival of Phytagorism occured in 60-70 A.D. ,which is too early to have any impact in the 2nd century. The supposed
economic reasons are contradicting and there is no evidence of any religious let alone Christian influence. More likely is a trend among the rich to have mausoleums built and carved luxuriously sarcophagi, to publically display their wealth.

The discussed issues and difficulties in Early Christian art indicate that a lot of study has been done, and there are even more questions to be answered as a result. With the current scientific approach and improving methods and techniques some of the discussed issues might be solved in the future.
13. Conclusion

In this thesis, following the traces of the shepherd’s motif, we touched upon Christian art itself; what defines it; its typology, chronology and development; and the difficulties encountered when studying art from this period. Early Christian art started out as virtually invisible, since the religion was forbidden and most followers were of a lower social class. They used the prevailing material culture and gave it their own interpretation; gradually Christian themes from the Bible were chosen.

The catacombs have been discussed, since these are the richest sources concerning Early Christian art in Rome. The theme of the sheep bearer has been thoroughly discussed and possible interpretations have been considered. Both Christian interpretations, such as the Good Shepherd and the representation of paradise, as well as the pagan interpretations have been discussed. For pagans a shepherd could be a mythological figure such as Endymion or a symbol of the bucolic life or a season. Some examples have been given to show the accompanying difficulties. When interpreting a sarcophagus or a catacomb it is necessary to consider each image individually, the combination of images and the combination between both frescoes and sarcophagi. The context determines its meaning.

Besides the images, one must be careful to remain as objective as possible. A modern-day Christian might be more eager to consider a sheep bearer as the Good Shepherd. It was and still is in the eye of the beholder. Since the 1970’s the tradition of the slightly religiously coloured research- which started in the Counter-Reformation, until the 20th century most researchers were catholic- was abandoned.

Historical events that had influence on the changing Christian iconography are the end of the persecution of Christians in 290 A.D., the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. and, finally, Christianity as state religion in 391 A.D. As the church became more powerful, the image of the shepherd was abandoned. An interesting case are the Cleveland marbles, a group of statues consisting of a Jonah cycle with four scenes, a sheep bearer and six portrait busts- (3 of the same males and 3 similar females). They are dated to the 3rd century A.D. and probably originate from Asia Minor. Their original context is unknown, however generally they are thought to
come from a Christian family grave. It is not uncommon to have a combination of a Jonah cycle and a sheep bearer in a funerary context.

The sheep bearer’s multiple interpretations were used in both a baptismal and funerary context; in the catacombs are a lot of bucolic- idyllic images.

The sheep bearer was a symbol of philanthropy, which is fitting in a funerary context. The sheep bearer in the baptismal context of Dura Europos is interpreted as a Good Shepherd; the sheep bearer has a flock of sheep around him which can symbolize “being guarded from the wolves” as described in the Acts of Thomas, -one becomes part of the flock of Christ and he protects it as a shepherd.

The sheep bearer is together with the orant the most used image in the 2nd and 3rd century A.D. Not only in sepulchral art but also everyday objects such as lamps. In this case a specific meaning apart from aesthetic appeal cannot be proven. Their interpretation of philanthropy and piety are suitable in both a funerary and baptismal context. The attendants at a baptism or funeral could have been reminded of these human virtues during the rituals of a rite of passage, marking the transition from one life phase to the next, such as from child to adult or from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Rituals connected with these changes are split up in three phases; separation, transition and incorporation.
Summary

This thesis investigates the theme of the sheep bearer in Early Christian art, during the first five centuries A.D. The main focus is Rome, with its catacombs and sarcophagi, but the City of Dura Europos and the Cleveland Marbles are not forgotten. The sheep bearer was one of the most common themes in the 2nd and 3rd century A.D. The main question of this thesis is the origin of the motif of the sheep bearer and the application of this theme in baptismal and funerary context. In order to answer this question the origin, interpretations, written sources and the rise and decline of this theme need to be researched.

The theme of the sheep bearer is derived from the *kriophoros*; a male figure who carries an animal on his shoulders. The interpretations range from a seasonal symbol, Jesus the Good Shepherd, a guider of souls; *psychopompos*, a symbol of philanthropy or the bucolic life to simply a shepherd.

First, some word on Early Christian art; during the first two centuries A.D., no Christian art or specific material culture is known, however the literary sources are abundant. Early Christian art started with appropriate and suitable images from the Greco-Roman culture, gradually these images were adapted into a specific and identifiable Christian iconography.

The sheep bearer does not only occur in baptismal and funerary contexts, this theme can is depicted on oil lamps, gems and drinking cups. Statues are made as well, both architectural and funerary. Examples of these objects are given. Apart from the interpretations and different locations of the sheep bearer the theory of Arnold van Gennep on rites of passages is set out against the funerary practice and baptism of Early Christians.

The sheep bearer is in combination with the *orant* the most used image in the 2nd and 3rd century. Their interpretation of philanthropy and piety are suitable in both a funerary and baptismal context. The attendants at a baptism or funeral could have been reminded of these human virtues during the rituals of a rite of passage.
Samenvatting

Deze bachelorscriptie onderzoekt het thema van de schaapdrager in de Vroeg-Christelijke kunst, in de eerste vijf eeuwen na Christus. Het accent ligt op de catacomben en sarcofagen in Rome, maar de stad Dura Europos en de “Cleveland marbles” worden ook meegenomen. De schaapdrager was één van de meest voorkomende motieven in de tweede en derde eeuw na Christus. De hoofdvraag betreft de oorsprong en het gebruik van het schaapdragersthema in zowel graf- als doopcontext. Om deze vraag te kunnen beantwoorden is de oorsprong, interpretaties, geschreven bronnen, de opkomst en het verdwijnen van het thema te besproken.

De schaapdrager is afgeleid van de kriophoros; een man die een schaap op zijn schouders draagt. Mogelijke interpretaties lopen uiteen van een sybool voor een jaargetijde, Jezus de Goede Herder, een psychopompos (begeleider van zielen), een symbool voor menslievendheid of het pastorale leven tot gewoon een herder.

De Vroeg-Christelijke kunst van de eerste twee eeuwen na Christus is niet te onderscheiden van de Romeinse cultuur, wel is er een veelheid aan textuele bronnen. De eerste kunst bestaat uit gepaste afbeeldingen uit de Grieks-Romeinse cultuur, geleidelijk werden zij bewerkt tot Christelijke thema’s met een herkenbare iconografie.

De schaapdrager komt niet alleen in graf- en doopcontexten voor, maar is ook afgebeeld op voorwerpen uit het dagelijks leven, zoals lampen, gemmen en drinkbekers. Ook zijn er architectonische en funerale standbeelden bekend, voorbeelden van deze obecten worden genoemd.

Naast de interpretatie en locaties van schaapdragers komt ook de theorie over “rites de passage” van Arnold van Gennep aan de orde om het graf- en doopritueel te beschrijven.

De schaapdrager was samen met de orans het meest gebruikte thema in de 2e en 3e eeuw n. Chr. De bijbehorende interpretaties van menslievendheid en vroomheid passen goed in de doop- en grafcontext. De aanwezigen werden tijdens het ritueel herrinerd aan deze deugden.
Literature

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