

Danuta Shanzer

*Argumenta leti and ludibria mortis:*  
**Ekphrasis, Art, Attributes, Identity, and Hagiography**  
**in Late Antique Poetry**<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Introduction

The relationships between text and image are manifold, and their nature and genesis unclear. Gregory of Tours tells how Bishop Namatius' wife built a basilica for Stephen outside Clermont. Since she wished to adorn it with pictures, she sat in the church and read the stories she wished to have depicted to the painters, telling them what to paint.<sup>2</sup> Such a testimonium is rare. But also ambiguous. What did she do? Simply read the text out loud? Or tell them what to depict or even where and how?<sup>3</sup> Usually texts with historical or documentary pretensions purport to describe pictures explicitly (*ekphrases*), and scholars obsess about the objective existence of the subjects of these *ekphrases*.<sup>4</sup> *Ekphrases* in obviously creative literary works are treated differently. No one seeks extant models, though extant art can illuminate them.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes text and image may be co-designed or co-dependent, with apparently only one part of the whole surviving. This seems to be the case for the Tituli of Prudentius, where Renate Pillinger has convincingly shown that all

<sup>1</sup> Heartfelt thanks to many who gave me bibliographical advice: Paul Binski, Shirley Ann Brown, Jaroslav Folda, Nicholas Horsfall, Herbert Kessler, Tomas Lehmann, Donald Mastronarde, Alan Shapiro, and David Wright. Special gratitude to Dieter Quast of the RGZM in Mainz for the gift of publications and for showing me the African bowls and to Renate Pillinger who generously read my penultimate draft; Ihor Ševčenko († 26 December 2009) was, as always, a very special Gesprächspartner at an early stage in developing my topic.

<sup>2</sup> Greg. Tur. Franc. 2, 17: *Cuius coniunx basilicam sancti Stephani suburbano murorum aedificavit. Quam cum fucis colorum adornare vellet, tenebat librum in sinu suo, legens historias actionum antiquorum, pictoribus indicans quae in parietibus fingere deberent.*

<sup>3</sup> See above n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Pausanias' description (10, 28) of Polygnotos' painting in the Lesche at Delphi is exceptional.

<sup>5</sup> Catullan coverlet, with Ariadne as Maenad in carm. 64, 60–70, Cumaean gates in Verg. Aen. 6, 20–33, Marine *thiasos* in Apul. met. 4, 31.

quatrains but one have plausible iconographic analogues.<sup>6</sup> The codependency is clear in quatrains such as tit. 81–84 where the modern pendant could not have been illustrated, but is suggested by the text. Likewise for the images in Paulinus' Church at Nola.<sup>7</sup> Clearly Paulinus used verses and images and even composed verses for Sulpicius Severus' church.<sup>8</sup> Images could speak to the illiterate.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes texts added value to images designed for the uneducated.<sup>10</sup> Augustine, however, warned of the pitfalls of working back from conventional image to (non-existent) narrative: Christ did not spend time with Peter and Paul.<sup>11</sup>

These problems relating to text and image are familiar and have been worked on extensively. The following paper will address a different set of problems, namely the depiction of Christian martyrs and martyrdoms within the framework of 'Text' and 'Bild.' It will begin by raising questions (some methodological) concerning various famous ekphrases of putative (lost) narrative works of art describing martyrdoms. It aims to make explicit some of the difficulties and constraints faced by the Christian artist who sought to depict martyrs and martyrdoms vis-à-vis pagan art, as well as to explore some roads not (or only eventually) taken.

## 2 Texts and images that shun explicit violence

An execution or lynching stood at the center of any martyr-narrative. Often torture too. Yet the depiction of violent death in the ancient world was subject to strict rules of genre. Athenian dramatic conventions, for example, seem to require that it not be staged, and tragedians had recourse to messenger-

<sup>6</sup> R. Pillinger, *Die Tituli Historiarum oder das sogenannte Dittochaeon des Prudentius. Versuch eines philologisch-archäologischen Kommentars*, Wien 1980 (ÖAW, phil.-hist. Kl., Denkschriften, 142), 66, for the exceptional Psalm quatrain.

<sup>7</sup> R. C. Goldschmidt, *Paulinus' churches at Nola*, Amsterdam 1940.

<sup>8</sup> Paul. Nol. epist. 32, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Most famously Greg. M. epist. 11, 10 to Serenus of Marseilles (CC SL 140A, p. 874).

<sup>10</sup> E. g. Paul. Nol. carm. 27, 580–585: *Propterea visum nobis opus utile totis / Felicis domibus pictura ludere sancta, / si forte adtonitas haec per spectacula mentes / agrestum caperet fucata coloribus umbra, / quae super exprimitur titulis, ut littera monstret / quod manus explicuit.* – See C. Kässer, *The Body is Not Painted On: Ekphrasis and Exegesis in Prudentius Peristephanon 9*, *Ramus* 31/1–2 (2002), 158–174 (165). Kässer however now notes (see his article in this volume, p. 159) that the Paul. Nol. carm. 27, 584f. really means something more like “so that writing may point out/draw attention to what the hand has unfolded/set forth.” So the relationship is not simply explicative.

<sup>11</sup> Aug. cons. evang. 1, 10, 16 on the falseness of depictions of Christ with Paul: *Sic omnino errare meruerunt, qui Christum et apostolos eius non in sanctis codicibus, sed in pictis parietibus quaesierunt: nec mirum si a pingentibus fingentes decepti sunt.*

speeches.<sup>12</sup> Some artistic ekphrases of classical scenes of violence concentrate on the moment before the death.<sup>13</sup> Obviously hagiographers had willy-nilly to mention violence. How they depicted it was another matter. Even protreptics, such as the *De laude martyrii*, acknowledge fear.<sup>14</sup> In a priceless passage from *Passio Montani* a martyr asked Cyprian in a dream whether the deathblow was painful, and how to bear it.<sup>15</sup> Initially many *passiones* elided or transmuted the actual moment of martyrdom and its details beneath the baldest of statements.<sup>16</sup> Much paleo-Christian art seems likewise to have shunned explicit violence.<sup>17</sup> Funerary art was usually ‘glad.’<sup>18</sup> This should not occasion surprise,

<sup>12</sup> E. g. Eur. *Bacch.* 1043–1052; *Hipp.* 1173–1254. The same holds true for Seneca’s tragedies. Sophocles’ *Ajax* 815–865 may be a partial exception. R. C. Jebb - A. C. Pearson, *The Ajax of Sophocles*, Cambridge 1936, ad 815 note that the body was not at first visible to the chorus, but think that the sword-point was. Tecmessa, though, can be seen to act as a messenger at 915, and 1003 provides the revelation of the corpse. There is more on the staging in W. B. Stanford, *Ajax*, London-New York 1963, 166 and 173f. Arist. *Poet.* 1452b defines pathos: πάθος δέ ἐστι πρᾶξις φθαρτικὴ ἢ ὀδυνηρά, οἷον οἱ τε ἐν τῷ φανεροῦ θάνατοι καὶ αἱ περιωδυνία καὶ τρώσεις καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα (“Pathos [‘suffering’] is a destructive or painful act, such as deaths in public, agonies, and woundings.”). The messenger-speech replaced the staging of pathos. See J. M. Bremer, *Why messenger speeches?*, in: J. M. Bremer - S. L. Radt - C. Ruijgh (edd.), *Miscellanea tragica in honorem J. C. Kamerbeek*, Amsterdam 1976, 29–48 (36–42).

<sup>13</sup> E. g. Philostratus, *imag.* 2, 9; 2, 10; 2, 30; Philostr. *Jun. imag.* 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ps. Cypr. laud. mart. 1: Nam quis est quem non ista res terreat? Quis quem non admirationis suae pavore subvertat?*

<sup>15</sup> *Pass. Montan.* 21, 3f. Cyprian at that point was their only martyr. He said: *Alia caro patitur cum animus in caelo est.*

<sup>16</sup> See *Pass. Maximil.* 3, 3: *Sic passus est*; also *Pass. Montan.* 15, 4.

<sup>17</sup> E. F. Le Blant, *Les persécuteurs et les martyrs aux premiers siècles de notre ère*, Paris 1893, 281. For some exceptions see the items adduced by Pillinger (above n. 6), 77 and 89, in re *Prud. tituli* 113–117, the Slaughter of the Innocents (but the ivory can hardly be considered sanguinary and the mosaic elides the slaughter, as does the example from Santa Maria Maggiore in E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making: Main Lines of Stylistic Development in Mediterranean Art. 3<sup>rd</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century*, Cambridge, Mass. 1977, fig. 126/127, and M. Gautier-van Berchem - É. Clouzot, *Mosaïques chrétiennes du IV<sup>me</sup> au X<sup>me</sup> siècle*, Genève 1924, 53, who comment on its rarity and “reserve”). The placid severed heads from the *Codex Sinopensis* and the *Alexandrian World Chronicle* lie inertly on their dishes. Plates 22 and 67 depict the hanging of Judas.

<sup>18</sup> A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins*, Princeton, N. J. 1980, 7f. – Some of the paintings from the *Via Latina catacomb*, however, suggest that universal needs to be qualified, in particular the hanging of Absalom (its first depiction), and the transfixion of Zimri and Cosbi (*Num.* 25, 7–15). For these see A. Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb: A Unique Discovery of Early Christian Art*, New Lanark, Scotland 1991, 72. But all three were malefactors. And of course the OT Book of Kings (in particular) was different and known to contain scenes of violence (hence to be unsuitable for barbarians). See *Philost. hist. eccl.* 2, 5: μετέφρασεν εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν φωνὴν τὰς γραφὰς

for sanguinary hagiography or art might not have been conducive to recruiting martyrs in times of persecution. Audience matters.

### 3 From martyrdom to commemoration

After Constantine, circumstances changed. Christian *martyria* became public pilgrim sites. There was now a need to give a face to and perpetuate a story for figures who might be undocumented and umbratile at best. Damasus' epigraphic project is a famous example.<sup>19</sup> Hearing of and reading had clearly mattered before. Seeing and even touching (healing and relics) gained importance now. Images could reach people whom narratives could not reach. More can look at one at the same time. Images spoke to those who could not read.

### 4 Namelessness and facelessness and recognition

Early Christian art faced not just the expected worries about idolatry,<sup>20</sup> but a twin difficulty. The martyred dead were often, not just nameless, but generally faceless.<sup>21</sup> So how did one recognize a martyr whose name one knew, but one had never seen?<sup>22</sup> Some interactions could be personal. In the case of an epiphany, dream or vision, the martyr is either recognized immediately<sup>23</sup> or is recognized tellingly afterwards.<sup>24</sup> Such experiences are controlled and media-

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ἀπάσας, πλὴν γε δὴ τῶν Βασιλειῶν, ἅτε τῶν μὲν πολέμων ἱστορίαν ἔχουσῶν, τοῦ δὲ ἔθνους ὄντος φιλοπολέμου καὶ δεομένου μᾶλλον χαλινοῦ τῆς ἐπὶ τὰς μάχας ὀρμῆς. ("He translated all of scripture into their language except for the Book of Kings, because it contained an account of wars. For their people were excessively fond of war and in need of a bridle to control their urge to fight.")

<sup>19</sup> Prudentius must have seen his inscriptions. See *perist.* 11, 1–8.

<sup>20</sup> E. Kitzinger, *The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm*, *DOP* 8 (1954), 83–150 (esp. 85), emphasizes the momentous character of Christianity's decision to admit graven images. The article paints a picture of comparative lack of controversy and tolerance in Late Antiquity.

<sup>21</sup> *Prud. perist.* 11, 2–16: *Incisos tumulis titulos et singula quaeris / nomina; difficile est ut replicare queam. / Tantos iustorum populos furor impius hausit, / cum coleret patrios Troia Roma deos. / Plurima litterulis signata sepulcra loquuntur / martyris aut nomen aut epigramma aliquod, / sunt et muta tamen tacitas claudencia tumbas / marmora, quae solum significant numerum. / Quanta virum iaceant congestis corpora acervis / nosse licet, quorum nomina nulla legas. / Sexaginta illic defossas mole sub una / reliquias memini me didicisse hominum, / quorum solus habet conperta vocabula Christus, / utpote quos propriae iunxit amicitiae.*

<sup>22</sup> For a variant of the question see H. Delehay, *Cinq leçons sur la méthode hagiographique*, Bruxelles 1934, 119: "Comment les artistes chrétiens s'y prenaient-ils pour mettre, sur les représentations isolées, les noms des saints, sans avoir besoin de les écrire?"

<sup>23</sup> As was Cyprian, because he knew him, by Marian in *Pass. Mar. Iac.* 6.

<sup>24</sup> As an example consider Gregory of Tours' development (in every sense) of the image of Julian of Brioude, refracted through multiple witnesses. See D. R. Shanzer, *So Many*

ted by the seer, so they may be very subjective and idiosyncratic.<sup>25</sup> But what of art?

## 5 Depiction for identification in classical culture

It is clear how identification worked in pagan life and art. Aristocratic Romans were fortunate because their *imagines* preserved their features.<sup>26</sup> Emperors and other notables had statuary traditions.<sup>27</sup> Divinities had types and attributes. An Aphrodite, for example was a beautiful naked woman of a certain age and voluptuousness – in certain poses. Clement of Alexandria knew one when he saw one.<sup>28</sup> As for a Leda – here an attribute, a swan clinched the identification. The combination of two elements secured the pagan iconography and prevented confusion.

## 6 Depicting martyrs: static vs. narrative

Peter and Paul developed a type-iconography very early:<sup>29</sup> Paul had been described in the Acts of Paul and Thecla 3.<sup>30</sup> The earliest portraits of living ascetics date to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> But before photography most martyrs

Saints – so Little Time ... the Libri Miraculorum of Gregory of Tours, JMedLat 13 (2003), 19–60 (35f.).

<sup>25</sup> For culture patterns in so-called ‘chrematismoi’, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1971, 107 and 109: impressive parental figures or authority figures. Sometimes just a voice and sometimes a tall man.

<sup>26</sup> H. Flower, *Ancessor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture*, Oxford-New York 1996, 40f., lists various forms.

<sup>27</sup> Which could in their turn enable recognition in a dream. See J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*, Princeton, N. J. 2007, 225, on Hist. Aug. Aur. 24, 2–9, the recognition of Apollonius of Tyana. Also C. A. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1972, XV and 40. Aristid. hier. log. 2, 41 recognizes the specifically Phidian Athena.

<sup>28</sup> See Protr. 4, 50.

<sup>29</sup> See Delehayé, *Cinq leçons* (above n. 22), 127f.

<sup>30</sup> Trans. B. D. Ehrman, *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader*, New York 1998, 178: “A man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, of noble mien, with eyebrows meeting, rather hook-nosed, full of grace.” The iconoclast Epiphanius of Salamis complained in his ep. ad Theodosium fr. 26: γράφουσι γὰρ Πέτρον τὸν ἅγιον ἀπόστολον οἱ πλάνοι γέροντα ἄνδρα, τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὸ γένειον κεκαρμένον· γράφουσι δὲ καὶ τὸν ἅγιον Παῦλον ἄλλοι μὲν ἀναφαλαντέα, ἄλλοι δὲ φαλακρὸν γενειῆτην. (“Charlatans write that Peter the holy apostle was an old man with clipped head and beard. Some write that Saint Paul had a bald forehead, others that he was bald and bearded.”)

<sup>31</sup> See T. Lehmann, *Martinus und Paulinus in Primuliacum (Gallien): Zu den frühesten nachweisbaren Mönchsbildnissen (um 400) in einem Kirchenkomplex*, in: H. Keller - F. Neiske (edd.), *Vom Kloster zum Klosterverband: Das Werkzeug der Schriftlichkeit. Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums des Projekts L 2 im SFB 231* (22. – 23. Februar

lacked faces, so static images were unlikely to identify or differentiate successfully. At Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, for example, all the martyrs look alike and must be distinguished by the labels above their heads.<sup>32</sup> Only Agnes sports a punning lamb at her feet.<sup>33</sup> The same phenomenon exists elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> Acheiropoietic “true icons” aimed eventually to circumvent that problem!<sup>35</sup> Yet when artists, shrines, or churches sought to depict martyrs, they also wanted to be able to narrate and instruct – particularly at the beginning before vulgate legendary traditions were established. This left three options:

1. Self-explanatory narrative image
2. Narrative or static image plus inscription (or verbal narration)
3. Static image plus differentiating attribute.<sup>36</sup>

## 7 Prudentius

Prudentius lamented the nameless, faceless dead. His own Peristephanon redressed such oblivion by providing narratives for 13 martyrs (including groups of martyrs). Two of his poems (perist. 9 and 11) explicitly invite the reader to consider ‘Text und Bild.’

### 7.1 Narrative before painting

In perist. 11 the poet’s narrative anticipates the painting and provides the prequel of the moment depicted, which seems to have been the collection of the dispersed and bloodied limbs of Hippolytus.<sup>37</sup> The evil judge (67–76) had

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1996), München 1997, 56–67, for the pitfalls of vanity and the exchange of images of the living ascetic.

<sup>32</sup> The same situation is implied by Paul. Nol. carm. 28, 20: *Martyribus mediam pictis pia nomina signant.*

<sup>33</sup> See G. Bovini - M. Pierpaoli, Ravenna: tesori di luce, Ravenna 1990, plates 38f. The unlabelled young female orant with the lamb at her feet from the Cemetery of Commodilla has (on the same principle) been identified as Agnes. See *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, vol. 1, Roma 1961, 384.

<sup>34</sup> E. g. there are labels in the Orthodox Baptistery rotunda, on which see Gautier-van Berchem (above n. 17), 99, and in the Archepiscopal Chapel in Ravenna (Gautier-van Berchem, 117), but none in the Arian Baptistery (Gautier-van Berchem, 172), where the figures are the apostles. At Rome S. Cosmas and Damian features labels. See Kitzinger (above n. 17, fig. 170); San Lorenzo fuori le Mura too (Gautier-van Berchem, 190f.); also S. Priscus at Capua, for which see A. Grabar, *Martyrium: recherches sur le culte des reliques et l’art chrétien antique*, 2 vols., Paris 1943, vol. 2, pl. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Kitzinger (above n. 20), 113, for magical impressions of divinities.

<sup>36</sup> What A. Rousselle, *Sources iconographiques perdues: les premières images des martyrs*, Cassiodorus 2 (1996), 215–230 (224), would call a “formule iconographique.”

<sup>37</sup> Prud. perist. 11, 123–132: *Exemplar sceleris paries habet inlitus, in quo / multicolor fucus digerit omne nefas, / picta super tumulum species liquidis viget umbris / effigians tracti membra cruenta viri. / Rorantes saxorum apices vidi, optime papa, / purpureasque*

threatened a sequence of deaths that explicitly played upon Christians' worst fears about the survival and resurrection of their bodies: 'sparagmos' ("tearing asunder into pieces"), burning, drowning, and consumption by fishes. The *ekphrasis* is not formally closed,<sup>38</sup> so it is probably Prudentius' meta-commentary rather than the image itself that assures us that all body parts were present and correct.<sup>39</sup>

## 7.2 Painting before narrative

In the case of *perist.* 9 the painting is the immediate conversation piece.<sup>40</sup> Again the painting depicts a moment, and here the *aedituus*' back-story and commentary are formally rounded off at *perist.* 9, 92. One must become very literal-minded, like children in museums, to see Prudentius' problem. If one does not already know the story, how is one to tell what is depicted?<sup>41</sup> Neither image is a narrative sequence, but a moment. And – curiouser and curiouser – in both cases the scenes depicted are dismayingly liable to confusion with classical narratives: *perist.* 11 with Sen. Phaedr. 1085–1114 and *perist.* 9 most probably with Liv. 5, 27.<sup>42</sup>

## 7.3 Why ekphrases?

Prudentius was not compelled to narrate these poems with the aid of embedded visual aids, and there is little sense, as one might expect from a classical ekphrasis, that his spectatorship characterizes him as well.<sup>43</sup> Yet he

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*notas vepribus inpositas. / Docta manus virides imitando effingere dumos / luserat et minio russeolam saniem. / Cernere erat ruptis compagibus ordine nullo / membra per incertos sparsa iacere situs.*

<sup>38</sup> G. Bertonière, *The Cult Center of the Martyr Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina*, Oxford 1985, 42; M. A. Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation: Prudentius and Classical Mythology*, Ithaca 1989 (Cornell Studies in Class. Phil.), 86; M. J. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: the Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius*, Ann Arbor 1993, 154.

<sup>39</sup> *Perist.* 11, 145–150.

<sup>40</sup> Prud. *perist.* 9, 9–20: *Erexi ad caelum faciem, stetit obvia contra / fucus colorum picta imago martyris / plagas mille gerens, totos lacerata per artus, / ruptam minutis praeferens punctis cutem. / Innumeri circum pueri (miserabile visu) / confossa parvis membra figebant stilis, / unde pugillares soliti percurrere ceras / scholare murmur adnotantes scripserant. / Aedituus consultus ait: 'Quod prospicis, hospes, / non est inanis aut anilis fabula. / Historiam pictura refert, quae tradita libris / veram vetusti temporis monstrat fidem.'*

<sup>41</sup> Roberts (above n. 38), 140, rightly distinguishes the informed from the uninformed viewer.

<sup>42</sup> P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Intorno ad alcune reminiscenze classiche nelle leggende agiografiche del secolo IV*, in: id., *Hagiographica*, Roma 1908 (Studi e Testi 19), 123–162 (esp. 131f.).

<sup>43</sup> On this point see Grewing in this volume.

decided to explore ‘Text und Bild’ in precisely (and just) these two cases for some reason. Could it be that in these two poems, both of which feature his authorial voice as pilgrim, he was recounting what he really saw at the respective *martyria*: namely paintings, as described? Since both paintings were liable to confusion with classical narratives,<sup>44</sup> both urgently needed commentary from *aedituus* to poet to audience (perist. 9) and from poet to audience (perist. 11). Both, unmediated, would have been falsely self-explanatory. A more cartoon-like narrative art<sup>45</sup> of the sort described in Asterius of Amasa’s hom. 11 on St. Euphemia<sup>46</sup> might have solved such problems of narration by distinguishing scenes: the heroine at judgment, her bloody torture by having teeth torn out,<sup>47</sup> in prison, and finally burning.

#### 7.4 Did such paintings exist?

Given the reticent nature of the surviving early Christian depictions of martyrdoms, what should the critical reader make of the extremely bloody *ekphrases* of perist. 9 and 11?<sup>48</sup> Believe?<sup>49</sup> Or not believe? Was Prudentius likely to have invented a painting when pilgrims could easily verify his account? Or assume that some such paintings existed, even if the ones described were

<sup>44</sup> Presumably this is the point behind the *aedituus*’ reassurance in perist. 9, 18: *Non est inanis aut anilis fabula*. On the admonition, see Kässer (above n. 10), 159, who sees it as an admonition to mind the “hermeneutical gap”. Malamud (above n. 38), 88, notes that Prud. (c. Symm. 2, 54–56) knew of depictions of the death of Hippolytus in temples of Diana.

<sup>45</sup> I. e. one in which the protagonist is repeated multiple times. P. H. Von Blanckenhagen, *Narration in Hellenistic and Roman Art*, *AJA* 61/1 (1957), 78–83 (esp. 79); K. Weitzmann, *Narrative in Early Christendom*, *AJA* 61/1 (1957), 83–91 (esp. 84 and 89); R. Brilliant, *Visual Narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art*, Ithaca 1984, II and 23, speaks of “serialized images” and “creative redundancy.”

<sup>46</sup> PG 40, 333–338; Grabar (above n. 34), 72–74.

<sup>47</sup> Hom. 11, 4, 1, 5: ὁ δὲ παραστάς ἐξέκοπτε τῶν ὀδόντων τὸ μαργαρωδες· σφύρα δὲ καὶ τέρετρον φαίνεται τῆς τιμωρίας τὰ (5) ὄργανα. Δακρύω δὲ τὸ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ μοι τὸ πάθος ἐπικόπτει τὸν λόγον· τὰς γὰρ τοῦ αἵματος σταγόνους οὕτως ἐναργῶς ἐπέχρωσεν ὁ γραφεὺς ὥστε εἴποις ἂν προχεῖσθαι τῶν χειλέων ἀληθῶς καὶ θρηνησας ἀπέλθοις. (“The man standing by knocked out her pearly teeth. A hammer and a gimlet seem to be the instruments of torture. I weep at what is happening and my suffering cuts short my speech. The painter has coloured the drops of blood so accurately that you would say that it was actually pouring from her lips and you would depart weeping.”). Kässer (above n. 10), 168, makes the same point about missing phases.

<sup>48</sup> For the debate, see Roberts (above n. 38), 138.

<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, after much beating around the bush, the recourse of A.-M. Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, Oxford-New York 1989, 275.



literary figments.<sup>50</sup> If the first, then one must imagine lost traditions – as Grabar did – even though only scant parallels exist and those from the 7<sup>th</sup> century and later.<sup>51</sup> First a few static examples: Even then the much-mangled Maccabees, their mother, and Eleazar appear serenely unharmed in a painting from S. Maria Antiqua.<sup>52</sup> Likewise the 7<sup>th</sup> century Agnes, though she stands above her sword and between flames.<sup>53</sup> The martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta (8<sup>th</sup> century) provides one non-static example.<sup>54</sup> If Prudentius invented the paintings, one must speculate about why. Beglaubigungsapparat? A chance to provide a dramatic autoptic messenger-speech-substitute for a scene for which there can be no messenger? A desire to put distance between himself and suspect hagiography? It may continue to be impossible to provide an adequate answer.

But other problems remained: torture and death was the climax. As Aline Rousselle said, “no one wanted to provide a simple portrait of a martyr as an illustration. One wants scenes of execution.”<sup>55</sup> But, that said, such scenes tout court presented certain disadvantages compared to texts. It was hard to turn the image of a human being burned to death into someone emitting a delicious odor of fresh-baked bread.<sup>56</sup> The magic of textual narration, however, could effect that alchemy and enable what Plotinus would call the “inner eye.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>50</sup> This is how I read Rousselle (above n. 36), 225: “Je vais supposer que des tableaux ont existé à la fin du IV<sup>ème</sup> siècle”, seems to ambiguate. Paintings existed, even if these did not. Implicitly one could make this argument about all the texts that describe martyrdom. They only make sense if such painting existed. After all, otherwise, would the market stand a bishop spouting unprecedented ekphrases in sermons, which are transactional documents? The poet, of course, is trickier.

<sup>51</sup> Grabar (above n. 34), 73, noting that no physical evidence survives till much later.

<sup>52</sup> Kitzinger (above n. 17), pl. 7 and fig. 204f. – Also P. Romanelli - P. J. Nordhagen, S. Maria Antiqua, Roma 1964, Tav. II. They have labels, but nothing to indicate their fate.

<sup>53</sup> For a 7<sup>th</sup> century mosaic of Agnes with a sword at her feet between two red flames, see Gautier-van Berchem - Clouzot (above n. 17), 196, pl. 247; Grabar (above n. 34), 60; now M. Andaloro - S. Romano, *Arte e iconografia a Roma: dal tardoantico alla fine del Medioevo*, Milano-Roma 2002, 25.

<sup>54</sup> See A. Grabar - C. A. J. Nordenfalk, *Early Medieval Painting: from the Fourth to the Eleventh Century*, New York 1957, 49.

<sup>55</sup> Rousselle (above n. 36), 216: “Personne ne souhaite donner en illustration un simple portrait de saint martyr. On souhaite des scènes d’exécution.”

<sup>56</sup> Mart. Polyc. 15, 2: καὶ ἦν μέσον οὐχ ὡς σὰρξ καιομένη ἀλλ’ ὡς ἄρτος ὀπτώμενος ἢ ὡς χρυσὸς καὶ ἄργυρος ἐν καμίνῳ πυρούμενος. καὶ γὰρ εὐωδίας τοσαύτης ἀντελαβόμεθα ὡς λιβανωτοῦ πνέοντος ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν τιμίων ἀρωμάτων. (“And he [sc. Polycarp] was in the middle [sc. of the wall of flames] not like burning flesh, but like bread baking or like gold or silver smelted in a furnace. And we experienced a sweet scent as of frankincense or some other priceless perfume.”)

<sup>57</sup> A. Grabar, *Plotin et les origines de l’esthétique médiévale*, in: *L’Art de la fin de l’Antiquité et du Moyen âge*, Paris 1968, 15–29 (esp. 18f.).

Asterius took care to add his commentary on the imperturbability of the martyr Euphemia.<sup>58</sup> And Basil of Caesarea could recount how the martyr Barlaam could see punishments as joy, whippings as roses, the rack as salvation, tortures as flowers,<sup>59</sup> and the prison as a meadow.<sup>60</sup> The text can massage the material extensively.<sup>61</sup> And this ability to comment, “spin,” or massage was crucial during the period when the Christian iconographic vocabulary was being established. It is thus hard to agree that narration and picture are “essentially equivalent.”<sup>62</sup>

## 8 Ekphrasis and ‘Real Paintings’

So far attention has been drawn to some of the problems early Christian art faced in depicting martyrs and martyrdoms, and how *ekphrasis* or textual commentary could help. But one still experiences considerable difficulty in trying to work on text and image at their intersection in *ekphrasis*.

<sup>58</sup> Aster. Amas. hom. 11, 4, 3: Ἰστησι δὲ μέσην αὐτήν, τὰς μὲν χεῖρας πρὸς οὐρανὸν διαπλώσασαν, ἀχθηδόνα δὲ οὐδεμίαν ἐπιφαίνουσαν τῷ προσώπῳ, ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον γεγηθυῖαν ὅτι πρὸς τὴν ἀσώματον καὶ μακαρίαν ἐξεδήμει ζωὴν. (“And they stood her up in the middle with her hands spread out towards heaven. Her face exhibited no distress, but rather rejoicing that she was migrating towards a blessed life apart from her body.”).

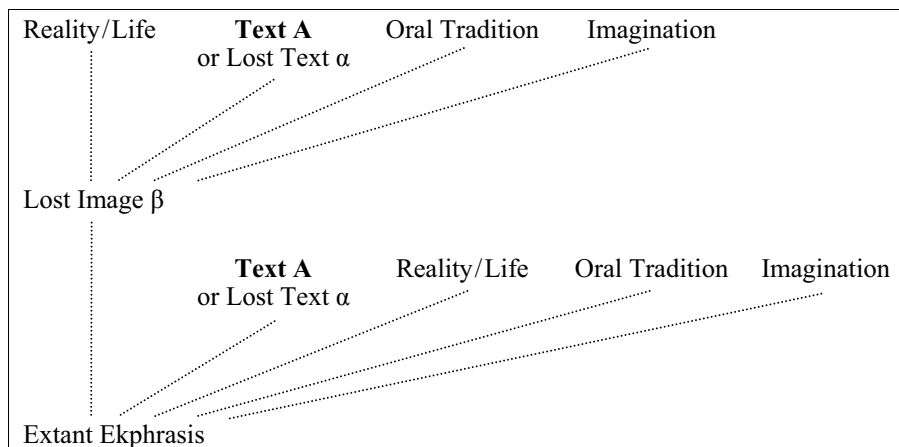
<sup>59</sup> Cf. Prud. perist. 5, 278f. and 320f. The martyr’s possibly subjective perception is confirmed as the jailer’s vision.

<sup>60</sup> Bas. hom. 17 in Barlaam (PG 31, 484–489), 485: εὐφροσύνην τὰς κολάσεις ἡγούμενος, ῥόδοις τισὶ βάλλεσθαι νομίζων ταῖς μάλιστα· τὰς τῆς ἀσεβείας αἰκίας δραπετεῦων ὡς βέλη, καπνοῦ σκιάν τὸν δικαστικὸν θυμὸν λογιζόμενος· τάγματα δορυφόρων ἀπηγριωμένα γελῶν· ὡς ἐπὶ στεφάνοις τοῖς κινδύνοις χορευῶν· ταῖς πληγαῖς ὡς τιμαῖς εὐφραίνόμενος· ταῖς σφοδρότεραις τιμωρίας ὡς βραβεῖοις ἐνσκιρτῶν λαμπροτέροις· ξίφη διαπτύων γυμνούμενα· χεῖρας δημίων ὡς κηροῦ μαλακωτέρας δεχόμενος· κολαστήριον ξύλον ὡς σωτήριον ἀσπαζόμενος· κλείσμασι δεσμοπηρίων ὡς λειμῶσι τερπόμενος· βασάνων ἐπινοίας ὡς ἀνθέων ποικιλίας ἠδόμενος. (“Thinking his punishments joy, believing that in the blows of whips he was being pelted with roses, evading the insults of the ungodly as if they were darts, thinking the anger of the judge a shadow of smoke, laughing at the savage ranks of spear-carriers, dancing in response to dangers as if they were victory-crowns, rejoicing in blows as if they were honours, skipping at the most excessive torments as if they were shining prizes, spitting disdainfully at naked swords, receiving slaps at the hands of the public as if they were softer than wax, embracing the stocks in prison as if they were a salvation, rejoicing in the lock-ups of prison as if they were meadows, taking pleasure in the (variety of) tortures contrived as if they were many-coloured flowers.”). – The attribution of the sermon to Basil is disputed: for arguments against see H. Delehay, S. Barlaam, Martyr à Antioche, AB 22 (1903), 129–145 (esp. 132 and 135).

<sup>61</sup> Elsner (above n. 27), 68, speaks of providing a pedagogic model for the gaze, both by “enabling” and by “occluding.” I think more in terms of “supplementing” and “spinning.”

<sup>62</sup> Roberts (above n. 38), 139.

The ‘real’ relationship of ‘Text’ and ‘Bild’ in many of the cases examined is irretrievably messy and impossible to recover completely.<sup>63</sup> The texts are preserved, but their expressions are often loose, and the images are lost. Yet one is trying to do no less than textual or source-criticism on them. Many of scholarly discussions are far too reductive and over-simplified, given the kind of contamination (in the strong textual critical sense) that is possible. There is no need to reconstruct all the possibilities. One simply has to consider the distressing implications of one perfectly possible scenario:



The extant *ekphrasis* alone survives, plus perhaps an extant source text or so (in bold). Yet both the lost image described in the *ekphrasis* or the *ekphrasis* itself could have been influenced by reality, an existent or lost text, oral tradition, or imagination (Havet’s “témoignage intérieure”).<sup>64</sup> There are too many possible variables to draw hard and fast conclusions, particularly as regards the sources of ‘contaminations’ from extant or lost texts or from life. Into the artwork? Or into the *ekphrasis*?<sup>65</sup> It is dismaying to see certain types of categorical and reductive arguments made.<sup>66</sup> Ausonius’ *Cupido Cruciatu*s, supposedly,

<sup>63</sup> Ch. Kässer analyzed the Tituli Historiarum as triangulating between Bible and (real or imagined) ‘Bild’, see in this volume pp. 151–165.

<sup>64</sup> See L. Havet, *Le Supplice de Phlegyas: Étude sur un épisode de l’Énéide*, RPh 12 (1888), 145–172 (esp. 169), who is likewise working on the problem of a poet’s (Vergil’s) pictorial sources.

<sup>65</sup> Point made very well in E. Kalinka - O. Schönberger, *Philostratos: Die Bilder*, München 1968, 36: The presence of poetic citations is not incompatible with real pictures as sources because painters drew their images from myths, which in turn were recounted in poetic texts.

<sup>66</sup> L. Mondin, *Genesi del «Cupido cruciatu»*, *Lexis* 23 (2005), 339–372 (esp. 341); also A. Franzoi, *Decimo Magno Ausonio: Cupido messo in croce*, Napoli 2002, 10.

cannot be an *ekphrasis* of a real painting, because it uses *picturarum instar* (29) as a comparandum for something within the frame. Yet there is an excellent parallel in the famous *ekphrasis* in Catull *carm.* 64, 61: *saxea ut effigies bacchantis* (within an *ekphrasis*).<sup>67</sup> It's safer to regard certain sorts of compositions as *ekphrastic* rather than as controllable and contained *ekphrases* with one-to-one-correspondences. If this terminology is adopted, one can then legitimately invoke texts such as Basil's Sermon on Barlaam, which is not an *ekphrasis*,<sup>68</sup> but a challenge to painters!<sup>69</sup>

Sometimes (particularly if one is French and very clever) one ends up arguing for a lost image as source for a text (for reasons, good or bad). Havet, then the frères Reinach, and Delaruelle made arguments of this sort about the depictions of sinners in Vergil, *Aen.* 6.<sup>70</sup> Havet managed to transcend his own masterful "critique verbale" that reconstructed lost manuscripts to resurrect a lost painting of Vergil's Phlegyas. Salomon Reinach executed some very fancy footwork to help understand how pictures in a distant past, misinterpreted sans text, may have generated iconic punishments in extant Nekyiai: Sisyphus, Tityos, and Salmones.<sup>71</sup> Whatever one thinks of specific theses, this work is methodologically intriguing.<sup>72</sup> And Prudentians might irresponsibly be tempted to try something of the sort with *perist.* 4. One could imagine an apse-mosaic

<sup>67</sup> For the objectification, see Elsner (above n. 27), 69.

<sup>68</sup> Pace Rousselle (above n. 36), 222.

<sup>69</sup> See Bas. Hom. 17 in Barlaam (PG 31), 489: Ἀνάστητέ μοι νῦν, ὦ λαμπροὶ τῶν ἀθλητικῶν κατορθωμάτων ζωγράφοι· (5) τὴν τοῦ στρατηγοῦ κολοβωθεῖσαν εἰκόνα ταῖς ὑμετέραις μεγαλύνετε τέχναις. Ἀμαυρότερον παρ' ἐμοῦ τὸν στεφανίτην γραφέντα τοῖς τῆς ὑμετέρας σοφίας περιλάμπυατε χρώμασιν. Ἀπέλθω τῇ τῶν ἀριστευμάτων τοῦ μάρτυρος παρ' ὑμῶν νενικημένος γραφῇ· (10) χαίρω τὴν τοιαύτην τῆς ὑμετέρας ἰσχύος σήμερον νίκην ἠττώμενος. Ἴδω τῆς χειρὸς πρὸς τὸ πῦρ ἀκριβέστερον παρ' ὑμῶν γραφομένην τὴν πάλιν· Ἴδω φαιδρότερον ἐπὶ τῆς ὑμετέρας τὸν παλαιστὴν γεγραμμένον εἰκόνας. ("Please stand up, outstanding painters of athletic victories! Exalt with your arts the mutilated image of the leader [sc. Barlaam with his lost hand]. Shed light with the colours of your art on the athlete who has been depicted more ineffectively [lit. obscurely] by me. May I leave worsted by you in the depiction of the feats of the martyr! May I rejoice defeated by today's victory of your strength! May I behold the wrestling match between his hand and the fire depicted more accurately by you!")

<sup>70</sup> Havet (above n. 64), 145–172; T. Reinach, Pirithous ou Sisyphé?, RPh 13 (1889), 78–80; S. Reinach, Sisyphé aux enfers et quelques autres damnés, in: Cultes, mythes et religions, Paris 1908, 159–205; L. Delaruelle, Les souvenirs d'œuvres plastiques dans la Revue des héros au livre VI de l'Énéide, RA 4, Ser. 21 (1913), 153–170.

<sup>71</sup> He was as much interested in the Euhemerized figures of the past as in Vergil.

<sup>72</sup> Yet seems to have been (other than Delaruelle) omitted from her discussion of the 'Heldenschau' by Flower (above n. 26), 110–114, who concentrates on funeral procession and *imagines* as possible sources. The case that the parade "passes by on foot" (111) and is in "constant motion" (112) seems over-stated.

with a grand ‘karpophoria’ of urban Tychai – with a difference. The fruits would be the relics of martyrs and their crowns.<sup>73</sup> One does worry that scholars end up tying themselves into knots by attempting to prove a poet was working from art (i. e. a pictorial tableau) rather than from his imagination. A new version of an old problem: does the artist work from Nature or the Forms? Sage Austrians acknowledge ambiguity in reconstructing images from texts, even when a text explicitly sports the word *pictura*!<sup>74</sup>

These sorts of stemmatic fallacies of source involving life, images, and texts bedevil many debates about the sources of Early Christian art. They undermine some of the reasoning of Mathews, who sought to refute Grabar on the alleged imperial origins of much early Christian art.<sup>75</sup> To take one example, how can Mathews be sure that the depiction of Jonas resting beneath his vine is specifically dependent on a depiction of Endymion, when both could be independently derived from conventional idea of what a naked male (or indeed female, if one considers sleeping Ariadnes) looked like when asleep?<sup>76</sup> Must the alleged revalorizing of Jonah’s sleep into the repose of the blessed<sup>77</sup> have occurred specifically on the basis of the alleged iconographic recycling of Endymion? The biblical text (Jonah 4, 6) emphasizes Jonah’s (short-lived) joy in the ivy (gourd): *Et praeparavit Dominus Deus hederam et ascendit super caput Iona ut esset umbra super caput eius et protegeret eum. Laboraverat enim laetatus est Iona super hedera laetitia magna.*<sup>78</sup> Likewise, if Christ rides an ass, is the imagery anti-imperial (i. e. in competition with imperial *adventus*),<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup> See perist. 4, 9–60.

<sup>74</sup> Pillinger (above n. 6), 109, (quite rightly) on Augustine, serm. 316, 5 (the lapidation of Stephen): *dulcissima pictura est!* (PL 38, 1434).

<sup>75</sup> P. Brown, Review of Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, ABull 77/3 (1995), 499–502, and T. F. Mathews, Reply to Peter Brown, ABull 78/1 (1996), 178.

<sup>76</sup> The arm, at least, of the abandoned Barberini Faun is not dissimilar.

<sup>77</sup> See A. Stüber, *Refrigerium interim. Die Vorstellungen vom Zwischenzustand und die frühchristliche Grabeskunst*, Bonn 1957 (Theophaneia 11), 138, now criticized by E. Dassmann - J. Engemann - K. Hoheisel, Art. Jonas, in: RAC 18 (1998), 670–699 (694): “Wenn der gelöst unter der Kürbislaube ruhende J. so ähnlich liegt wie Endymion oder Dionysos ..., so zeigt dies nur, daß die christlichen Bildwerke Teil der spätantiken Kunst sind ...”.

<sup>78</sup> There was definitely re-organization going on in the Christian treatment of the episode. See Dassmann (above n. 77), 692, as well as the occasional in bono interpretation of the puzzling passage. See Dassmann, 687.

<sup>79</sup> Here I see a problem, for Mathews seems to be arguing that Christ is the opposite of imperial, while at the same time assuming no relationship (I would call it ‘push’) from imperial art.

based on a different model altogether (Mathews' country gentleman),<sup>80</sup> or biblical?<sup>81</sup> Or, all three of the above?<sup>82</sup> The presence of the *pullus* with the *asina* is a strong argument for use of Matthew (21, 1–6) as opposed to Mark or John and was required for Matthew's fulfillment citation (21, 6) to work. Mathews' insistence that the "doggy foal" is an "accident of the source images" and is derived from the Gentleman's Homecoming seems wrong-headed.<sup>83</sup>

## 9 Depicting Christian martyrdoms: classical vs. Christian conventions: the role of 'push'

It may be no coincidence that it is the two martyr narratives with the closest and most insidious ties to classical literature that unfold from the contemplation of paintings. Prudentius was thinking of 'Text' and 'Bild' quite self-consciously.<sup>84</sup> I would like to use this point to initiate a more theoretical discussion of the options that were available to Christian artists who wished to describe the deaths of martyrs. It is worthwhile running through some of these roads taken and roads not taken, to open up discussion of the problems the martyrs posed for Christian art. Interference from different classical traditions may have been aversive and exercised decisive 'push'.

### 9.1 *Insolitum leti genus* and telling moments

The two Prudentian *ekphrases* presented scenes that were *insolita leti genera*, to be sure, but nonetheless easily mistakable for pagan scenes if taken in by the eye alone. In the case of Hippolytus the mythological punishment was deliberate. It (and its depiction) would thus invoke the same idolatrous horror that surrounded the mythological or blasphemous 'fatal charades' some martyrs had to enact.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>80</sup> T. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton, N. J. 1993, 34f.

<sup>81</sup> Where the narrative no doubt already had both prophetic and subversive connotations.

<sup>82</sup> Mathews (above n. 80), 28f., insists that no element in the iconography requires imperial *adventus* to be a source. But Christ's entry into Jerusalem was indeed a royal *adventus*.

<sup>83</sup> Mathews (above n. 80), 34f. (quotation on 34).

<sup>84</sup> Even if thereby merely making excuses for creative activity. Grabar (above n. 34), 71, gets this right.

<sup>85</sup> For the term, see K. M. Coleman, *Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments*, JRS 80 (1990), 44–73; for more examples, see K. M. Coleman, *M. Valerii Martialis Liber spectaculorum*, Oxford-New York 2006, 62–65 and 82–85. Also *Pass. Perp.* 18, 4 for the robes of the priests of Saturn and Ceres.

### 9.1.1 Another iconographic confusion: Sacrifice and capitulation or steadfastness?

As a subcategory of such a scene, one might return to the torture of Barlaam as preached by Basil. The pagans tried to force the martyr to sacrifice by having him hold incense in his hand over an altar. Steadfastly he refused to open his hand and sprinkle the incense on the flame. His hand was reduced to ashes. Much needs to be said about this passage, in which Basil deliberately praises Barlaam's steadfastness by comparing him to statue<sup>86</sup> and ends by disingenuously inviting painters to 'improve' on his own verbal description.<sup>87</sup> But so far no one has compared Martial 8, 30<sup>88</sup> and 10, 25.<sup>89</sup>

These epigrams show that the legend of Mucius was yet another 'fatal charade,' and, for that reason, yet another possible iconographical confusion for a depiction of the martyrdom of Barlaam – not just any generic scene of sacrifice,<sup>90</sup> such as this 'Mucius,' from Dunapentele!<sup>91</sup> And of course scenes of sacrifice were themselves abominations, like the forced sacrifices imposed during persecutions that compelled the steadfast to burn their own hands.<sup>92</sup> (And eventually provide a script for voluntary ordeals by fire.) Such an image needs text, and cannot be read as pagan-Christian "Esperanto."<sup>93</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Bas. Hom. 17 in *Barlaam* (PG 31, 488): Ἀνδριάντα καλέσω.

<sup>87</sup> See above n. 69.

<sup>88</sup> *Qui nunc Caesareae lusus spectatur harenae, / temporibus Bruti gloria summa fuit. / Aspicias ut teneat flammam poenaque fruatur / fortis et attonito regnet in igne manus! / Ipse sui spectator adest et nobile dextrae / funus amat: totis pascitur illa sacris. / Quod nisi rapta foret nolenti poena, parabat / saevior in lassos ire sinistra focos. / Scire piget post tale decus quid fecerit ante: / Quam vidi satis hanc est mihi nosse manum.*

<sup>89</sup> *In matutina nuper spectatus harena / Mucius, imposuit qui sua membra focis, / si patiens durusque tibi fortisque videtur, / Abderitanae pectora plebis habes. / Nam cum dicatur tunica praesente molesta / 'ure manum', plus est dicere 'non facio'.* Barlaam is not cited by Coleman (above n. 85), 61f., nor Scaevola by Rousselle (above n. 36), 225.

<sup>90</sup> Pace Rousselle (above n. 36), 225, who points to the sacrifice of Elijah from Doura, where one figure could look as if he was burning his hand.

<sup>91</sup> Image from Dunapentele, Pannonia AD 2<sup>nd</sup> century – Hungarian National Museum – Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Lapidárium. See *Archaeologia Hungarica: Intercisa I (Dunapentele-Szálinvares)*, Series Nova, Budapest 1954, 215: "Dargestellt ist ein mit dem römischen Sagenheld identifizierter Soldat." The illustration is Nr. 191, Tafel LX, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Euseb. hist. eccl. 8, 12, 2. For Julian's trickery involving images of the gods, and the sacrificing hands of his soldiers, see Cassiod. hist. 6, 30 (CSEL 71, 349f., esp. 350, 45): *Et si dici posset, solam manum paganam esse, conscientiam vero nihil simul egisse.*

<sup>93</sup> Hans Förster's useful term, see in this volume, p. 84, quoting F. Dexinger - J. Rosenthal, *Als die Heiden Christen wurden. Zur Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, Wien 1992, 192–194.

## 9.2 Tribunal or Judicial Execution

A second option included tribunal scenes or scenes of judicial execution, in the arena or elsewhere. But classical scenes of execution were never favorable to the victim, and some showed up in the most secular of locales (such as mosaic floors with *venationes* and gladiators).<sup>94</sup> Classical models were lacking for burnings at the stake.<sup>95</sup> A few early depictions of martyrs being beheaded exist.<sup>96</sup> But these are exceptional. This type of scene, often one of imperial power, had to be ‘hijacked’ or ‘usurped’ by the Christians to glorify martyrs and stigmatize persecutors with its sense inverted.<sup>97</sup> One might compare this to rhetorical exaltation of *sermo humilis*. But something had to be done to revalorize these narratives of death and turn them from narrative ‘downers’ to ‘uppers.’ Narrative texts have no difficulty in doing so, because they can add meta-commentary to the image. Consider Perpetua’s self-help when she guided the novice gladiator’s sword to her own throat during her bungled execution.<sup>98</sup>

A Christian art that sought to depict the martyrs without help from texts thus started out with its own version of the ‘Christianity and Classical Culture’ problem that is so overworked in our study of literature, but also so unavoidable. Either (the mythical route) martyrdoms looked too classical and had blasphemous, derivative, or misunderstandable overtones as in the cases of

<sup>94</sup> For Christian disapproval of scenes depicting animals, see Mango (above n. 27), 33, for Nilus’ Letter to Olympiodorus and Ast. Am. hom. 1, 3, 1: τῆς γραφικῆς μιμεῖται τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πάντων ζῴων τοῖς πέπλοις τὰς μορφὰς ἐνσημαίνεται, and 1, 3, 3: Ἐκεῖ λέοντες καὶ παρδάλεις, ἄρκτοι καὶ ταῦροι καὶ κύνες· ὕλαι καὶ πέτραι, καὶ ἄνδρες θηροκτόνοι καὶ πᾶσα ἡ τῆς γραφικῆς ἐπιτήδευσις μιμουμένη τὴν φύσιν.

<sup>95</sup> Rousselle (above n. 36), 216. Note however that there were ekphrastic parallels for immolations-by-fire, e. g. Evadne in Philostr. imag. 2, 30.

<sup>96</sup> Grabar (above n. 34), 17, n. 3. For Nereus and Achilleus, see H. Leclercq, Actes des martyrs, in: DACL 1 (1907), 373–446 (esp. 423 and 435), and Le Blant (above n. 17), 286, and now M. Andaloro, L’Orizzonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312–468, 6 vols., vol. 1: La pittura medievale a Roma: 312–1431. Corpus e Atlante, Viterbo-Milano 2006, 108–110, for Crispus, Crispinian, Benedicta under S. Giovanni e Paolo on the Caelian hill.

<sup>97</sup> Grabar (above n. 17), XLVIII f.: “In one instance, and a rare one, we will see pre-Christian iconographic formulas applied in a sense diametrically opposed to the meaning they held originally. I have in mind those images of Imperial art which served to glorify the power of Rome and its representatives by showing the defeat of Rome’s enemies, who are bound, judged, condemned, and beheaded. Christian image-makers took over this imagery, but used it to glorify the judged and condemned – Christ, the apostles, the martyrs – and to stigmatize their persecutors – the princes, the judges, the Roman soldiers.”

<sup>98</sup> Pass. Perp. 21, 9f.



Hippolytus, Cassian, or Barlaam. Or else (the imperial art route) the martyr might look like an abject (and perhaps deserving) victim at best.

### 9.3 Non-narrative options

Both the options discussed tend to the narrative, whether details are supplied by the viewer or not. But there were other possibilities, which might be called iconographic formulae or clichés and would eventually distinguish even typologically similar saints one from the other.<sup>99</sup> These could have been (and of course eventually were) adopted. But not in Late Antiquity. They became perfectly standard and universally comprehensible by the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>100</sup> “Proud and triumphant the saints bear the instruments of torture which had opened to them the gate of heaven.”<sup>101</sup> But by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Jacopo da Voragine had assembled his *Legenda aurea*, so there was vulgate hagiography to support the art.<sup>102</sup> And viewers knew what was needed to interpret the image. Three options to be raised are: the body part, the wound, and the weapon. In the following section some tentative suggestions will be made about why these options did not catch on till much later.

#### 9.3.1 The Body Part

Eventually viewers would become familiar with cephalophoric saints<sup>103</sup> or saints carrying their breasts or eyes.<sup>104</sup> And many saints would become especially connected to the body part in which they were wounded or which was severed. So much so that some developed medical specializations in that body part. In our period though, particularly in epic hagiography, there was a tendency to spend considerable time on the martyr’s tortures. These latter were often multiple, and that multiplicity was the real point.<sup>105</sup> So no particular torture came to the fore. What would the visual impact of images of the saint with his/

<sup>99</sup> E. Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, New York 1972, 285.

<sup>100</sup> Mâle (above n. 99), 271, for the marking of calendars with arrows, a key, a sword, etc. Mâle, 285, for the prevalence of attributes in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. For a typical early 20<sup>th</sup> century gallery guide, see E. A. Greene, *Saints and their Symbols: A Companion in the Churches and Picture Galleries of Europe*, rev. ed. London 1924.

<sup>101</sup> Mâle (above n. 99), 286.

<sup>102</sup> Mâle (above n. 99), 272.

<sup>103</sup> P. Saintyves, *Les saints céphalophores. Étude de folklore hagiographique*, Paris 1929; more scientifically Delehaye, *Cinq leçons* (above n. 22), 135–138.

<sup>104</sup> Agatha and Lucy, for whom see the popularizing treatment in F. Lanzi - G. Lanzi, *Saints and Their Symbols: Recognizing Saints in Art and in Popular Images*, Collegeville, Minn. 2004, 88f.

<sup>105</sup> E. g. Prudentius’ Vincent in perist. 5, 98–fin. or Romanus in perist. 10.

her body part have been in the period before the development of Christian cults of healing? It might have looked for too much like a pagan scene of deity plus ex-voto. Or simply seemed ridiculous.<sup>106</sup> Or been too repulsive and infernal in its mutilation. Bertram dal Bornio has no head in Dante's *Inferno* and carries it like a lantern.<sup>107</sup> Central and late medieval images of Saint Denis are sedate.<sup>108</sup> An imitator of Poussin had other ideas – and no inhibitions.<sup>109</sup> But Late Antique viewers may not have relished contemplating saints without body-parts. Le Blant cleverly explained why Christians regularly escape methods of execution that destroy the body (flames, water, and beasts), but rarely the sword.<sup>110</sup> They had worries about the Resurrection and, while the spirit was willing, the flesh might be weak: bodies had to be preserved. But any missing pieces would be restored at the Resurrection.<sup>111</sup> Eventually attractive female saints, the Agathas and Lucys, regularly have one set of eyes (or breasts) and carry another.<sup>112</sup> It is worth wondering whether the imagery of medical ex-voto in some cases affected the development and specialization of a cult – and perhaps even its narrative hagiography. There seem to be later medieval examples of how misunderstood attributes generated bogus legend.<sup>113</sup> Loose body parts, particularly

<sup>106</sup> Some of the attribute-like pairings in the *Iudicium coci et pistoris* (Anth. Lat. 190, ed. Shackleton Bailey, I, 1, pp. 135–139 = Vespa) attest to parodic value of injured body-part (Tityos' *ficatum*, Philomela's tongue) or attribute-turned-into-food (Pasiphae's beef). See esp. 83ff.: *Partes quisque suas tollet qui cenat apud me ...* down to 93.

<sup>107</sup> Dante, *Inf.* 28, 118–142.

<sup>108</sup> Delehaye, *Cinq leçons* (above n. 22), 137.

<sup>109</sup> "Saint Denis frightening his executioners with his head." Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 373, 12. "La distance n'y fait rien; il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte" Mme. du Deffand might have said.

<sup>110</sup> E. F. Le Blant, *Mémoire sur les martyrs chrétiens et les supplices destructeurs du corps*, Paris 1875 (*Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 28, no. 2).

<sup>111</sup> For an explicit statement of the problem, see Aug. civ. 22, 19: *Nec ideo si aliqua martyribus amputata et ablata sunt membra, sine ipsis membris erunt in resurrectione mortuorum, quibus dictum est, Capillus capitis vestri non peribit.*

<sup>112</sup> Agatha was healed in prison. The scene was illustrated. See C. Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century*, Berkeley 2001, 74–76.

<sup>113</sup> Mâle (above n. 99), 287 and 291, on Denis walking with his head and Erasmus' entrails. He calls it the "unconscious collaboration" between art and the *Legenda aurea*. See also H. Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, 4. éd. Bruxelles 1968, 43f., on misunderstood images. Lucy was depicted with eyes to indicate that she healed them, so a story developed that she tore them out to save a young man who was in love with them. He also cites the legend of Nicholas and the Pickled Boys. More in Delehaye, *Cinq leçons* (above n. 22), 134. C. Cahier, *Caractéristiques des saints dans l'art populaire énumérées et expliquées*, 2 vols., Paris 1867, vol. 1, 363, speculates on the derivation of the

carried by people, might be liable to interpretation as scenes of pagan mythic ‘sparagmos’ or simple lynching,<sup>114</sup> even though relic-collection is going on in the *ekphrasis* of perist. 11.

### 9.3.2 The Wound

Even if nothing was removed or put out, the saint’s body regularly suffered *vulnera*. Prudentius claimed that a noble gate was opened for the just by a gaping wound.<sup>115</sup> Cassian is one sort of extreme example. Wounds, interestingly, would not be made completely whole in the afterlife. In Homer’s *Nekyia* there is some discreet allusion to the persistence of wounds on the ghosts of the ‘biaiothanatoi’.<sup>116</sup> The *Aeneid* depicts shades that are visibly and emphatically wounded: Eriphyle *monstrantem vulnera* and Dido, *recens a vulnere*.<sup>117</sup> Later appears Deiphobus, whose body is appallingly mutilated (Aen. 6, 494: *laniatum corpore toto*) and whose ears and nose have been cut off too (497: *inhonesto vulnere naris*).<sup>118</sup> None of this is cheerful precedent. But the visible and touchable wound was redeemed by NT precedent at John 20, 24. Christian confessors were proud of their wounds and believed that martyrs’ scars would be visible at the Resurrection.<sup>119</sup> Yet wounded figures might have seemed like

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winding of Erasmus’ entrails on a windlass from the naval capstan and rope associated with St. Elmo.

<sup>114</sup> Which certainly happened in this period. For examples, see Amm. 14, 7, 15 for death of PLRE 1 Montius Magnus 11, and Vita Melaniae graeca 19 for the death of PLRE 2 Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus 2 and Claud. Ruf. 2, 405–420 for the death of PLRE 1 Flavius Rufinus 18 and Rousselle (above n. 36), 229.

<sup>115</sup> Perist. 1, 29: *Nobilis per vulnus amplum porta iustus panditur*.

<sup>116</sup> E. g. Od. 11, 40f.: πολλοὶ δ’ οὐτάμενοι χαλκήρεσιν ἐγγείησιν, / ἄνδρες ἀρήφατοι, βεβρωτώμενα τεύχε’ ἔχοντες. How does Odysseus identify them? No doubt this feature is caused by adoption from a non-infernal source. Reinach, Sisyphé (above n. 70), 167: “Nonetheless when a man died in tragic circumstances of a violent death it happened that one depicted him in dreams not as he lived, but as he died.” Note that in the case of the Eioiai at 218ff. there is no hint that they show any signs of their fates. Epikaste’s hanging is told as a narrative at 277–279: ἡ δ’ ἔβη εἰς Αἶδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο / ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὸν ἀφ’ ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου / ὧ ἄχει σχομένη.

<sup>117</sup> Aen. 6, 445f.: *Maestamque Eriphylen / crudelis nati monstrantem vulnera cernit*, and 450: ... *recens a vulnere Dido*.

<sup>118</sup> Deiphobus of course is a friend of Aeneas and his wounds prove what one might call a “conversation-piece” to elicit the necessary narrative; Aen. 6, 501: *Quis tam crudelis optavit sumere poenas*.

<sup>119</sup> For a wounded confessor see Cypr. epist. 38 (34), 2, 3: *Lucent in corpore glorioso clara vulnerum signa*. Like Jesus (Aug. civ. 22, 19 for Christ’s own scars), martyrs would still have their scars in the Resurrection: *Sed si hoc decebit in illo novo saeculo, ut indicia gloriosorum vulnerum in illa immortali carne cernantur, ubi membra, ut praeciderentur, percussa vel secta sunt, ibi cicatrices, sed tamen eisdem membris redditae, non perditae*,

defeated imperial enemies, cadavers from an anatomy school,<sup>120</sup> or even like yet another sort of ex-voto, which showed a whole figure touching the affected body-part.<sup>121</sup>

### 9.3.3 Weapon or Instrument of Torture

And now tortures and weapons. Latin poets loved to enumerate them often asyndetically: *verbera carnifices robur pix lammina taedae*, etc.<sup>122</sup> Eventually instruments of martyrdom will become attributes. But this tradition was not well established in Late Antiquity. One tantalizing testimonium about the (now destroyed) apse mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore dates to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century (432/440).<sup>123</sup> Another parallel may be the identification of the saw with the prophet Isaiah and his apocryphal martyrdom, which had some currency in Palestine and Egypt in the later 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>124</sup> The closest earlier Western parallel may be the St. Laurence from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (after 450). The image is controversial, depicting neither a static martyr and

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*apparebunt. quamvis itaque omnia quae acciderunt corpori vitia tunc non erunt, non sunt tamen deputanda vel appellanda vitia virtutis indicia.*

<sup>120</sup> See Ferrua (above n. 18), 122f., for the anatomy lesson.

<sup>121</sup> See J. Hughes, Fragmentation as Metaphor in the Classical Healing Sanctuary, *SocHistMed* 21/2 (2008), 217–236, esp. 222f. and fig. 223 for 4<sup>th</sup> century BC ex votos from Neapolis in Sardinia.

<sup>122</sup> *Lucr.* 3, 1017; *Damas. carm.* 33, 1. Also much later (of Christ's passion) *Sidon. carm.* 16, 48: *Sustentans alapas ludibria verbera vepres / sortem vincla crucem clavos fel misile acetum.*

<sup>123</sup> Delehaye, *Cinq leçons* (above n. 22), 129, states: "In the mosaic in the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore that was unfortunately destroyed the martyrs appeared with the instruments of their torture at their feet." While he does not say so explicitly, he must be thinking of the now lost inscription of Sixtus III that described the scene as follows: *Ecce tui testes uteri sibi praemia portant / sub pedibusque iacet passio cuique sua / ferum flamma fere fluvius sevumque venenum / tot tamen has mortes una corona manet.* See now Andaloro (above n. 96), 343. Note how the position of the passion instruments beneath the feet shows them as obstacles surmounted and overcome. They are thus to be distinguished from the *supplicia* of the Heroides, for which see below p. 78.

<sup>124</sup> See A. Fakhry, *The Necropolis of El-Bagawat in Kharga Oasis, The Egyptian Deserts, Cairo 1951*, 59 with fig. 43 and pl. XVII, and now M. Zibawi, *Bagawat. Peintures paléochrétiennes d'Égypte, Milano-Paris 2005*, 54, pl. 28. For a papyrus hymn that cites the episode, see C. E. Römer, *Der Papyrus Bouriant 4: ein literarisches Bilderbuch*, *ZPE* 159 (2007), 86–100, esp. 88f. and 93, line 88. Martyrium Isaiae 1–5, esp. 5, in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*. 2 vols., vol. 2 *Pseudepigrapha*, Oxford 1913, 159–162, and an allusion (perhaps) in *Hebr.* 11, 37: *secti sunt*. For the preservation and veneration of the saw, see Grabar (above n. 34), 21, citing the Piacenza pilgrim (*Itin. Anton. Plac. rec. A 32, CSEL 39, p. 180, 3–5*): *Inde venimus in loco, ubi Esaias a serra secatus est vel iacet, quae serra pro testimonium ad sanctum Zachariam posita est.*

attribute, nor a passive scene of execution. The saint seems to stride towards the burning grate. But is the grate an instrument of martyrdom or a threat to the books that are so prominent in the image or a completely misunderstood object?<sup>125</sup> And if the scene depicts the legend of his burning, does it show the saint triumphant afterwards, or before? This mosaic has been cited to draw attention to its ambiguities and unusualness. Perhaps this ambiguity explains why Lawrences on the grill appear only in very small minor art forms that must have been commissioned by or at least bought by individuals who knew what they were getting.<sup>126</sup> Weapons wielded or alone show power (think of the *fasces*), but they can work otherwise. There is evidence from the Talmud and Midrash, for example, that criminals might carry instruments or weapons to the place of execution (as did Jesus), or the *corpus delicti*.<sup>127</sup> Thus a static image of a martyr might be hard to recast positively in this period.

Now another aversive factor that may have prevented the early development of saint plus instrument of torture. It relates to the issue of wounds. Hell, as we all know, was a vast prison with sinister peepshows, even in the latter part of Od. 11. And the pagan hell, unlike the early Christian one, was populated with named individuals with punitive attributes or distinctively damaged bodies: Ixion and his wheel, Sisyphos and his stone, Tityos and his liver. As late as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE Polygnotos' famous Nekyia could be seen and described in the Lesche at Delphi.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>125</sup> For some of the debate, see J. Gagé, *Le livre sacré et l'épreuve du feu: A propos d'une mosaïque du mausolée de Galla Placidia à Ravenne*, in: A. Stuiber (ed.), *Mullus, Festschrift Th. Klauser, Münster 1964* (JbAC Ergbd. 1), 130–142, who sees the grill as a misunderstood *cancelum* guarding the books for which the deacon was responsible, and G. Mackie, *New Light on the So-Called Saint Lawrence Panel at the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Gesta 29/1* (1990), 54–60, suggesting it is Vincent. Additional debate in P. Franchi de'Cavalieri, *San Lorenzo e il supplizio della graticola, RQA 14* (1900), 159–176 (repr. in P. Franchi de'Cavalieri, *Scritti agiografici, Città del Vaticano 1962*, 383–399), who suspects that the grill is likewise a misunderstood visual element from an image of an imprisoned orant; J. Zeiller, *Communication sur une mosaïque de Galla Placidia à Ravenne, CRAI* (1934), 43–53; P. Courcelle, *Le Gril de Saint Laurent au mausolée de Galla Placidia, CArch 3* (1948), 29–40; J. Lassus, *Craticula habebat rotas, CArch 16* (1966), 5–8.

<sup>126</sup> For a lead seal, see Mackie (above n. 125), 55. For other miniature Lawrences, see Leclercq (above n. 96), 427 and 430.

<sup>127</sup> S. Liebermann, *Roman Legal Institutions in Early Rabbinics and in the Acta Martyrum*, in: id., *Texts and Studies*, New York 1974, 57–111 (esp. 92f.).

<sup>128</sup> Paus. 10, 28, rightly invoked by Rousselle (above n. 36), 226. Also M. D. Stansbury-O'Donnell, *Polygnotos' Nekyia: A Reconstruction and Analysis, AJA 94* (1990), 213–235.

An important parallel needs to be brought into the discussion even though it comes from ‘the other side of the tracks,’ a text that is both narrative and ekphrastic, and contains short-hand images of violent death (‘women with weapons’). This is the twilight dream Nekyia, the *lugentes campi*, of Ausonius’ *Cupido Cruciatius*. This piece, like *perist.* 9 and 11, claims to be ekphrastic, and has occasioned considerable dispute about pictorial models.<sup>129</sup> It depicts (to be brief) a sequence of *Heroides* in the afterlife. All somehow exhibit the symbols of their deaths (Auson. Cup. 4: *ut quondam occiderant leti argumenta gerebant*), which range from lightning-bolt, to lamp, to leap, to noose, to swords, to a torn womb dripping myrrh, to torches. Eventually they (aided and abetted by his mother Venus) torture and crucify the childish god of Love.<sup>130</sup> At the end of the poem we discover that the vision was a nightmare of Cupid’s. “Una finzione alla duplice, anzi alla triplice potenza.”<sup>131</sup> The *leti argumenta*, as has been noted, look a great deal like the attributes that will eventually distinguish martyrs.<sup>132</sup> And there are 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE Roman wall paintings from Tor Marancia that depict some of the heroines with their attributes. Phaedra,<sup>133</sup> Skylla,<sup>134</sup> Canace.<sup>135</sup> There may be more to be done with the possible Christian resonances of the *Cupido Cruciatius* than declaring the idea blasphemous,<sup>136</sup> or ignoring it<sup>137</sup> by relegating it to one sentence.<sup>138</sup> It is hard to believe that the

<sup>129</sup> W. Fauth, *Cupido cruciatur*, GB 2 (1974), 390–460.

<sup>130</sup> Auson. Cup. 65–67: *Cunctae exprobrantes tolerati insignia leti / expediunt: Haec arma putant, haec ultio dulcis / ut quo quaeque perit studeat punire dolore.*

<sup>131</sup> Mondin (above n. 66), 371.

<sup>132</sup> Franzoi (above n. 66), 51; U. Schmitzer, *Amor in der Unterwelt: zu Ausonius’ Gedicht “Cupido Cruciatius”*, in: U. Schmitzer (ed.), *Suus cuique mos*: Beiträge zur paganen Kultur des lateinischen Westens im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr., Göttingen 2006 (Vertumnus 1), 167–184 (esp. 173): “Das erinnert an in der Antike angelegte, im Mittelalter voll entfaltete Verfahren ikonographischer Charakterisierung, bekannt vor allem durch Heiligen- und Märtyrerdarstellungen.”

<sup>133</sup> P. Linant de Bellefonds, Art. Phaidra, in: LIMC 7/1 (1994), 356–358. For the illustration, see Phaidra 19, in: LIMC 7/2 (1994), 316.

<sup>134</sup> F. Canciani, Art. Skylla II, in: LIMC 7/1 (1994), 793. For the illustration, see Skylla II.4, in: LIMC 7/2 (1994), 569.

<sup>135</sup> G. Berger-Doer, Art. Kanake, in: LIMC 5/1 (1990), 950f. For the illustration, see Kanake 3, in: LIMC 5/2 (1990), 607.

<sup>136</sup> Schmitzer (above n. 121), 181, n. 39, arguing that such a painting would be blasphemous at this time.

<sup>137</sup> R. P. H. Green, *The Works of Ausonius*, Oxford-New York 1991, 527: “But the religious overtones of the picture, at least in this description, are few and unimportant.” It is not clear that he intends ‘Christianity’ by “religious”. He may be thinking of Fauth’s mysteries.

<sup>138</sup> Green (above n. 137); C. Santini, *Ambiguità intertestuale nel “Cupido cruciatius” di Ausonio*, in: *Curiositas. Studi di cultura classica e medievale in onore di U. Pizzani*,

poem could be read as purely pagan at this period in this milieu.<sup>139</sup> But that is a topic for the future. Be that as it may, the poem's angry heroines, some suicides, with the symbols of their death, were alive and well in Late Latin literature. The continued life of such iconography (written or painted) for men (in hell) or women from hell might well have largely prevented the adoption of martyr-plus-torture-instrument-as attribute in Late Antiquity.<sup>140</sup>

### 10 An early response to these problems?

A major Late Antique poet needs to be adduced in connection with the discussion of body parts, wounds, and instruments of torture and execution, namely Venantius Fortunatus. For he can be seen to confront precisely the problems outlined in his Hymns to the Cross (carm. 2, 1; 2, 2; 2, 6), but could easily be left out of any discussion on a technicality, namely that he is not writing ekphrasis, but is visualizing.<sup>141</sup> His artistic task was to turn a small piece of wood, installed in a processional cross (probably not a crucifix in this period) into a visualization of the Crucifixion.<sup>142</sup> One should take note of his asyndetic enumeration of the instruments of the Passion: *Hic acetum fel harundo sputa clavi lancea*.<sup>143</sup> He explicitly confronts the unpleasant connotations of the crux as *patibulum*.<sup>144</sup> He is recasting that most *infelix* of trees into a tree that is *fertilitate potens* with its "strange fruit."<sup>145</sup> He is meditating on wounds and body parts in a way that anticipates late medieval and early modern spirituality by

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Napoli 2002, 243–256 (esp. 244): "A me non sembra per altro possibile passare sotto silenzio la sostanza di uno scenario tutt'altro che evasivo e irrilevante (soprattutto per un'età come quella che vide il definitivo scontro del cristianesimo con il paganesimo) quale appare essere l'atto della crocifissione ad un albero di mirto, quello della fustigazione con un serto di rose e il gesto di spillare sangue con un sottile stilo, vale a dire la ripresa che potrebbe essere considerata parodica e irriverente di motivi analoghi della scena della passione di Cristo."

<sup>139</sup> Consider the mother Venus allowing the torture, the use of crucifixion (even in classical form with hands behind the back), the transference of guilt (Auson. Cup. 63f.: *Se quisque absolvere gestit / transferat ut proprias aliena in crimina culpas*), a rose-garland as weapon, the elements of *ludibria* (Cup. 75).

<sup>140</sup> The absence of carryover from hell to the depiction of martyrs is noted by Rousselle (above n. 36), 226. The epic Virtues of the psych. are feminine in grammatical gender. Their use of weapons is taken from epic and from male models and is not a valid compendium for woman victim-and-weapon.

<sup>141</sup> But 'Visualisierung' fell within the purview of the conference.

<sup>142</sup> On the fictional rhetoric of visualization see Smolak in this volume, p. 172f.

<sup>143</sup> Carm. 2, 2, 19.

<sup>144</sup> Carm. 2, 6, 3f.: *Quo carne carnis conditor / suspensus est patibulo*.

<sup>145</sup> Carm. 2, 1, 10: *Tam nova poma geris!* The kaleidoscope of imagery in carm. 2, 1 and 2, 2 is breathtaking: *patibulum*, cross, psalmic tree, ship of salvation.

many centuries.<sup>146</sup> All of the above is executed with a poetic sensibility and imagination that works, and does not leave the reader queasy or suspicious as he is at the excesses of Prudentius. Fortunatus' poems are a triumph of 'Text.'

### 11 Some (tentative) conclusions

This has been a long and somewhat convoluted argument. In its course an attempt has been made to tease out the logistical problems faced by artists who sought to depict martyrs and martyrdom in Late Antiquity, creative writers who described their work, and viewers who sought to interpret their 'Bilder' either with or without 'Text.' The difficulties started with namelessness and facelessness. But the essential problem involved the frightening, painful, and degrading nature of torture and execution. To that could be added aggravating circumstances, such as whiffs of blasphemy from executions-staged-as mythic enactments.<sup>147</sup> Depictions of these needed the help that written exegesis or even just labeling could provide to ensure that they were understood properly. Idolatry was a concern.<sup>148</sup> The way ekphrastic texts shade and 'spin' what they describe has been emphasized. Ekphrastic texts aim to help images and artists out, but in some cases to compete with them.<sup>149</sup> Ekphrases of martyrs usually focus on more narrative treatments. Discussion then jumped to the future, to roads that would eventually be taken, namely the use of certain sorts of attributes: limbs, wounds, and instruments of torture. Here it was suggested that there might have been too much interference ('static') from existing (pagan) iconography with the wrong connotations to make these viable strategies in Late Antiquity. In the early Middle Ages attributes, for biblical figures, seem finally to take off in a parodic text, the mysterious Ps. Cyprianic Cena.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Buxtehude's "Membra Jesu nostri" is a good example of the latter.

<sup>147</sup> D. Potter, *Martyrdom as Spectacle*, in: R. A. Scodel (ed.), *Theater and Society in the Classical World*, Ann Arbor 1993, 53–88 (esp. 67), calls it the "fantasy world."

<sup>148</sup> Take, for example, the miracle that withered the hand of an artist who depicted Christ as Zeus in Theod. Lect. hist. eccl. 2, 382, 1: 'Ἐπὶ Γενναδίου ἡ χεὶρ τοῦ ζωγράφου ἐξηράνθη τοῦ ἐν τάξει Διὸς τὸν σωτήρα γράψαι τολμήσαντος· ὃν δι' εὐχῆς ἰάσατο ὁ Γενναδῖος.

<sup>149</sup> Ast. Am. hom. 11, 1, 2: Δεῦρο δ' εἰ βούλει – καὶ γὰρ σχολὴ νῦν διηγήματος –, φράσω σοι τὴν γραφὴν· οὐδὲ γὰρ φαυλότερα πάντως τῶν ζωγράφων οἱ μουσῶν παῖδες ἔχομεν φάρμακα.

<sup>150</sup> MGH Poetae 4, 2, 857–900 (different versions), dedicated to Pope John. At 882/883 (vv. 117–140) appear biblical figures with body parts they consume, e. g. 130: *maxillam fortis Samson*, and 133: *Ionas intestanea*, and 136: *latus Adam costas Eva*. On the parody, see M. Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages. The Latin Tradition*, Ann Arbor 1996, 19–56, especially 20 for the *Cena's* anticipation of iconic attributes. A passage like Sextus Amarcius, serm. 4, 332f. (*lectus Iob fimus est, Stephanus lapidum imbre necatur, / Mauricius gladio, Vincentius igne catastae*) represents a next step.



One must end with a point so obvious it can easily be forgotten. Many Romans avidly attended violent spectacles.<sup>151</sup> Tertullian's spect. and Prudentius' views on the gladiatorial games are famous.<sup>152</sup> There were 'snuff' spectacles available in the form of games as well as executions in the Later Roman world. A martyrdom fell squarely into the latter category and could be turned into the former.<sup>153</sup> Thoughtful Christians, such as Augustine, wondered about why one felt compelled to gaze on horrors: Alypius at conf. 6, 8, 13 shut his eyes, but was still overcome by the sound, and in conf. 10, 35, 54 appears a remarkable passage with a possible echo of Leontius in Plato's Republic 439c–440a. The latter on his way to Athens from the Piraeus noticed corpses lying at a place of execution and felt both the urge to see them and aversion. He resisted for a while, but eventually rushed up to them, and said (to his eyes): "There, you wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle!"<sup>154</sup> Augustine meditates on *curiositas*, asking what pleasure we derive from gazing on mangled corpses to shudder at them (conf. 10, 35, 55): *Quid enim voluptatis habet videre in laniato cadavere quod exhorreas?* This question (and whatever answer one has for it) was the problem that faced the Christian artist depicting martyrs and martyrdoms. After all, the picture, or statue, or photograph, or film still represents an abomination – even at one or more removes. Different ages with different tastes have responded differently. But the problem still has not been solved.

### Appendix: *Terra sigillata* with Martyrs?

The collection of bowls in *terra sigillata* in the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz was found in Africa, and is dated to the 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup>

<sup>151</sup> For their spectatorship, see R. Lim, In the 'Temple of Laughter': Visual and Literary Representations of Spectators at Roman Games, in: B. Bergmann - C. Kondoleon (edd.), *The Art of Ancient Spectacle*, New Haven-London 1999 (Stud. in the Hist. of Art 56), 356–360, for some textual evidence. D. S. Potter, *Entertainers in the Roman Empire*, in: D. S. Potter - D. J. Mattingly (edd.), *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, Ann Arbor 1999, 256–325 (esp. 304f.), emphasizes the varieties of types of combat seen by Roman spectators.

<sup>152</sup> C. Symm. 1, 379–407 with D. R. Shanzer, *The Date and Composition of Prudentius's Contra Orationem Symmachi Libri*, *RFIC* 117 (1989), 442–462.

<sup>153</sup> Christians of course tried to take control of their own executions and canny governors tried to avoid spectacles. See Potter (above n. 147), 59–62.

<sup>154</sup> 439e: Ἄλλ', ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ποτὲ ἀκούσας τι ἢ πιστεύω τούτῳ· ὡς ἄρα Λεόντιος ὁ Ἀγλαϊωνος ἀνιῶν ἐκ Πειραιῶς ὑπὸ τὸ βόρειον τεῖχος ἐκτός, αἰσθόμενος νεκροὺς παρὰ τῷ δημίῳ κειμένους, ἅμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ, ἅμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραίνει καὶ ἀποτρέπει ἑαυτόν, καὶ τέως μὲν μάχοιτό τε καὶ παρακαλύπτοιτο, κρατούμενος δ' οὖν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, διελκύσας τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, προσδραμών πρὸς τοὺς νεκροὺς, "Ἴδου ὑμῖν," ἔφη, "ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος."

century CE. While photographs of some of them have appeared,<sup>155</sup> there is as yet no authoritative scholarly publication. They are of interest in the context of this paper because a number of the pieces with Christian motifs are thought to depict male and female martyrs. No. 13 shows a female martyr full frontal, naked above the waist, attached to a pole, labeled *Domina Victoria*. Her hands seemed to be outstretched in prayer. Two lions sit near her. No. 14 depicts a male figure attached a stake with two bears, one of whom menaces him. No. 15 depicts a male figure on a formal seat holding a large laurel-garland, with a threatening leopard and a standing lion. Weidemann interprets the scene as a martyr “verherrlicht”. Other pieces (not illustrated) depict a lone female figure being grappled with at close quarters by a bear (Inv.-No. O.41962) and a naked female bound to a stake being approached by a bear (paws outstretched) head facing backwards (Inv.-No. O.41911). A third piece shows a female attached to a stake (in profile) being mauled by a bear (Inv.-No. O.41495).

Strictly speaking, only *Domina Victoria* (on the basis of her *orans*-pose) is indeed likely to be a martyr (and various African martyrs of that name are attested). The others could be martyrs (as opposed to criminals awaiting execution *ad bestias*).<sup>156</sup> If they are, the eroticization of their depiction (naked breasts, languishing poses) needs to be taken note of. No. 15 likewise has been read as glorifying (and sanitizing, if Weidemann is right) the martyr’s death. But it seems equally likely that the scene is not specifically Christian: might it depict the rich sponsor of a *venatio* (a *munerarius*) with a prize-crown?

Even if these all are depictions of martyrs, the violence is, on the whole, discreet, and most of the time about to happen, rather than in process. The lions (but not the bears) are as unthreatening as they appear in depictions of Daniel. The appearance of such scenes on small household objects would be parallel to the seals and gold glass depicting Lawrence on the grill.<sup>157</sup> These are not public or ecclesiastical art, but objects sold to buyers for private use.

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<sup>155</sup> K. Weidemann, *Spätantike Bilder des Heidentums und Christentums*, Mainz 1990, nos. 13–15.

<sup>156</sup> For some examples, though no close parallels, see F. Oswald, *Index of Figure-Types on Terra Sigillata* (“Samian ware”), Liverpool 1936, Ppl. LIV and LV, for prisoners and victims.

<sup>157</sup> See above, n. 126.