

КУБИТРА

DOI: 10.31857/S086919080029094-0

SYMBOLISM OF EARLY CHRISTIAN PRAYERS
IN ROMAN, GREEK AND EGYPTIAN FUNERARY ART

© 2024

Valeria Z. KUVATOVA ^a^a – Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8932-6490; kintosh@mail.ru

Abstract: The question of semantic connections between Early Christian funerary art and texts of an Early Christian prayer for the dead – *Ordo commendationis animae* – remains controversial. Some scholars endorse the idea that iconographic programs of Roman catacombs and Early Christian sarcophagi can be traced back to the prayer. Others highlight the distinctions between them, emphasizing that the oldest text of the *Ordo commendationis animae* cannot be dated earlier than the 4th century A.D. Both the prayer and the funerary art embody the same themes of salvation and resurrection, often depicted through shared biblical heroes and narratives. Although there are inconsistencies between the biblical heroes mentioned in the prayer and the most popular characters and narratives in the Early Christian art, the semantic parallels cannot be simply dismissed. This research seeks to uncover the origins of the prayer itself and propose liturgical sources that could have influenced regional traditions of Early Christian funerary iconography. The earliest texts of Early Christian prayers known so far (the so-called *Orationes pseudocyprianæ*) were dedicated to martyrs. They originate from the Eastern Mediterranean region (Antioch) and can be dated to the 3rd c., which makes them contemporary to the early phase of Christian funerary art. Originally they were penned in Greek. The list of biblical episodes and heroes mentioned in the *Orationes* differs from that of *Ordo commendationis animae* and includes some New Testament episodes that used to be popular subjects of the Early Christian art. Additionally, it hypothesizes explanations for the iconographic principles of several renowned Early Christian monuments.

Keywords: Early Christian funerary art, Early Christian iconography, *Ordo commendationis animae*, Dura Europos, Roman catacombs, Early Christian tombs of Thessaloniki, Coptic painting, Coptic art, Early Christian prayers.

For citation: Kuvatova V.Z. Symbolism of Early Christian Prayers in Roman, Greek and Egyptian Funerary Art. *Vostok (Oriens)*. 2024. No. 1. Pp. 177–185. DOI: 10.31857/S086919080029094-0

The semantic association between the imagery of Early Christian funerary art and the texts of Early Christian prayer for the dead – *Ordo commendationis animae* – has a rich history of research. E. le Blant, followed by H. Leclercq and other scholars, argued that the parallels between the characters and episodes depicted in the art and those referenced in the prayer could not be merely coincidental [Blant, 1878; Carbol, Leclercq, 1907, p. 435]. However, the debate over a direct link between the prayer and funerary pictorial programs continues. The earliest known text of the *Ordo commendationis animae* cannot be dated before the 4th century A.D. [Jensen, 2000, p. 71; Martimort, 1949, p. 105]. Furthermore, the overlap between the two is far from perfect. R.M. Jensen argues that certain figures from the prayer, such as Enoch, Elijah, Lot and Thecla,

do not appear in catacomb painting, while the most commonly depicted narratives and characters in Roman funerary art are absent from the prayer [Jensen, 2000, p. 71]. The text of the prayer itself is a topic of debate. It remains unclear if Jonah, a prominent Old Testament figure in the Early Christian art, was mentioned in the 4th century version. The text published by H. Leclercq in his dictionary omits the rebellious prophet, leading many scholars to conclude that the story of Jonah was a later addition to the prayer [Jensen, 2000, p. 71; Stroumsa-Uzan, 2008, p. 56; Mitius, 1897, p. 90]. Presently, neither viewpoint can be definitively rejected due to a lack of substantial evidence. Yet, the semantic parallels cannot be easily ignored. If the *Ordo commendationis animae* was not the source for the earliest catacomb paintings, then what could have served as such? Both the prayer and the funerary art convey the same themes of salvation and resurrection through the narratives of the same Biblical heroes.

Considering the potential influence of the *Ordo commendationis animae* on funerary art, researchers often focus on the art of Rome and nearby provinces. This likely stems from the Latin language of the prayer, suggesting its use in Latin-speaking regions. No known versions of the *Ordo commendationis* exist in other languages that can be dated to the 3rd–4th centuries. However, painted tombs and mausoleums are also preserved in other regions, notably Northern Greece and Egypt. Their pictorial programs generally share significant similarities with the Roman paintings. On the other hand, some striking distinctions between these and Roman works are quite telling. Roman catacomb paintings and carved sarcophagi frequently depict Jonah, while Thecla is absent. In contrast, Thessalonian tombs never reference Jonah, but at least one known depiction of Thecla is preserved. The pictorial programs of the Early Christian mausoleums in the Bagawat necropolis (Kharga oasis, Egypt) routinely feature various episodes involving Thecla, yet they completely lack the New Testament scenes.

The semantic relationship between the Early Christian prayers and art might also shed light on the pictorial program of the baptistery of the *Domus ecclesiae* in Dura Europos. Although it is not a funerary site, its composition includes similar scenes seen in funerary monuments. The particular selection of scenes is rather enigmatic. Given the early dating of the paintings (253 A.D. is their *terminus ante quem* and ca 232 A.D. is their estimated date according to the Yale University Art Gallery and the Metropolitan Museum), and Dura Europos's distance from the major Early Christian cultural centers, it seems unlikely that the baptistery's artists had access to other Early Christian painted monuments for inspiration. In the absence of visual models, they might have turned to Early Christian texts or liturgical practices. R.M. Jensen argues that it may have had liturgical parallels, and, citing V. Schultze, refers to the book V of the Apostolic Constitutions, which mentions both the Old and New Testaments episodes [Schultze, 1919; Jensen, 2000, p. 71–72]. However, the timeline does not align, as the Constitutions were written in Syria around 380 A.D. The first six books are adaptations of the *Didascalia apostolorum*, penned in the mid-3rd century¹, but the list of characters in the *Didascalia* is limited to a handful of Old Testament heroes.

THE ORATIONES PSEUDOCYPRIANAE

The hypothesis that the *Ordo commendationis animae* and other Early Christian texts could have served as “guidelines” for pictorial programs is a valid one. H. Leclercq was the first scholar to identify the so-called *Orationes pseudocyprianae* as a predecessor of the *Ordo Commendationis animae* [Carbol, Leclercq, 1907, p. 430–435]. He also argued that the Early Christian prayer

¹ Didascalia Apostolorum. *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Didascalia-Apostolorum> (accessed: 25.12.2023).

for the dead could have evolved from Jewish prayers, in particularly the *Mi she'anah* [Carbol, Leclercq, 1907, p. 437–438], a repetitive invocation mentioning multiple Biblical characters.

The prayer begins with the words, “He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day”². An early version of the *Mi she'anah* is included in the second order of the *Mishnah* (*Moed*), which concerns ceremonies, rituals, observances, and prohibitions related to the Sabbath, religious festivals, and fast days (*Ta'anit* 2: 2–4). The codification took its final form in the early 3rd century A.D.³ The *Mishnah* version refers to just seven Biblical heroes, not all of whom are mentioned in the *Ordo Commendationis Animae*. Later *Mi she'anah* versions encompass a broad list of biblical characters.

The structure of the Jewish prayer could have influenced Early Christian prayers, including those for the dead. The adaptation could have occurred in any major city with mixed Greek and Jewish or Latin and Jewish populations, such as, for instance, Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, and Sardis. These cities witnessed the extensive Jewish emigration post 117 A.D. [Kerkeslager et al., 2008, p. 67–68, 76]. Further indications suggest that the *Orationes Pseudocyprianae* can be traced back to Jewish prayers. Attributed to Cyprian of Antioch, they were translated from Greek to Latin at the turn of the 4th century [Cabrol, Leclercq, 1907, p. 429–430; Sicard, 1978, p. 366–367; Velazquez, 2006, p. 53; Gomez-Narros, 2015, p. 90; Pinar, Turell, 2007, p. 145]. H. Leclercq highlights that the initial invocation «Ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος» in the *Oratio pro martyribus* [Cyprianus Carthagenensis, 1844, p. 905] originates from the Greek version of the prayer [Carbol, Leclercq, 1907, p. 432]. The invocation forms an integral part of the Christian liturgy and is a central part to the “Thrice-Holy” hymn. However, its roots lie in Jewish liturgical traditions. The acclamation originates in the Old Testament, specifically in the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:3), where the seraphims around God’s throne cry out: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory.” As the Early Christian liturgy developed within the context of first-century Judaism, many facets of the Jewish worship, including this invocation, were integrated into Christian prayer.

The Latin text of the *Oratio sub die suae passionis* also preserves the same Greek word, along with the Latin invocation [Cyprianus Carthagenensis, 1844, p. 905]. During the early Christian era, Greek was the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean world; hence its usage was a natural choice for the written preservation of Christian prayers.

Scholars do not dispute the Antiochene origin of the *Orationes Pseudocyprianae*, thus, the original Greek language of the prayers looks logical. Translated into Latin in the early 4th century, the Greek versions had been likely composed in the 3rd century, making them contemporaneous with the early days of the Early Christian art.

While the *Orationes* were not exactly the prayers for the dead, their dedication to martyrs linked them to the themes of martyrdom, salvation and resurrection. The *Oratio pro martyribus* addresses both God the Father and Christ, mentioning Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Daniel, Tobias and Sarah, three youths in the fiery furnace, persecuted Paul, Peter in the waves and Thecla in the fire. This is a shorter list of heroes compared to those mentioned in the *Ordo commendationis animae*. The prayer also references several salvation episodes such as the cure of a leper, healing of the blind and paralyzed, and resurrection of the dead. While the healing of the blind and paralyzed can be directly paralleled with the New Testament scenes in the Early Christian art, the Resurrection of Lazarus and Job could visualize the theme of resurrection and the miracle of the cure of a leper.

God is referred to as the God of martyrs, prophets, apostles and virgins, thereby extending the range of characters included in the Prayer. All these characters were featured in the Early Christian art. The prayer also refers to Christ’s birth “*ex Mariae virginis utero per mysterium*” [Cyprianus

² English translation from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noe Talmud.

³ Mishna. *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mishna> (accessed: 25.12.2023).

Carthagenensis, 1844, p. 905], indicating that as early as in the 3rd century some prayers could have inspired the visualization of the New Testament episodes related to the birth of Jesus, such as the *Nativity* and the *Adoration of Magi*.

The *Oratio Quam sub die passionis suae dixit* has a tripartite structure. The brief first part describes God the Father in a manner similar to the *Oratio pro martyribus* (God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, apostles, prophets, martyrs). The second part echoes the structure of the *Mi she'ana* and the *Ordo commendationis animae*. It consists of repeated invocations like “Would you hear me praying as you heard Jonah from the belly of the whale”⁴, etc. This part mentions Israelites, Moses, Jonah, three youths in the fiery furnace, Daniel from the lions’ den, Susanna, Ezekiah, David, Tobias, Sarah and Thecla in the amphitheatre. The third part is dedicated to Jesus. Here again, it is mentioned that he was born from Mary who received the annunciation message from Gabriel [*Cyprianus Carthagenensis*, 1844, p. 908]. This mention could have contributed another popular scene to the repertoire of the Early Christian art, namely the Annunciation. The third part also refers to famous New Testament miracles – the healing of the blind, paralyzed and those possessed by demons, healing of the bleeding woman, resurrection of the dead, water walking and the episode where Christ supported Peter walking on water.

The *Oratio sub die passionis suae* presents a broad list of biblical narratives and characters for visualization. The two *orationes* collectively almost encompass the repertoire of the most popular Early Christian scenes. Some characters are only mentioned by names, not tied to any particular episode. For instance, both *orationes* reference the generic miracle of resurrection, which could have left room for visual interpretation.

The textual structure of the *Orationes* and *Ordo commendationis animae*, along with the invocation formula “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob” likely evolved from Jewish prayers. Justin Martyr (2nd century A.D.) [*Justinus Martyros*, 1971, ch. 85] and Origen (first half of the 3rd century A.D.) [Origen. *Contra Celsum*, 1857, p. 699–700] mentioned that this formula was highly prevalent, even in magical rituals. It also appears in the Syriac version of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Manasseh’s prayer) [Gibson, 1903, p. 38]. However, the specific biblical episodes and heroes mentioned in the Early Christian prayers have fewer parallels with the Jewish prayers. The former focused on symbolic depictions of salvation, resurrection and blissful afterlife, possibly drawing inspiration from the Patristic literature. H. Leclercq refers to the 1st century letter to Corinthians by Clement of Rome [Carbol, Leclercq, 1907, p. 435], which, apart from the characters listed in the *Orationes* and *Ordo commendationis animae*, mentions Adam and Jonah but never mentions Thecla and Susanna [Clemens Episcopus Romanus, 1886, p. 199–327]. Similarly, Origen in his treatise on prayer refers to almost the same list of biblical characters, adding Eve alongside Adam, but omitting Thecla and Susanna [Origen. *Libellus de oratione*, 1857, p. 415–561]⁵. These two patristic treatises alone could have provided almost comprehensive range of the Old Testament episodes and heroes for both liturgical and artistic purposes, depending on their symbolic significance. However, like the Early Christian prayers, no Patristic text provides a complete list of the most popular heroes and scenes of the Early Christian art.

The Early Christian art could draw from various sources, but the influence of prayer texts seems more prominent. While the Patristic literature required intellectual engagement, prayers were likely to be more accessible and easier to interpret. They provided a “short-list” of biblical characters and episodes related to the themes of salvation and resurrection. Further nuances could have been derived from the Patristics, such as the theme of women’s piety expressed through

⁴ Exaudi me orantem, sicut exaudisti Jonam de ventre ceti.

⁵ The story of Susanna was discussed in the correspondence between Origen and Africanus.

the parable of the wise virgins. If not directly from the *Orationes* and the *Ordo commendationis animae*, similar prayers could have influenced the repertoire of the Early Christian art.

The crucial theme of a blissful afterlife in paradise seems to have been challenging to articulate verbally, for it is scarcely addressed in Early Christian texts. Therefore, its visualization necessitated adaptation of several scenes from the ancient funerary art: the shepherd as the Good Shepherd in a paradisiacal landscape, Endymion's sleep for the scene of Jonah's rest under the gourd vine, and Hercules in the Garden of the Hesperides for the scene with Adam and Eve in paradise. Some motifs were also borrowed from ancient pagan art, such as the motif of the gourd wine, which originated from Alexandrian tomb paintings [Kuvatova, 2023, p. 6–11]. At least one of these compositions appears in nearly every Early Christian iconographic program.

Many elements and themes of the ancient funerary painting acquired new shades of meaning in the Early Christian art and became firmly entrenched in the new tradition. Images of birds drinking from a fountain, shepherds with flocks or carrying sheep on their shoulders, and floral motifs are among the most vivid examples of such appropriation.

Recognizing that the Early Christian funerary art served a specific function with its own means of expression, it could not restrict itself to a single source of themes and stories. Different regions might have preferred various prayer narratives. For instance, the presence of a rare scene of the Exodus in the Egyptian necropolis seems fitting, as does the scene of Thecla's conversation with Paul in Ephesus in Asia Minor. Some stories may have been chosen based on their visual expressiveness. For example, the scene of the paralytic's healing, popular in almost all provinces, might have been selected for its iconographic vividness compared to other healings.

Comparative analysis of the aforementioned prayers and Patristic treatises reveals some patterns that may hold significance in the context of the Early Christian art:

1. Only four biblical heroes/episodes consistently appear in all texts: Abraham, Isaac, Daniel and three youths in the fiery furnace. In the *Orationes* Abraham and Isaac are addressed in the invocation to the Almighty, while Daniel and the three youths are mentioned among the salvation episodes.

2. Noah is mentioned in both treatises and the *Ordo commendationis animae* but is absent in the *Orationes*.

3. Jonah appears in the treatises and one of the *Orationes* but is omitted in the other one, as well as in the early text of the *Ordo commendationis animae*.

4. Thecla is mentioned in all three Early Christian prayers within different episodes. While the *Oratio sub die passionis suae* recounts the episode in the amphitheater, the *Oratio pro martyribus* references Thecla in the fire. Both episodes of the saint's passions were visualized in the Early Christian art.

5. Only the *Orationes* focus closely on the miracles of Christ.

6. The *Orationes* address the stories of Annunciation to Mary and Jesus's birth.

Some heroes and miracles are not strictly contextualized, thus offering some flexibility to choose the most suitable episode. Both *Orationes* refer to the resurrection of the dead without specifying a particular story. Artists could have chosen the episode of Lazarus as the most vivid example of a resurrection miracle. The miracle of curing the leper (*Oratio pro martyribus*) could have been associated with the story of Job. David could have been depicted either playing among wild animals or confronting Goliath. The general mentions of apostles, prophets, and virgins could have allowed for various interpretations. Although the *Orationes* never mention the *Multiplication of Loaves*, a popular scene in the Early Christian art, they do refer to an episode from the Book of Daniel where the prophet Habbakuk brings food to Daniel. The narratives do not bear strong

similarity, and yet there is a slight likelihood that this plot, by distant association, served as a prototype for the development of the scene of the Multiplication of Loaves.

PICTORIAL PROGRAMS OF THE 3RD CENTURY A.D.

The earliest monuments of the Early Christian art are especially illustrative in this regard. In the absence of typical pictorial programs to serve as models, authors had to rely on verbal rather than visual sources. The program of the baptistery in Dura Europos, although not being a funerary monument, includes the same biblical narratives, but the selection appears unusual. A. Wharton argues that the stark stylistic differences between the procession of women and the biblical scenes arise from their specific functions – the former supporting rites, and the latter bearing symbolic and educational purposes [Wharton, 1995, p. 54]. She calls the interpretation of the procession “haptic”, implying a more tangible nature of painting. The scene does not illustrate biblical or apocryphal narratives but is directly related to the function of the Dura Europos baptistery and serves the purpose of supporting the baptism ritual. On the other hand, the remaining scenes are directly connected to biblical narratives and visualize their literal or symbolic significance.

Furthermore, functions of the same early Christian narratives varied depending on the intended purpose of the monument. For instance, in a temple the particular scene could serve an educational function, while in a mausoleum it could serve a commemorative one [Kuvatova, 2022, p. 368].

The procession cannot be unequivocally linked to any specific biblical story, and the selection of educational scenes is somewhat perplexing. The extremely rare scene with Jesus supporting Peter on the water, and the composition with a woman at a well are tied to the function of the baptistery through the theme of water (fig. 1–2). However, the *Healing of the Paralytic* (fig. 3) and especially “David and Goliath” seem almost arbitrary. As every Early Christian paradigm is conveyed through several biblical stories simultaneously, it is practically impossible to select these particular four scenes from the broad range offered by the Bible and Patristics.

However, the primary selection is already evident in the prayers, with each one manifesting these scenes in some manner. The unique pictorial program of the Dura Europos baptistery appears to correlate to a certain extent with the *Orationes Pseudocyprianæ*. Given the probable Antiochene origin of the prayers, this correlation seems more plausible. One prayer mentions Peter in the waves, another one refers to the precise moment when Jesus supported Peter on water. The *David and Goliath* episode could have also been inspired by the mention of the Jewish king in the *Oratio sub die passionis suae*. The specific episode from David’s life could have been dictated by the military character of Dura Europos [Peppard, 2016, p. 21–22] and/or may have alluded to the victory of the baptized neophytes [Stoll, 2021, p. 20]. It is the only scene with an inscription, suggesting that, despite the familiar plot, the artist had no model and questioned its recognisability. The *Healing of the Paralytic*, a popular scene in the 3rd century Roman catacomb painting, is mentioned in both *Orationes*. In the baptistery context, it could symbolize the full force attained by the baptized neophytes. Regardless of the reason behind this choice, the idea of incorporating the miracle into the pictorial program might have been inspired by prayers. Yet another scene of the Dura Europos program is not easily attributed to a specific biblical subject. A woman at a well is generally interpreted as the Samaritan [Kraeling, 1967, p. 68], though nothing in the iconography of the scene allows for a definitive conclusion. M. Peppard proposes an alternative interpretation based on the absence of Christ’s figure in the scene and the popularity of the *Annunciation at the Well* iconographic type in the Eastern tradition, as described in the Protoevangelium of James [Peppard, 2012, p. 547–549]. The story of the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Christ is not very expressive and was seldom commented on by the Church Fathers. However, the *Oratio sub die passionis suae* mention an episode at a well or spring – the

Annunciation. If the woman at a well is Mary, then the scene might have been well-known and not requiring captions.

One of the earliest Roman painted tombs, considered Christian by some scholars – the Clodius Hermes Mausoleum in the catacombs of San Sebastiano – dates back to the late 2nd – early 3rd centuries A.D. [Finney, 1994, p. 231]. The pictorial program of the mausoleum is extremely ambiguous. If the mausoleum belonged to Christians, then its program probably contained the earliest and most detailed depiction of the Healing of the Possessed. The scene with multiple banquet tables might visualize the Cana Marriage episode. Both stories are mentioned in the *Orationes*.

The 3rd century Roman funerary art primarily focused on Moses striking the rock, healing of the paralytic, the blind and the bleeding woman, Resurrection of Lazarus, Jonah's cycle (fig. 4), Sacrifice of Abraham (fig. 5), Daniel in the Lions' Den (fig. 6), and the New Testament episodes involving Mary. All these biblical heroes and episodes are mentioned in the *Orationes*. The scenes depicting women at wells and male figures are conventionally interpreted as the Samaritan at the well, although, in the absence of captions, it cannot be proved. As in the case with Dura Europos, they could be an early iconographic type of the Annunciation, based on the Protoevangelium of James. For instance, a 5th century ivory diptych from Milan offers such an interpretation [Weitzmann, 1979, p. 543]. Male figures, interpreted as Jesus, could also symbolize an archangel. Until the end of the 4th century, angels were depicted without wings [Peers, 2001, p. 23].

PROVINCIAL FUNERARY ART

The funerary art of another major Early Christian cultural centre – Thessaloniki – demonstrates a slightly different selection of themes. The catalogue of scenes is more limited than the Roman one. The funerary pictorial programs feature depictions of the Good Shepherd, Adam and Eve as the symbols of paradise, Daniel in the lions' den, Sacrifice of Abraham, Noah, occasionally the healings of the paralytic and the possessed as symbols of salvation, and the Resurrection of Lazarus as a symbol of resurrection (fig. 7). A new character appears in Thessaloniki, namely Thecla, who is mentioned in all three Early Christian prayers. The interest towards the saint is likely due to closer contacts with the Eastern provinces where Thecla was extremely popular. In Thessaloniki, she is depicted in the fire. The episode is mentioned in the *Oratio pro martyribus* and is much less common than Thecla surrounded by wild animals.

The most notable characteristic of the Thessalonian art is the complete absence of the Jonah story. No scenes from this cycle has been found to date. Given the popularity of the Jonah cycle in the Roman art, it is unlikely that the Thessalonians were adhering to the Roman approach to pictorial programs. Although the iconography of scenes in Roman and Thessalonian tombs is partially alike, the content of the programs differ significantly. The simplified nature of the Thessalonian pictorial programs suggests that they could not have been derived from the sophisticated works of the Church fathers that also referenced the Jonah story. The Thessalonians seemed to rely on sources that did not mention Jonah, such as the *Oratio pro martyribus* and/or the *Ordo commendationis animae*.

Moving to another region – the Great Oasis – reveals more complex funeral pictorial programs. Early Christian Alexandrian tombs, or what remains of them, appear to contrast sharply with the provincial tradition. Egyptian provincial funerary painting shows no inclination towards the New Testament whatsoever. Instead, it highlights the Old Testament scenes, such as the Sacrifice of Abraham, Daniel in the lions' den, Noah in the Ark, Adam and Eve, and the Jonah cycle. Thecla was one of the most popular saints, depicted in various episodes – in the fire, among animals,

conversing to Paul. The painted program of the so called Chapel of Exodus in the Bagawat necropolis of Kharga oasis, dating back to the late 4th–5th centuries, incorporated most characters mentioned in the *Ordo commendationis animae* plus Jonah, Rebecca at the well and the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah (fig. 8–9).

This funerary program contrasts starkly with painted Coptic textiles, where New Testament episodes such as the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Adoration of Magi, healing miracles, and the Resurrection of Lazarus were quite common. It appears that funerary wall painting and textile painting drew from different sources. Some scholars propose that special papyrus drawings were used as models for producing Late Antique textiles, explaining their similar iconography and style across the Eastern provinces of the Empire [Elsner, 2020, p. 7–27; Raff, 2022, p. 12]. The approach to the pictorial programs of funerary art tended to be more specific. In Egypt it might have involved local prayers akin to the *Ordo commendationis animae*. Monasticism played a significant cultural role in Egypt, and prayer was an integral part of monastic life.

In the Chapel of the Exodus, a unique character in the Early Christian art – Moses' father-in-law, Jethro – is depicted in the Exodus scene. In the biblical text, Jethro stands out for delivering a brief prayer. The importance of prayer to the Christians of Kharga, along with the persistence of this tradition, is evident in another Bagawat mausoleum from a later period (around the 6th century) – the Chapel of Peace. Its iconographic program features Noah, Daniel, Abraham, Isaac and Sarah, Adam and Eve, James, Maria and Paul, Thecla and Paul, and the personification of prayer (Εὐχή) (fig. 10).

CONCLUSIONS

The Early Christian funerary art evolved alongside theological development. During the formation of iconographic canons, Christianity was also seeking theological canons. The challenge of visualizing a sophisticated and flexible religious doctrine may have prompted the creators of iconographic programs to consult simpler and more explicit sources, such as the Early Christian prayers.

Given its specific aims and means, the Early Christian funerary art could not fully adhere to a single source, whether it was theology, liturgy, or ancient artistic heritage.

Funerary painting programs partially relied on the texts of the Early Christian prayers, especially those dedicated to the deceased and martyrs. This appears logical since both convey the concepts of salvation and resurrection, communicated through the same biblical narratives.

This assumption provides the most plausible explanation for the noticeable regional differences in the repertoire of the Early Christian art, which is otherwise fairly homogeneous.

REFERENCES

- Blant le E. *Étude sur les sarcophages chrétiens antiques de la ville d'Arles*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1878. Pp. 21–36.
- Carbol F., Leclercq H. *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de la Liturgie*. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907.
- Clemens Episcopus Romanus. *Ad Corinthios*. Ed. by J.-P. Migne. *S. Clementis Episcopi Romani Epistola ad Corinthios I. S. Clementis I, Pontificis Romani opera omnia*. Vol. I. Paris: Garnier, 1886. Pp. 199–327.
- Cyprianus Carthagenensis. *Oratio Antiocheni Quam Sub Die Passionis Suae Dixit*. Ed. by J.-P. Migne. *S. Cypriani Episcopi Carthaginensis et Martyris opera omnia*. Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina. Vol. 4. Paris: Garnier, 1844. Pp. 905–908.
- Elsner J. Mutable, Flexible, Fluid. Papyrus Drawings for Textiles and Replication in Roman Art. *The Art Bulletin*. 2020. No. 102. Pp. 7–27.
- Finney P.C. *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Gibson M.D. *The Didascalia Apostolorum in English: Translated from the Syriac. (Horae semiticae 2)*. London: C.J. Clay, 1903.

Gomez-Narros J. Un ordo liturgico latino convertido en literatur romance: el Ordo Commendationis Animae en la epica espanola. *Dicenda. Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica*. 2015. Vol. 33, Núm. Especial. Pp. 89–104.

Jensen R.M. *Understanding Early Christian Art*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Justinus Martyros. S. Iustini philosophi et martyris, cum Tryphone Judaeo dialogus. Ed. by J.C.M. van Winden. *An Early Christian Philosopher: Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho. Philosophia patrum*. Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, 1971.

Kerkeslager A., Setzer C., Trebilco P., Goodblatt D. The Diaspora from 66 to c. 235 CE. Ed. by S.T. Katz. *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. Vol. 4. *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Kraeling C.H. *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII*. Part II. *The Christian Building*. New Haven, New York: Dura Europos Publications; J.J. Augustin, 1967.

Kuvatova V.Z. Exodus Chapel. Ritual Movement as a Metaphor of Journey to the Happy Netherworld. Ed. by G. Ferri. *Ritual Movement in Antiquity (and Beyond)*. Roma: Editrice Morcelliana, 2022. Pp. 364–373.

Kuvatova V.Z. Funerary art of Ptolemaic Alexandria as a Model for an Early Christian iconographic cliché. *Vostok (Oriens)*. 2023. No. 1. Pp. 6–12 (in Russian) [Куватова В.З. Росписи александрийских гробниц птолемеевского периода как источник раннехристианского иконографического клише. *Восток (Oriens)*. 2023. № 1. С. 6–12].

Martimort A.G. L'iconographie des catacombes et la catéchèse antique. *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*. 1949. No. 25. Pp. 105–114.

Mitius O. *Jonas auf den Denkmälern des christlichen Altertums*. Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1897.

Origen. Contra Celsum. Ed. by J.-P. Migne. *Patrologiae Graecae*. Vol. 11. *Origen*. Paris: Garnier, 1857. Pp. 631–1521.

Origen. Libellus de oratione. Ed. by J.-P. Migne. *Patrologiae Graecae*. Vol. 11. *Origen*. Paris: Garnier, 1857. Pp. 415–561.

Peers G. *Subtle bodies. Representing angels in Byzantium*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001.

Peppard M. Illuminating the Dura Europos Baptistery: Comparanda for the Female Figures. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*. 2012. No. 20.4. Pp. 543–574.

Peppard M. *The World Oldest Church: Bible, Art and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria*. Yale University Press, 2016.

Pinar J., Turell L. Ornamenta vel vestimenta ex sepulchro abstulere. Reflexiones en torno a la presencia de tejidos, adornos y accesorios de indumentaria en el mundo funerario del mediterraneo tardoantiguo. *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*. 2007. No. 4. Pp. 127–167.

Raff K.A. The Waiting-Servant Motif in a Late Antique Textile in Chicago: Iconography, Visuality, and Materiality. *Arts*. 2022. No. 11. Pp. 1–38.

Schultze V. *Grundriss der christlichen Archäologie*. Munich: Beck, 1919.

Sicard D. La liturgie de la mort dans l'Eglise Latine des origines à la reforme carolingienne. *Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen* 1978. Bd. 63. Pp. 1–450; I–XXXII.

Stoll M. *Painted Iconographical Program sin Late Antique and Early Medieval Churches: Continuities and Ruptures with Greco-Roman Decors (3rd century AD – 6th century)*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2021.

Stroumsa-Uzan M. Jonas of Aquileia: A Gesture to Constantine the Great. Ed. by M. Meyer, K. Kogman-Appel. *Between Judaism and Christianity: Art Historical Essays in Honor of Elisheva (Elisabeth) Revel-Neher*. Boston: Brill, 2008. Pp. 55–72.

Velazquez I. *La teja de Villamartín de Sotoscueva (Burgos). Los versos más antiguos del poema de Fernán González*. (Avances 5). Segovia: Beltenebros Minor, 2006.

Weitzmann K. (ed.). *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*. New York, Princeton: Metropolitan Museum; Princeton University Press, 1979.

Wharton A.J. *Refiguring the Post Classical City. Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem and Ravenna*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ / INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

КУВАТОВА Валерия Зуфаровна – научный сотрудник Института востоковедения РАН, Москва, Россия.

Valeria Z. KUVATOVA, Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia.

Иллюстрации к статье В.З. Куватовой



Fig. 1. Jesus supporting Peter walking on water, *ca* 232 AD, Dura Europos Baptistery. Yale University Art Gallery, accession № 1932.1202 (photo is permitted for editorial use).



Fig. 2. Woman at the well, *ca* 232 AD, Dura Europos Baptistery. Yale University Art Gallery, accession № 1932.1204.2 (photo is permitted for editorial use).



*Fig. 3. Healing of the Paralytic, ca 232 AD, Dura Europos Baptistery.
Yale University Art Gallery, accession № 1932.1202 (photo is permitted for editorial use).*



*Fig. 4. Jonah cast into the water and Jonah resting under the gourd vine. Jonah sarcophagus, late 3rd AD,
British Museum, museum № 1957,1011,1 (photo is permitted for editorial use).*



Fig. 5. Sacrifice of Abraham. Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, 359 AD, Rome, Saint Peter's treasury (Public domain).



Fig. 6. Three youths in the fiery furnace. Roman glass bowl base, ca 350-400 AD. Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession № 16.174.2 (photo is permitted for editorial use).



Fig. 7. Resurrection of Lazarus. Tomb 15. Thessaloniki, early 4th c.,
Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (the author's photo).



Fig. 8. The Exodus, the Jonah cycle, Susanna and the Elders, three youths in the fiery,
Rebecca at the Well, Martyrdom of Isaia. Chapel of Exodus, Bagawat necropolis, Kharga Oasis, Egypt.
Late 4th – first half of 5th c. (photo courtesy V. Melnik).



Fig. 9. The Exodus, Noah in the Ark, procession of virgins, Jeremiah in front of Jerusalem. Chapel of Exodus, Bagawat necropolis, Kharga Oasis, Egypt. Late 4th – first half of 5th c. (photo courtesy V. Melnik).



Fig. 10. Personification of Prayer. Chapel of Peace, Bagawat necropolis, Kharga Oasis, Egypt. Late 4th – first half of 5th c. (photo courtesy V. Melnik).