Kelechi Johnbosco Ahunanya

TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY:
THE *TRADITIO LEGIS* MOTIF ON CHRISTIAN SARCOPHAGI IN FOURTH-CENTURY ROME

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2016

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(Nigeria)

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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External Reader

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I, the undersigned, **Kelechi Johnbosco Ahunanya**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the *traditio legis* motif, as found on fourth-century sarcophagi in Rome. Scholars previously interpreted this motif as the replacement of the old Mosaic Law by the new Law, which Christ gives to Apostle Peter in the presence of Apostle Paul. Thus, they also called it 'the Lord gives the Law' scene. However, the assessment of this motif in the context of the debates and events of the fourth-century, especially in Rome, reveals that it might rather primarily express the establishment and the transfer of authority from Christ to Peter, and, hence the establishment of the apostolic linage.

I approached the idea of the transfer of authority by analyzing other motifs that are found alongside the *traditio legis* on Roman sarcophagi. I also analyzed the scriptural *topoi* and narratives to clarify this notion. A significant scene was the ascension of Elijah, during which he hands over the mantle of leadership and authority to his disciple, Elisha. Other motives currently used in the Roman sarcophagi are Moses receiving the Law and eschatological scenes. For these reasons, I argue that, although the *traditio legis* expresses the transfer of a new law, its primary interpretation might be the divine origin of power and its transfer to humans.

Acknowledgements

To my supervisors Marianne Sághy and Volker Menze for believing in me. Also for the time travelling into the captivating and breath-taking world of Late Antiquity, and fourth-century Rome.

To the entire staff and student of the Department of Medieval Studies here at CEU, especially Daniel Ziemann, Alice Chokye, Cristian Gaspar, Csilla Dobos, Annabella Pál, Dóra Mérai, Zsuzsa Reed, Johanna Tóth, and Andra Juganaru, for developing, teaching, instructing and helping me survive beyond the four walls of the university.

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on a single scene prominent on several fourth-century Roman Christian sarcophagi: the giving of the Law by Christ to Apostle Peter in the presence of the Apostle Paul, the so-called *traditio legis* scene. This scene became suddenly very popular in Rome in the second half of the fourth century, but practically disappeared by the fifth century. For what reason did Christians – be they laymen or clerics – in Rome chose to select and advertise this particular episode? What may have prompted the proliferation of this scene particularly on sarcophagi? Many scholarly hypotheses and explanations were formulated with regard to these questions. This thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of the *traditio legis* motif on fourth-century Roman sarcophagi with a new argument. I wish to suggest that the primary function of the motif was that of the transfer of authority both for the clergy and for the senatorial aristocracy of the *Vrbs*. Even though it might seem challenging to access the beliefs of those who commissioned these sarcophagi, scholars are convinced that, to a reasonable extent, it is possible to decipher the messages that Late Ancient Christians in Rome sought to convey.[1]

The rhetorical nature of Roman art has been captivating in scholarship for centuries. Sarcophagi specifically, "with their highly distinctive and restricted spatial field of visual representation and the relatively narrow range of formal devices employed to decorate them – are strongly so."[2] On early Christian sarcophagi, the compositional elements and iconographic types may be repetitive, yet unique when compared with other elements or icons on it to show the inter-relativity, specificity, and creativity of the art that are embedded in mythology,

1 Paul Zanker and Bjorn Ewald, *Living with Myths: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi*, trans. Julia Slater, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
2 Jaś Elsner, "Image and Rhetoric in Early Christian Sarcophagi: Reflections on Christ' Trial", *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson (New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 359.

Biblical texts, and narratives. This fact explains the continuous and inexhaustible study both in style, form, and theme of these motifs.

Christianity offered a new perspective on the afterlife. If in the Roman world inscriptions stood out as a form of representation of faith and worldview, visual media played an equal or even more important role in the commemoration of the dead and alluding to the world to come. There might be many inscriptions on the tombs of the dead, but Romans paid equal attention to creating visual representations reflecting their understanding of the world of the living and the world of the dead.[3]In the traditional Roman world, burying the dead is a continuous process where, even after the initial burial, the family of the deceased usually gathers over and over again many times a year in remembrance of their loved ones and would keep them company.[4]The place and object of burial were, thus, an important display of the social and religious virtues of the deceased. "Visual negotiation was a language that appealed to people from various social groups of Roman society, and besides being a strong communicative factor in public and private monuments, it is used metaphorically in written texts."[5] Textual works, such as elegies or epitaphs, are thus complementary to figures on visual scenes and narratives shown on objects of commemoration and burial.

In order to fully grasp the function of the motifs on sarcophagus reliefs – it is less important to know who was buried in it, who commissioned it or who bought it, albeit this would be helpful too – we must decipher the images on it. Another important aspect in understanding the function of the motifs is the question of who were the audience – who was

[3] Valerie Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook.* (London: Routledge, 2007).
[4] For the connection between the deceased and their families see Brent D. Shaw, "Latin Funerary Epigraphy and Family Life in the Later Roman Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 33, no. 4 (1984): 457-97; Kimberly Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Also, Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome.*
[5] Stine Birk, *Depicting the Dead. Self-Representation and Commemoration on Roman Sarcophagi with Portraits* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013) 21.

supposed to see these images. The funerals and the commemoration of the dead, at once a family and a communitarian venue in the Roman world, were not hidden events. Both the direct family of the deceased and the public could have access to the location and objects used to bury the deceased. Since the first internment is not the last of burial – because it includes visiting the tomb times in a year, one should investigate whether the visuals created in the location and/or objects of burial serve more than an aesthetic value. Images might have been used as a teaching or propaganda instrument for displaying political or religious allegiance as well as social status. Therefore, this thesis addresses not only the Scriptural background of the *traditio legis* scene, but also its political and aesthetic/compositional aspect. In some cases, the departed person is portrayed alongside his/her patron.[6] Usually, these patrons are those who may have paid for the sarcophagus, or for the burial programs, and are depicted in the company of the deceased. In other cases, there is no portrait of the deceased, but there are only scenes representing the beliefs of the deceased. Examples include inscriptions, epitaphs, or images showing a relationship between the dead and his/her social context, particularly his/her relatives who would visit the tomb. In the case of sarcophagi, funerals and funerary commemoration as a genre is an important means of self-representation, showing one's belief and visual commemoration in Late Antiquity.[7] By using sarcophagi as a mirror of the past we can understand better how people in this period viewed and valued themselves, their status, their faith, and their ideals in society.

Following the Constantinian turn in 313, Christians in Rome employed on the sarcophagi scenes and motifs that featured Christ's miracles, such as the miracle of the blind man, raising Lazarus from the dead, the miracle at Cana, and the multiplication of the bread. Other motifs taken from the Bible were also popular, such as Noah in the Ark, Jonah and the

[6] Birk, *Depicting the Dead,* 22.
[7] Janet Huskinson, "Degrees of Differentiation: Role Models on Early Christian Sarcophagi," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome Sup*. 7 (2008): 287-299.

sea-monster, Susanna, and the three young boys in the furnace. Lastly, non-Biblical narratives were also represented, such as Christ between Peter and Paul.[8] Christ triumphant over death was used by Christians to represent the triumph of their religion and the ushering of a new era in the Christian milieu. Beyond this obvious understanding and interpretation lies another aspect of these iconographies and motifs. My thesis proposes to explore the theme of authority, apology, and polemic, the predominant themes of early Christianity as illustrated in the *traditio legis* motif on the sarcophagi of this period.

Chapter one contains two sections. The first section is the description of the *traditio legis* scene, where I explain the different elements of the *traditio legis* motif and their relationship with each other. I shall highlight the characteristic of the motif on the basis of the extant copies. Other visual media that show the *traditio legis* motif (wall paintings, caskets, gold-glass, mosaics, and frescoes) will not be discussed, because I wish to give a new insight on the interpretation of the motif based on the interrelationship with other motifs used on the same object. Hence, only sarcophagi containing more than one motif will be used. The second section summarizes previous scholarly debates and scholarly interpretations concerning the *traditio legis* motif. This motif inspired historians, archeologists, and theologians to offer various hypotheses for the understanding of late antique society.

Chapter two deals with the construction of the *traditio legis* scene. The underlining factors here are giving the sources for the creation of the images and elements on the *traditio legis* motif. In simple terms, this chapter precedes the new insight in the interpretation of the motif by revisiting the different narratives, motifs, icons, and objects that both the

[8] These motifs (also predominant prior to the fourth century) are discussed in detail by Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003); Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000); Reidar Hvalvik, "Christ Proclaiming the Law to the Apostles: The *Traditio Legis*-Motif in Early Christian Art and Literature," *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context*, ed. John Fotopoulos, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), 405-437.

commissioners and the artists might have been familiar with, and which the artists and workshops may have used in creating the *traditio legis* motif. I think it is necessary to try and revisit what could have been the models for creating this motif so that we can understand the underlying meanings. The construction and models that I shall employ here are mostly based on my own reconstructions of what could have been used to model the *traditio legis* motif during this period.

In the third chapter I analyze the scene. I argue that the *traditio legis* was significant in fourth-century Rome not only because of its Biblical roots and deep Christian spirituality, but because it fulfilled a role in the debates over authority. The *traditio legis* represents concord (*concordia)* and power (*auctoritas).* I will use Scriptural narratives and historical interpretations to shed light on this interpretation. The *traditio legis* motif is an apologetic and polemic tool supportive of the authority of the bishop of Rome at a time when the Petrine primacy, that is, the primacy of Rome among the Churches, was hotly debated. The *concordia* between the princes of the apostles and their equality will also be discussed. How did fourth-century Roman Christians understand this motif? This is best shown by the case of the sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus.

Chapter 1 – "The Lord Gives the Law": the *Traditio Legis* Scene and Scholarship

Christians developed rich decorative program on their sarcophagi. These marble artifacts, made from the third to the fifth centuries, are identified according to the decorative programs represented on them. The Christian sarcophagi are grouped under two different identifiable series; the ones with a continuous frieze on their front, and the ones that uses columns and arches as an architectural framework.[9] The *traditio legis* sarcophagi which I will be dealing with are found in both series. Sarcophagi are one of our richest sources of Christian iconography showing the transformation of Classical style in the Christian Empire. The *traditio legis* iconography is an indispensable source. There are 29 extant *traditio legis* sarcophagi and more than 40, if one includes the fragments.[10] Some historians added to it, others subtracted from the standard catalogue.[11] Amongst the deliberations on which numbers would be the standard, none of these scholars has questioned the place of manufacturing of the materials and production of the artworks. The *Repertorium der Christlich-antiken Sarkophage* gave 19 sarcophagi as the standard ones with the *traditio legis* motif that were a product of the Rome metropolis.[12] As already noted that the general description of the *traditio legis* scene on a sarcophagi shows Christ standing or seating, holding a scroll or a codex (Figure 1). There are the main elements, and the secondary on this motif.

[9] Walter Lowrie, *Art in the Early Church*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc. 1947) 69; Marion Lawence, "City-Gate Sarcophagi", *the Art Bulletin, 10.1* (1927) 1.

[10] This list is based on Bas Snelders catalogue. Worth noting is that Snelders limited his counting on were this motif appeared to only sarcophagi, mosaics and pieces of gilded glass. If other forms of this visual representations were included such as frescoes, this would have increased the number of the *traditio legis* motif. Bas Snelders, "The *Traditio Legis* on Early Christian Sarcophagi", *AnTard*, 13, (2005) 321.

[11] Among these are Sotomayor Manuel who listed 23 sarcophagi as the one with the *traditio legis* motif; Bøgh Rasmussen Mikael listed 25; and Provoost Arnold listed 34. Snelders, "The *Traditio Legis*", 321.

[12] For details of these list check the two volumes of *Repertorium der Christlich-antiken Sarkophage*, both the *Tafelband* and the *Textband*, especially volume one by Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann (1967), and volume two by Jutta Dresken-Weiland (1998).

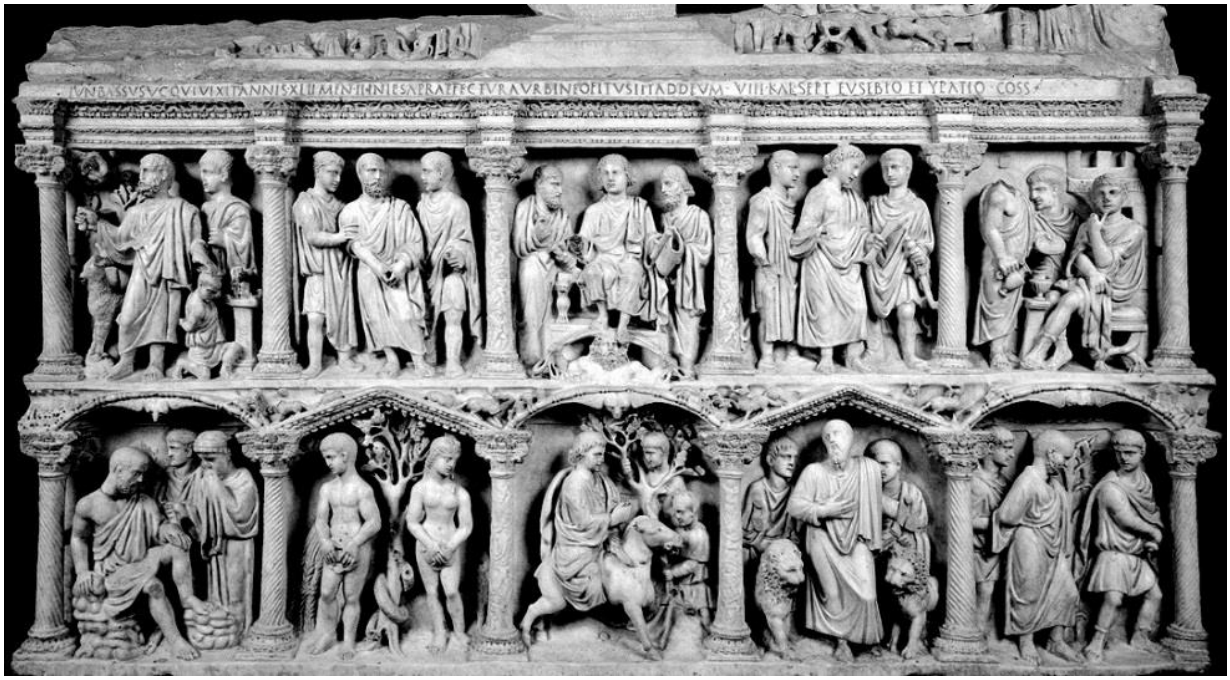

Figure 1 Sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus. Basilica of Saint Peter. Vatican. AD. 359. Front. L. 2,40; W. 0,40; H. 1,37. REP. I. 680.

The Elements of the Composition

The main element of the *traditio legis* motif is the three-figured composition of Christ, Saints Peter and Paul.[13] This is startling because there is no record of a gathering of these three persons. The New Testament hardly describes Saints Peter and Paul together. Saint Paul was not part of the Twelve Apostles. The apocryphal works narrates how Saints Peter and Paul worked in Rome, but there was no account of Christ appearing or meeting both apostles together. There is, however, the meeting of Saints Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles in deliberation of whether the Gentiles who are aspiring to become Christians should go through the Jewish ceremony.[14] Christ holds the end of an open scroll in his left hand, with Peter standing on his left and Paul on his right. Peter is portrayed on most of the scenes as shouldering

[13] There are some cases where Christ is flanked by the Apostles, whether they are the complete twelve (Sarcophagus Sant'Ambrogio, Milan; Sarcophagus Cathédrale Saint-Saveur, Aix-en-Provence; Borghese Sarcophagus, Musée du Louvre; Sarcophagus San Paolo Fuori Le Mura, Rome; Sarcophagus of Concordius, Musée Départmental Arles Antique, Arles; and Sarcophagus Saint-Victor, Marseille); or incomplete in number which probably would be because of some aesthetic or technical reasons (Sarcophagus of Gorgonius, Museo Diocesano, Anacona; Sarcophagus of Probus, St Peter's Rome).*Repertorium der Christlich-antiken Sarkophage, Vol.1 and 2.*

[14] Acts: 15; Gal:2

a cross and gathering the falling end of Christ' scroll with his mantle (Figure 2). Paul raises his right hand in acclamation, holding either a scroll or the slip of his mantle in his left. Christ' gesture differ from one another mostly in the position of his right arm. When portrayed standing or seating, Christ holds his arm aloft and stretches out his hand with the palm of his hand turned to the front that is facing the viewer. In other scenes Christ' right hand makes the usual gesture that signifies blessing (Figure 3).[15] In some sarcophagus, Saints Peter and Paul are depicted flanked by the rest of the apostles. Whether seated or standing, they all seems to be acclaiming Christ, just as Saint Paul.

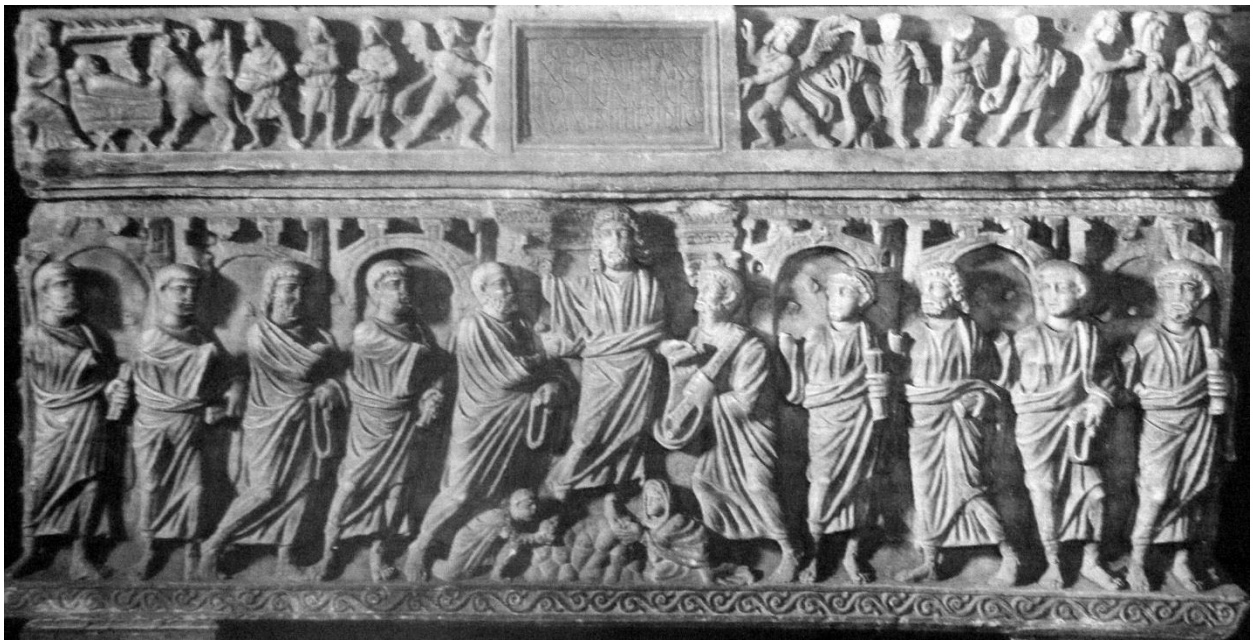

Figure 2: Sarcophagus of Flavius Gorgonius. Cathedral of Saint Cyriacus, Ancona. AD 386. Front: L. 2, 37; W. 0, 80; H. 1, 13; with cover (lid): L. 2, 35; W. 0, 32; H. 1, 15. REP. II. 149.

Other compositional details in the three figure compositions are the scroll (or codex) and the piece of cloak. Since the motif is also known as *Dominus legem dat*, it is of great importance to consider the scroll itself from which the name is derived The scroll is found on most sarcophagi as held by Christ in an authoritative and gesturing manner, but as either

[15] Typically interpreted liturgically and theologically as the '*Pax Domini'* sign.

displaying it or giving it to someone, which in this case is Peter.[16]Peter is always depicted with covered hands and seems to be receiving the scroll with a piece of cloak.

Figure 3: Sarcophagus. Gregoriano Profano Museum, Vatican Museums. Late fourth Century. Front. L. 2, 19; W. 0, 79; H. 1, 13. REP. I. 677.

Compositional details of the scroll have to deal with the style and composition of other elements in the sarcophagus both in the columnar and the frieze styles, because both visual fields have different and unique composition and architecture. In this case we have to look at the different groups of the sarcophagus from the so called 'city gate series' to the 'Christian columnar sarcophagi'.[17]Both the 'city gate' and the 'Christian columnar' sarcophagi (quite different from the frieze sarcophagi) are 'micro-architecture'.[18] This 'micro-architecture' mirrors, for the contemporaries from the classical times to Late Antiquity and especially in

[16] There are exceptions. In the few cases of this exceptions Christ is holding a book instead, as in the case of the rear of the Sarcophagus of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan (which also has the same scene in the front but with the typical *traditio legis* scene of Christ holding a scroll). It would be interesting to find out why the sarcophagus has the same motif but with different alterations of Christ and the Apostles standing in one scene and seating in the other. The Sarcophagus of Concordius now in the *Musée Départmental Arles Antique* in Arles, which has the text *Dominus legem dat*. The Sarcophagus of *Sant'Apollinare in Classe*, Ravenna, where Christ seems to be giving the scroll to Saint Paul, instead of Saint Peter. It was also be interesting to know why that was the case too.*Repertorium der Christlich-antiken Sarkophage, Vol.1 and 2*.

[17] Marion Lawence, "City-Gate Sarcophagi", *the Art Bulletin*, 10.1 (1927): 5.

[18] A term Edmund Thomas claimed was first used in depicting this notion, explicitly by the French bulletin; "Micro-architectures" *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui,* 328 (June 2000); Edmund Thomas, "'Houses of the dead'? Columnar sarcophagi as 'micro-architecture'", *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, Jas Elsner, Janet Huskinsoneds, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter (2011) 387.

funerary objects, a reflection and ideal for the next world, which, in the case of early Christians, is the heavenly abode.[19]

Figure 4: Sarcophagus. Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. AD 380 – 400. Front. L. 2, 30; W. 0, 50; H. 1, 14. REP. II 150.

Secondly, the composition contains the so called 'eschatological element', also known as the scene of Paradise. Christ stands on the mountain of Paradise, of which flow the four rivers of Paradise (Caelus) (Figure 1 and 3). In some scenes, this mountain of Paradise on which Christ is standing is flanked by the palm trees at the rear, and the phoenix or lambs are at the foot of Christ, beside the mountain (Figure 4 and 5). In my interpretation, these elements are secondary, since they seem not to form the main elements of the triangular composition, which are the human figures of Christ, Peter, and Paul; rather, they support the main elements and form a frame for them. The secondary elements also have an interchangeability. The mountain of Paradise, Caelus, palms, phoenix, and lambs are used sometimes to frame the motif. This

[19] Thomas, "'Houses of the dead,'"387.

means that their selection and use is primarily driven by the size of both the sarcophagus and the image field (that is the relief) of the *traditio legis* motif.[20]

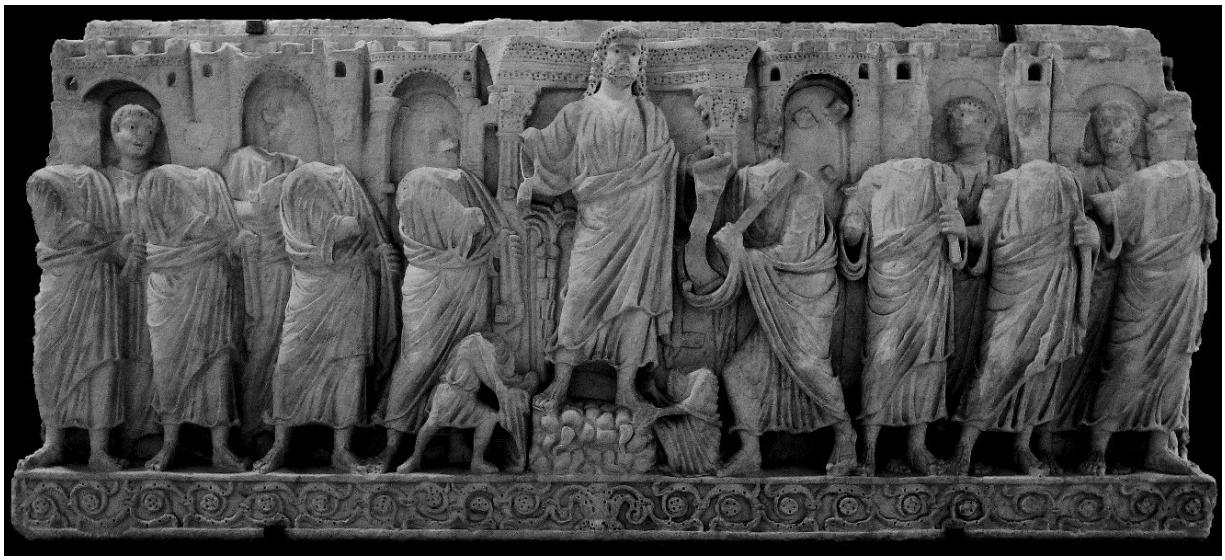

Figure 5: Sarcophagus of Anicii. Louvre Museum, Paris. Late fourth century. L. 2, 52; W. 1, 46; H. 1, 11. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P1070871_Louvre_sarcophage_de_la_Remise_de_la_Loi_face_frontale_Ma2980_rwk.JPG

The description of *traditio legis* motif on a sarcophagi notes the following elements. First, the main elements in the compositional details contain the following three features. Christ holding an open scroll or codex in his left hand. Christ standing in the center and flanked by Peter and Paul. Peter catching the falling end of Christ's scroll with a cloak and most of the times bearing a cross. The secondary elements, also interchangeable, are all part of the *traditio legis* motif. This description is based on the elements of the composition in the main visual field in the sarcophagi. Other details flank the main composition. In the subsequent chapters, I will discuss them too, since, in other to understand and interpret the subject of *traditio legis*, one should not alienate other scenes in the sarcophagus, which are parts of the visual narrative.

[20] Snelders, "The *Traditio Legis*", 330-332.

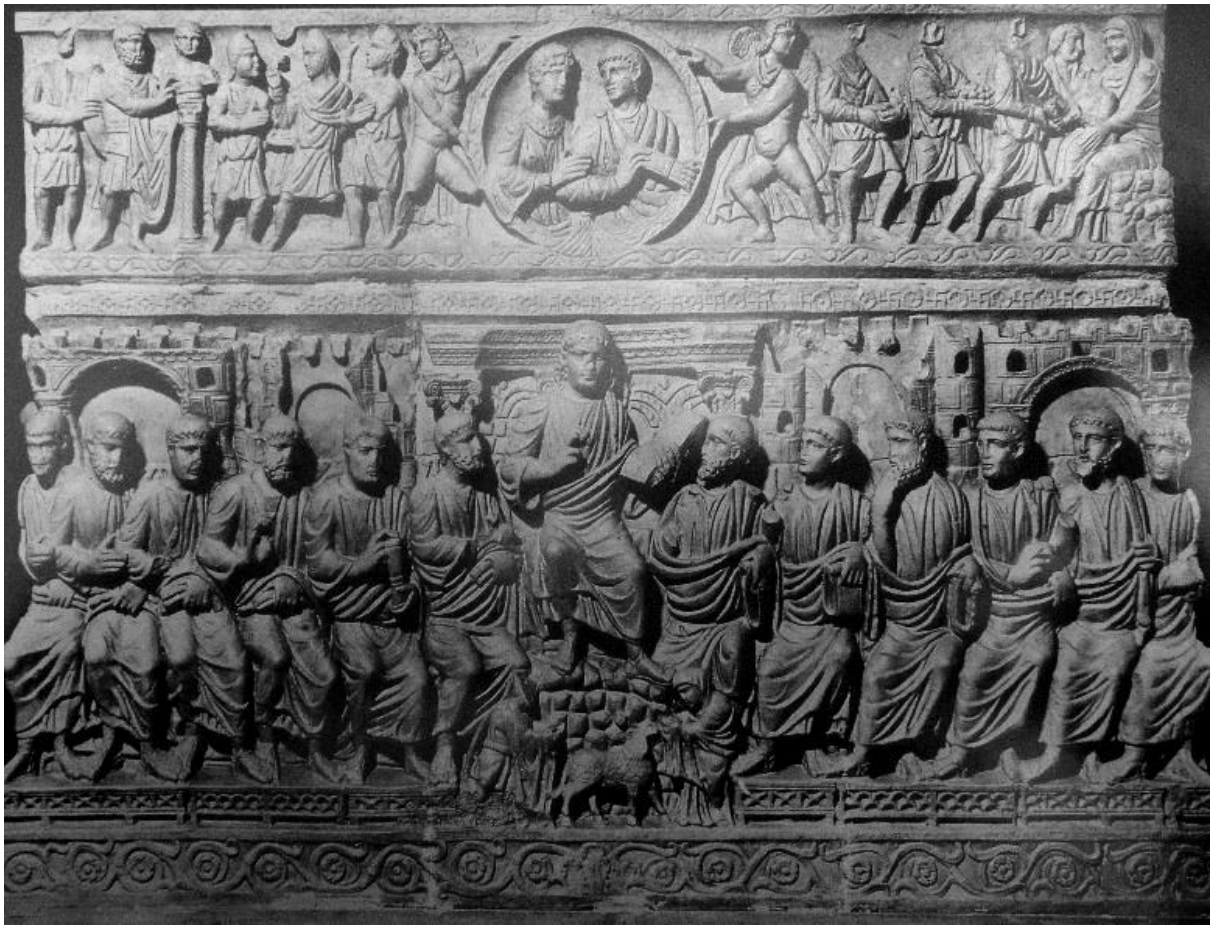

Figure 6: Sarcophagus. Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. Back.

The *Traditio legis* in Scholarship

Scholars have mostly interpreted the *traditio legis* motif as the new, Christian Law overtaking the old Mosaic Law.[21] The most recent literature on the motif by Robert Couzin, gave a detailed anatomical analysis of the *traditio legis* motif showing the previous scholarships and analysis of the elements in the composition. He made it explicitly in his preface that his aim is to approach all the surviving comparable monuments and images that has the *traditio legis* motif, "cautiously, imposing as few preconceptions and extrinsic constraints as

[21] George Hanfmann, *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks*, Vol 2, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), Appendix 74; Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson eds., *Life, Death and Representation:;* Zanker and Ewald, *Living with Myths:;* Snelders, "The *Traditio Legis*", 321

possible."[22]Couzin did however highlight that the *traditio legis* could signify the transfer of authority within the period in which it appeared, but he did not elaborate on this.

Art historians interpreted the scene as Christ proclaiming the Gospel with the Apostles Peter and Paul, [23]the Gospel being the 'New Law'.[24] Christ addressing his disciples in the Gospel of John said; "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."[25] This interpretation is accepted because when this motif is represented on mosaics and frescoes, an accompanying text reads 'The Lord gives the Law' *(Dominus legem dat).* In the Iunius Bassus sarcophagus, Saint Peter is not directly receiving the law from Christ. In this case Christ seems to be displaying the new law.

Robert Frakes proposed that the scene suggests the continuity of the classical Roman law in the Christian context.[26] There are other interpretations: Peter's investiture in the apostolate; an allegory of the divine appearance of the resurrected Christ to Peter and Paul; the second coming of Christ, who proclaims the Law and commissions the Apostles Peter and Paul, thereby ushering the new Christian era; and the Mosaic Law as a precursor to the New Testament Gospels.[27]These interpretations are all relevant as the *traditio legis* motif emerged as a visual motif after the Constantinian turn. This period saw the triumph of Christianity, which became legal and supported by the emperor after centuries of persecution and illegality.

[22] Robert Couzin, *The Traditio Legis: Anatomy of an Image*, (Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2015).
[23] Snelders, "The *Traditio Legis*", 321.
[24] George Hanfmann, *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks,* Vol 2, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 78.
[25] John 13:34-35.
[26] Robert M. Frakes, *Compiling the Collatio Legum Mosaicarum et Romanarum in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[27] Galit Noga-Banai, "Visual Prototype Versus Biblical Text: Moses Receiving the Law in Rome" *Sarcofagi tardoantichi, paleocritiani ed altomedioevali*, ed. Hugo Brandenburg and Fabrizio Bisconti, Monumenti di antichitàcristiana, 2nd ser., 18 (Città di Vaticano: Pontificio Instituto di Archeologia Cristiana 2003), 175-85. Also, Hvalvik, "Christ Proclaiming the Law" 408.

The interpretation of Galit Noga-Banai of *traditio legis* as representing the proclamation of the law in line with the Old Testament, relates to the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. The Prophet Isaiah declares: "Many peoples will come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."[28]In this interpretation, Christ holding the scroll reemphasizes the position of the prophet Isaiah. Moreover, the New Testament is a manifestation and fulfilment of the Old Testament.

The eschatological interpretation of Reidar Hvalvik, is based on the secondary elements of the motif, such as the palms, the phoenix, and the lambs. The four rivers which flow out of the mountain on which Christ is standing suggest more of a paradisiacal interpretation than the eschatology. The four rivers of Paradise received an eschatological interpretation in early Christianity, signifying the four gospels which will spread in the whole world before the second coming. The secondary elements of the *traditio legis* also may have an ecclesiological interpretation.[29]Eschatology was a major concern for Christians even if the first ecumenical councils dealt mostly with Christology. The Church Fathers wrote extensively about eschatology (how long would the punishment last was subject to long treatises, debates etc.[30]Eschatological expectations were on the rise under the reign of Emperor Julian (361-363), and the brief spell of the "pagan revival". But the "pagan revival" did not affect the stability and authority of the Church in Rome, where the *traditio legis* motif was prominent. Although eschatology prevailed in early Christianity even after the peace of the Church, Christians were more concerned with the depicting the triumphant Christ after their persecutions in the

[28] Isaiah 2:3-4.
[29] Hvalvik, "Christ Proclaiming the Law" 431.
[30] For more on the Early Church Fathers debates on Eschatology see; Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

preceding centuries within the Roman Empire. Church councils following the Constantinian turn dealt more on issues of orthodoxy, hierarchy and authority.[31] The *traditio legis* motif should be interpreted in the context of the fourth-century ecclesiological debates influenced the *tradition legis* motif. I will address these ecclesiological debates which includes the authority and primacy of the Bishop of Rome later in this thesis.

Scholars have focused on the *traditio legis* motif without considering one other element on the same sarcophagi as interpretative key to highlight and understand its function. The interpretation which has linked this motif to Christ giving the 'new law' to the apostles overlooked another scene found alongside the *traditio legis* motif: Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. I link the *traditio legis* scene to the Moses and the Elijah scenes (Ten Commandment and the Ascension), as a prefiguration of Christ giving the mantle of authority to Saint Peter, to reinforce the theme of authority.

[31] Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting About God in Early Church Councils*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006).

Chapter 2 – Models and Typology

The aim of this chapter is to give an insight into the models and topoi that were used in creating the *traditio legis* motif. This motif, as I have mentioned, is not based on any scriptural scene. When commissioned to create a narrative and scene, artists creatively use their imagination and refer to what the commissioner was familiar with, and what the general public would understand. What could have been the models of the *traditio legis* motif? The artists could have relied both on visual sources, such as familiar Classical and Christian images, and Classical and Christian texts, mythological or Biblical. The political contexts of Rome and the Roman Empire also shaped the perception of the *traditio legis* motif.

Biblical Typology

Christ standing on a mountain might have been modeled after the Old Testament scene of proclaiming the Law: "Since the old (Mosaic) covenant was linked with a mountain, Sinai/Horeb, it is quite natural to link the new covenant with another mountain, Zion."[32] For Isaiah, the mountain of God is a place where teaching commences:

> People from many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of Jacob's God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths." For the Lord's teaching will go out from Zion; his word will go out from Jerusalem.[33]

Christ on his Sermon on the Mount, taught and instructed his followers on many subjects such as anger, lust, retaliation, divorce, and love for enemies. Christ also mentioned that he was not against the Mosaic Law:

[32] Hvalvik, "Christ Proclaiming the Law to the Apostles:" 426.
[33] Isaiah 2:3.

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.[34]

The mountain refers to the position of someone who instructs: he is shown on a higher location of authority, such as Zion and Jerusalem. Divine authority is what the *traditio legis* motif aims to proclaim and this might have been well understood by commissioner, artist and audience during this period. The Great Commission was given by the resurrected Christ to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee:

> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Christ had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Christ came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.[35]

Christ' last exhortation to his disciples took place on a mountain. He proclaimed his authority and transferred his authority on His disciples. "If the 'historical' scene behind the *traditio legis* motif is the giving of the Great Commission, it had to be placed on a mountain."[36]

Imperial Models

The *traditio legis,* however, has also imperial models. Christ' posture in the *traditio legis* motif is the same as that of the emperor on the *adlocutio* and *largitio* images. The imperial models

[34] Matthew 5: 17-19.
[35] Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16; Luke 24.
[36] Hvalvik, "Christ Proclaiming the Law to the Apostles:" 427.

were the emperor addressing people (*adlocutio)* and the emperor distributing money among the people (*largitio).*[37] The *traditio legis* motif recalls that of the emperor distributing largess.

Roman art has a vast visual repertoire showcasing a god or an emperor in seated or standing posture. The emperor is depicted seated and distributing largesse or granting clemency and in audience or judgement scenes.[38] This posture is the same as that of Christ in the *traditio legis* motif. Christ seated on a mountain or atop a globe or Caelus is modeled after that of the seated ruler. One can compare the seated Christ on the Iunius Bassus sarcophagus with that of Emperor Constantine distributing largesse on the Arch of Constantine. One of the striking difference is the beard: fourth century emperors, at least in their public self-representations, preferred clean-shaved face without beard and short hair that does not touch the shoulder. Constantine is clean-shaved with short hair. The imperial model was not used for the head of Christ even though the imperial posture was employed. Christ has the head of a philosopher. Ancient philosophers are always depicted with beard, signifying wisdom. The philosopher model is what was employed in making the bearded face of Christ.[39] Old Testament characters are always presented as bearded men: Abraham, Moses, the prophets Elijah and Elisha (Fig. 6). The head of Christ replicates the head of pagan gods, such as Asclepius, Neptune or Jupiter.

The imperial *adlocutio*, in which the seated ruler addresses his troops or citizens, is comparable to some elements of the *traditio legis*, such as the standing posture and the gestures of the hand. Like the emperor in the *adlocutio* scene, Christ raises his right hand up, with his palm facing the audience. *Adlocutio* scenes are represented on the Arch of Constantine and the Trajan Column in Rome. The availability and accessibility of this scene is what makes it one of the assumed models for the forming of Christ posture on the *traditio legis* motif. Not only

[37] Hvalvik, "Christ Proclaiming the Law to the Apostles:" 415.
[38] Couzin, *The Traditio Legis:* 33.
[39] Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity,* trans., Alan Shapiro,(Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995) 300.

similarities, but differences also exist as to the heads of the emperor and Christ. There is also a significant difference between the form of the emperor in the *adlocutio* scene and the *traditio legis* scene. This difference is in the details of both the palm of the right hand of the emperor and Christ.

There are also differences between the classical representation of the Imperial *adlocutio* and the *traditio legis*. The imperial *adlocutio* shows the emperor pointing his right hand towards his audience. The *traditio legis* Christ is depicted with a flat frontal palm or any other finger gesture except pointed towards the viewer as that of the emperor. This difference in finger gesture has been interpreted with the case of Christ as a gesture of blessing, victory, or even greeting and with the case of the emperor as command for silence, power, invincibility, and judgement.[40] Christ is a teacher, a philosopher:

> The distinction between a raised, flat palm and more complex digital speaking gesture is even clearer in fourth-century Christian art. Pointed fingers or other hand formations commonly denote speech by the seated 'teaching' or 'philosopher' Christ. This device served to emphasize the learning and (divine) wisdom of the usually youthful figure, just as it was adopted as an indicium of education to support the claims of precocious members of the imperial family or children of senior bureaucrats during this same period. […] On the *traditio legis* monuments, however, it yields to the flattened hand displayed frontally to or thrust towards the viewer.[41]

Artists and workshops sought to create a Christ unlike an emperor or a pagan god, but like a philosopher.

Rome had a long tradition about Saint Peter preaching and being martyred in the *Vrbs*. The princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul, shed their blood in Rome. The apostles' equality, friendship relationship, and authority were depicted visually. Apocryphal texts, the Acts of

[40] Couzin, *The Traditio Legis: Anatomy of an Image*, 26-27.
[41] Ibid 27.

Peter, constructed the two apostles as working together in Rome to establish true faith and get rid of charlatans. There is a long tradition of Saint Peter maintaining the authority of the Church and to prevent people such as Simon Magus to impose their challenge.

Chapter 3 – Authority and the *Traditio Legis* Motif

The Authority of the Bishop of Rome

After the Constantinian turn, from the mid-fourth to the late fourth century, the historical situation contributed to the increase in the production of objects that showed Saints Peter and Paul in *concordia* and as the apostles that the Christians in the city of Rome claimed exclusively as theirs. The function of the *traditio legis* motif, including the aforementioned interpretations, appeared and boomed not only because of Christianity's triumph in the fourth century with imperial help, but also because of the doctrinal and ecclesiastical upheavals.[42] The bishop's authority was been threatened, challenged or overlooked.[43]

These were not the sole reasons for the appearance of the *traditio legis* motif, but these situations might have prompted the use, understanding and interpretation of this motif as a functionality to lure audiences to the quest for the unification of the warring factions within Christianity and conversion of non-Christians. Why did it become important to depict the *traditio legis* motif on sarcophagi in the second half of the fourth century in Rome? These sarcophagi were patronized and produced for the Roman elite – they constitute the demography of those who could afford fine-cut marble sarcophagi in Rome. The majority of the *traditio legis* sarcophagi were discovered in the city of Rome. Not a single sarcophagus that contains this motif was found in Constantinople or other vibrant cities with an ambitious aristocracy. Why was this narrative exclusively employed in Rome alone? Was it because of Rome's claim to authority in this period?

[42] Joseph Alchermes, "Pope Symmachus and the Rotunda of St. Andrew at Old St. Peter's" *The Catholic Historical Review, 81/1* (1995) 2.
[43] George Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) 2.

Rome was not only an imperial seat of power, but an episcopal see as well. The *traditio legis* motif displays *concordia* and *auctoritas.*[44]Defining and redefining orthodoxy and the quest to build unity within Christianity impacted visual art production. The Arian heresy "resulted not from an intentional departure from orthodoxy but from the need to elaborate a point which had remained un-explicated."[45] This misunderstanding which brought about doctrinal and theological conflict also brought about the quest to ask for the intervention of the heavenly souls in other to bring unity, *concordia* and ensure the right *auctoritas* of the right ecclesiastical position during this period. Thus, the epigraphic works of Damasus of Rome and his visual propaganda, offers a program of the primacy of Rome in terms of authority. [46]

The Visual Propaganda

The promotion of the cults of Saints Peter and Paul helped the Bishop of Rome to wield superior authority amongst his peers. Establishing and maintaining authority entails creating a propaganda to instill constantly the position of power on one's subjects. Although this promotion of the cult of the saints, especially that of Saints Peter and Paul in *concordia*, was improved during the episcopate of Pope Damasus, he was not the first to use the two Princes of the Apostles to claim his superior authority. If one accepts the supposition that the origin of the *traditio legis* motif "must have stemmed from the mosaics, or frescoes, of the great Constantinian basilicas in Rome, in particular the apse mosaics of Old Saint Peter's or of Saint John Lateran,"[47] one agrees that, before Pope Damasus, Bishops of Rome such as Sylvester I (314-335), have already found a means of displaying publicly in a place of grandeur, such as

[44] Huskinson, "Degrees of Differentiation:" 288.
[45] Jean Michel Spieser, "The Representation of Christ in the Apses of Early Christian Churches", *Gesta* 37.no1 (1998), 66. Also Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian tradition I: The Emergence of the Catholic tradition 100-600,* (Chicago, 1971).
[46] Marianne Sághy, "*Scinditur in partes populous:* Pope Damasus and the Martyrs of Rome," *Early Medieval Europe* 9/3 (2000) 266-283.
[47] Janet Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum: Christian propaganda at Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries; a study in early Christian iconography and iconology* (London: BAR, 1984) 11

basilicas, their link to the Apostolic Princes in their quest to establish their authority. Pope Damasus took this link to a whole new level of propaganda of his authority. Janet Huskinson, in supporting this understanding of the propaganda of Pope Damasus asserts that

> "The earlier development of peculiarly Roman iconographies, for example the *traditio legis*, and the utilization of imperial art motifs, may be seen as part of a continuing programme of propaganda. The circumstances of Damasus' election, which had demanded that he should take every step to stress the authority of his office, were no doubt also factors in this aspect of his policy."[48]

The Emperor, as the highest authority, displays his power and authority by creating visual propaganda. The Arch of Constantine, was erected as such by the senators of Rome. The arch itself was a *spolia*, which means that the elements and objects used were made in such a way as to establish the authority of the emperor, by linking him to a chain of previous emperors, thereby making his authority accepted and unquestionable. Pope Damasus used this visual propaganda. Emperors give gifts to their subjects and aristocrats as a propaganda to maintain their authority. The Missorium of Theodosius typifies this. There are also the gold glasses and coinages that depicts the emperor alongside people of power and absolute authority, such a gods. In the case of the emperor, the propaganda is to maintain him as a divine being, thereby not questioning his authority. In the case of Pope Damasus, his images on the gold glasses became the visual propaganda to establish him as an authority linking him to the Apostolic Princes of the Church and secular authorities of his period.

Pope Damasus in his quest for authority employed this visual propaganda. There are two gold glasses at the Vatican collection that shows Pope Damasus alongside Saints Peter and Paul. Pope Damasus not only used these two gold glasses to establish his link and authority to Saints Peter and Paul, but he also used them to link himself to a secular authority in Rome. On

[48]Janet Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 91.

one of the gold glasses, he appears together with Pastor, Peter, and Paul. In this gold glass, Saints Peter and Paul were not the only religious authorities that Pope Damasus linked himself to. Pastor was a Spanish martyr commemorated later in the century by Prudentius (348-405?), the Christian poet, and ascetic from Spain, who also served Emperor Theodosius I.[49] On the other gold glass, Pope Damasus appears with Saints Peter, Simon, and Florus. Florus was the father of Proiecta, for whom Damasus wrote a funerary epitaph.[50] "Epigraphical evidence suggests further possible identities for a Florus in this period: as praetorian prefect of the Eastern Empire in 381-3 and as patron of a basilica in Rome dedicated to the martyr Liberalis."[51] Simon and Florus, were persons of power who formed a circle of friends that Pope Damasus used in his propaganda of authority. The *traditio legis* motif was not the only item used in establishing the authority of the Bishop of Rome, but even in other objects, such as the described gold glasses, the two Princes of the Apostles, or at least one of them (Saint Peter) was included in this propaganda.

Concordia

Damasus' greatest contribution to the art and artistic production lies in the material remembrance and honoring the dead, especially the saints and martyrs. Damasus epigrams and epitaphs are the best example of the ambition of the bishop to unite warring Christians in Rome (*concordia*), and uphold the legitimacy of his office (*auctoritas*), while not succumbing to the theological disparities of his contemporary clergies and secular powers, especially the aristocrats. Damasus created a collective memory of the saints and martyrs for the Christians in Rome. The list of the commemorative epigrams for the saints and martyrs includes (based

[49] Lucy Grig, "Portraits, Pontiffs and the Christianization of Fourth-Century Rome", *Papers of the British School at Rome, Vol. 72* (2004), 210.
[50] Dennis Trout, Damasus of Rome: the Epigraphic Poetry: Introduction, texts, Translations, and Commentary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 181-182.
[51] Grig, "Portraits, Pontiffs" 211.

on the extant copies) 59 works.[52] This gives us a clear picture how Damasus constructed, used and consulted the deceased members of the Christian community in acquiring and establishing his authority as the Bishop of Rome. He also used the intercession of these deceased members to create *concordia* in the Church of Rome.[53]

Jas Elsner indicates that after the Constantinian turn, Christianity and especially the Church in Rome was in constant need to establish auctoritas and concordia.

> The fact that the fourth-century Roman Church was no less riven with schisms than the pre-Constantinian Church in Rome or the contemporary Church in the East, was perhaps itself a cause of the claims to unified and collective authority on the part of different Christian factions such as those variously represented by such figures as Callistus and Hippolytus in the third century, or Liberius and Felix as well as Damasus and Ursinus in the fourth.[54]

The Bishops of Rome felt challenged to establish themselves as having the same authority or even higher than the rest of the Bishops. The hindrance was that Rome was a pagan city. Some other cities in the empire such as Jerusalem, had more Christian heritage and based on that could claim higher authority. The churches in Palestine and Antioch and other cities in the east of the empire, were littered with genuinely biblical sites and pilgrimage centers that attracted even Emperor Constantine and his family. For example Empress Helena the mother of Emperor Constantine went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and discovered the true cross, a relic which as the most pre-eminence in Christianity. For the bishops of Rome such as Damasus, the best claim as a Christian city lay in the bones of the martyrs especially those executed in the city during the persecutions. This is why Damasus, worked extensively to promote the cults of different various saints and martyrs in other to possess equal or even higher authority amongst

[52] The epigrams are as follows: one to the apostles Peter and Paul, six to bishops, and twenty-three to non-episcopal martyrs, Marianne Sághy, "Martyr Cult and Collective Identity in Fourth-Century Rome", *Identity and Alterity in Hagiography and the Cult of Saints,* A. Marinkovic, T. Vedris, eds, (Bibliotheca Hagiotheca: Croatian Hagiography Society, 2008) 21.
[53] Sághy, "Martyr Cult and Collective Identity", 16.
[54] Jas Elsner, "Inventing Christian Rome: the role of early Christian art" *Rome the Cosmopolis* Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

his peers. This could also be the reason why Damasus claimed Saints Peter and Paul as sole citizens of Rome. This could also be the reason why the *traditio legis* motif that depicts Saints Peter and Paul was found only in Rome, because with these two Princes of the Church, the city's Christian elites and episcopus establish Rome as the pre-eminent Christian city.

Damasus epigram on Saints Peter and Paul emphasizes their Roman citizenship. The fact that the apostles died in Rome sufficed: it gave them recognition and appreciation.

> You should know that holy men once dwelt here,
> Whoever you are who seek at the same time the names of Peter and Paul.
> The East sent its apostles, a fact we freely acknowledge.
> By virtue of their martyrdom – having followed Christ through the stars
> They reached the heavenly asylum and the realms of the righteous –
> Rome has earned the right to claim them as her own citizens.
> These things Damasus wishes to relate in your praise, O new stars.[55]

This epigram in honor of Saints Peter and Paul emphasizes not only their Roman citizenship, but also that it was their exercise of authority and martyrdom in the Rome that earned them the ultimate Roman citizenship. Saint Peter's 'episcopate' and martyrdom, which includes his authority as the head of the church in Rome is what Damasus claimed too. It is also part of what is depicted on the *traditio legis* motif.

55 Epigram 20 (English translation by Dennis E. Trout): Hic habitasse prius sanctos cognoscere debes, nomina quisque Petri partier Paulique requiris. Discipulos Oriens misit, quod sponte fatemur; sanguinis ob meritum Christumque per astra secuti, aetherios petiere sinus regnaque piorum: Roma suos potius meruit defendere cives. Haec Damasus vestras referat nova sidera laudes. Marianne Sághy, "Pope Damasus and the Beginnings of Roman Hagiography" *Promoting the Saints Cults and Their Contexts from Late Antiquity until the Early Modern Period,* Ottó Gecser, József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, Marcell Sebők, Katalin Szende eds., (CEU Medievalia, 12: Budapest) 2011.

Damasus appeal to his communities' memory of the relationship and the *concordia* between Saint Peter and Saint Paul is part of a long standing tradition.[56] By the middle of the third century, the cults of both saints were celebrated together, the *memoria apostolorum* was covered with graffiti on the *Via Appia* in honor of them, and a common feast was recorded in the *Depositio Martyrum.* [57]The common martyrdom and common authority of Saint Peter and Saint Paul were the legacy of the Christian community in Rome. Damasus utilized this in his setting up of a distinct memorial plaque for the two apostles in the *Basilica Apostolorum.*[58] Referencing *auctoritas* is part of the *traditio legis* motif: in Damasus' poem, just as on the sarcophagi, Christ is flanked by Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

The positioning of the two apostles next to Christ, alludes to the 'two opposing apostles' who reconciled (*Concordia). Traditio legis* sarcophagi were produced under Damasus' pontificate as an extension of the bishop's program of unifying the warring factions under his episcopal jurisdictions. He not only mobilized the Apostles and martyrs, but also organized the cults of the martyrs, Saint Peter and Paul. The pairing of the apostles emphasizes the unity in diversity, a notion that could be traced all the way back to the Bible. This is the recurring of brotherhood cycles and themes from the Old Testament to the New Testament and the Classical notion of brother's rivalry in the Roman world such as Romulus and Remus, Caesar and Augustus, Castor and Pollux.[59] Saint Peter is a figure of the prophet Moses and the head of the mission both in the Old and New Testaments, while Saint Paul is a figure of Aaron, the brother of Moses and the mouthpiece of the mission.

[56] Herbert Kessler, "The Meeting of Peter and Paul in Rome: An Emblematic Narrative of Spiritual Brotherhood," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers 41* (1987), 265-275; Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter:,* 13 – 38
[57] Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum*, 81.
[58] Sághy, "Pope Damasus and the Beginnings of Roman Hagiography" 9.
[59]Sághy, "Martyr Cult and Collective Identity in Fourth-Century Rome", 31

Was the intention of Damasus to show that brothers rivalry is not always in the negative light and could be seen as something healthy, using his own with Ursinus, as long as there is reconciliation after debates and quarrels and one of the two brothers takes an upper hand as could be seen in the lives of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and even Joseph and his brothers? For Damasus, the rivalry between himself and Ursinus is over. Damasus, had the upper hand and therefore reconciliation should ensure to create a *concordia.* We could extend this notion of reconciliation after a rivalry and one brother overtaking the other with the reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles. In this affectionate rivalry, Saint Peter has the upper hand, because he was given the symbol of authority. This does not mean that Saint Paul's position was "negative". While Saint Peter was presented as the authoritative head of the church, a position given to him by Christ himself, Saint Paul's missionary position as both the Apostle of the Gentiles and the mouthpiece of the Gentiles is also accredited. This is why the Paul is also depicted as proclaiming and attesting to Christ on the opposite side of Peter on the *traditio legis* sarcophagi.

The Traditio Legis as an Apologetic Tool

Christianity continued to be polemic and apologetic even though it is no longer being under any persecutions. The apology now is mostly not against paganism or other religions of the Roman Empire, rather it became the tool to promote Christianity as the only true religion. For example, beyond establishing the authority of Christianity and the Church in Rome as streaming from Christ to Peter the apostle, "both Liberius and his successor, Damasus, like the leaders of the Roman Church in earlier centuries when under attack, based their case on the apostolic foundation of the Church at Rome, but now they insisted on its foundation by both Peter and Paul *in concordia*"[60] This is where the *traditio legis* motif comes into play. This we

[60]Janet Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum,* 89.

could argue might be the reason why there is no single account of the motif appearing before Christianity became one of the official religions of the empire. This could also be the reason of the puzzling fact that up until now there is no single *traditio legis* sarcophagus discovered outside Rome's vicinity or in other parts of the Roman Empire.

Christian visual motifs were supposed to muster "an implicit polemical intent against paganism."[61] For example, the visual repertoire before the Constantinian turn and during the persecutions, such as frescoes and wall paintings depicts the Three Young Hebrews in the furnace because they refused idol worship. This can be interpreted as an apologetic visuals in response to the rejection of paganism like the cult of the emperor, and accepting death instead. Later this apologetic visual repertoire increased to include "such as the representations of the miracles and not least the trial of Christ [which] may be said to offer an apologetic edge that justifies and elevates Christianity above its ancient religious competition as the (one) true religion."[62]We see a religion that has been given a platform to prove itself as one of the religions of the empire proclaiming itself as the one true religion.

The *traditio legis* motif could not be understood entirely without looking into other motifs that were used together with it in each of the sarcophagus. Other scenes that occur alongside the *traditio legis* scene are Christ' triumphal entry and trial, and Christ before Pilate. These scenes stress the trials and triumph of Christianity in the fourth century.[63] Since the beginning of 'Christian Art', images whether Biblical or not, were used in more than just a way of giving a visual to a textual story or narrative. We can deduct from their composition, selection of a particular scene in the narrative or story, and the relationship between each of the motifs as having another purpose, as with the case of the *traditio legis*, an apologetic or polemic

[61] Elsner, "Image and Rhetoric" 362.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Typified on the Junius Bassus Sarcophagus motifs and narratives.

function. This apologetic or polemic function would be reinforced when we consider how certain figures are placed in relation to others. Within a frieze of a sarcophagus, there could be just one image field or in some cases three to seven, but in this compositional group or groups, individual scenes or motifs would reverberate and strengthen one another to tell a single or multiple stories and also to promote a single or multiple ideas. In such a situation, individual scenes would be interpreted in the light of some or the whole composition and becomes symbolic. This is typified with the relationship between the sacrifice of Isaac and sacrifice of Christ for example.

The sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus (Fig 1) is one of the earliest representation of the *traditio legis* motif produced in Rome in 359. The main front of the sarcophagus is adorned with ten Christian scenes placed between the intercolumniations of a double-register columnar sarcophagus. Reading from left to right, these images represent – on top – the sacrifice of Isaac, the arrest of Saint Peter, Christ enthroned over Caelus between Saints Peter and Paul (the *traditio legis*), the arrest of Christ and the judgement of Pilate. Below, in the lower register, are the distress of Job, Adam and Eve, Christ entering Jerusalem in triumph, Daniel in the lions' den and the arrest of Saint Paul. Additionally, in the spandrels of the arches that spring from the columns of the lower register, there are six curious scenes where lambs replace people. These represent the three Hebrew in the fiery furnace, Moses or Peter (or both) striking the rock, the miracle of the multiplication of loaves, the baptism of Christ, Moses or Peter (or both) receiving the Law, and the raising of Lazarus.

The Sacrifice of Isaac occurs regularly in catacomb painting and on sarcophagi reliefs from the early fourth century. The motif of Christ before Pilate has been used apologetically as a defense of Christianity as early as the middle of the third-century by Origen in his great defense of Christianity and did appear on sarcophagi reliefs as the same time with that of the

sacrifice of Isaac. One way to interpret this is to first consider the concept of Christ as the son of the Father (God) and Isaac as the son of Abraham. Another is to link them together to mean that the sacrifice of Isaac is a precursor to that of Christ. But in the narratives Isaac did not die. God stopped Abraham at the nick of time and instead a lamb was used in place of Isaac. In the case of Christ there was no replacement. John Chrysostom (349 – 407) wrote:

> A lamb was offered for Isaac, and a spiritual lamb was offered for the world. The reality has to be depicted beforehand in type. Consider, I beg you, to what extent everything had been told in advance. In both instances we have an only son; in both instances one who is greatly loved. The first was offered as a victim by his father and so was the latter offered by the father.[64]

The Sacrifice of Isaac "may thus have been a figural substitute for the Crucifixion, a subject that is almost completely absent from Christian art prior to the early fifth century."[65]

If we include the Sacrifice of Isaac motif as part of a larger narrative that also has the Christ before Pilate and the *traditio legis*, the interpretation and meaning becomes elaborate. Although we can still see the interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac being a precursor to that of Christ, we can also see a sacrifice and obedience that led to a triumph. Hence these motifs if joined together would be taken as the obedience and sacrifice of the martyrs (in this case the apostles Peter and Paul) which led to the triumph of Christianity. From the fourth century, Christ is always depicted as in triumph and not as dead or suffering. The figures depicted on other scenes that are alongside the *traditio legis* motif are all shown alive, even those that has a narrative about death and sacrifice. For example on the Iunius Bassus sarcophagus, neither Isaac, the replaced lamb nor Christ, was shown dead or being killed. Rather what we have are

[64] Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers,* Dom Wulstan Hibbered trans., (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960) 129.
[65] Robin Jensen, "Early Christian Images and Exegesis" *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art.* Spier Jeffrey ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 81.

scenes depicting a 'sacrifice' that precipitates glory (triumph). Thus the *traditio legis* motif if we place it with the corresponding motifs on the same frieze, becomes an art that is a manifestation of the triumph of Christianity.

The fourth century saw heated theological and philosophical debates on the nature of Christ. Notable amongst these debates is the Nicene or Arian Controversy. These controversies became prominent because of the lack of established doctrine and laws. After decades of having the patronage of Emperor Constantine and imperial households and some aristocrats, one wondered why the Christian God and his son Christ were not depicted in majesty. Why is Christ on the *traditio legis* motif presented and depicted in simple form without any sign of being majestic in appearance (although in some of the motifs, as we have seen, he is standing on top of the globe or Caelus, signifying him on top of the world)? These images present Christ in simple form if we compare his appearance to that of the secular hierarchies on the same sarcophagi.[66]

The Arian controversy and the victory of the Nicene faith was nothing short of a paradox. The figure of Christ who was the center of this controversy, became something which was interesting to acknowledge and depict in any form.[67] In the Gospels, Christ was presented as someone who had weakness and sometimes helpless, but for the Nicene party, Christ although he could have those attributes, is still God.[68] Neither the triumphant Christianity nor the triumphant Nicene party depicted Christ as higher than ordinary humans Christ was depicted without any special extra attention to make him look divine or above the simple humans.[69]

[66] At typical example of this is the Iunius Bassus sarcophagus.
[67] We see this controversy growing intermittently to the extent of the Iconoclasm in the later centuries.
[68] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 221.
[69] A visual form that changed in the later centuries where he was depicted majestically (*Maiestas Domini*)

Paulinus of Nola (354 – 431) was among those bishops who emphasized the 'poverty' of Christ. For Paulinus, Christ, although divine and majestic, is full of humility, a notion upheld by the Nicene party. Christ had a "double nature" for the aristocrats of Rome: neither wretched nor worldly and glorious. As Peter Brown explained:

> He [Christ] was far removed from the destitution and blatant poverty of a later medieval Man of Sorrows. Rather, he stood with dignity before Pilate in a simple, well-folded robe. Yet it was precisely the total reticence of Christ's stance that would have weighed heavily with a late antique viewer.[70]

For bishops such as Paulinus, humility in Christ is what every Christian convert should aspire and acquire. The power and status in the Roman world would be acknowledge more if they found their royalty in Christ's humble majesty. This might be precisely why an aristocratic convert like Iunius Bassus employed and depicted such Christ in the *traditio legis* motif on his sarcophagus, to show not only his understanding of the transfer of authority from one person to another, the aspiration of unity within his community and also a royalty that is wielded with humility.

The Right Hand of Christ

Christ' right hand in the *traditio legis* scene is held up and his fingers and thumb extended forward, opened, while the flat palm is facing the viewer. The centrality of this gesture means that it had a succinct importance. Previous interpretations of this gesture allude to speech and in particular to the imperial *adlocutio.*[71] *Adlocutio* is a known and recognizable imperial gesture that the emperor used amongst his troops mostly in addressing or exhorting them. Christ, however, is not speaking, neither is he exhorting the apostles or the viewers. His is a

[70] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle:*, 222.
[71] Couzin, *The Traditio Legis:*, 26.

gesture of authority. This gesture can also have other interpretations such as judgement, blessing, greeting or victory. Robert Couzin noted that one interpretation which is questionable when used with this gesture is that of its specific association with the iconography of *Sol Invictus*.[72] The *Sol Invictus*, the victorious sun god which was used extensively by Emperor Constantine in his coinage and other visual materials and monuments, notably his imperial propagandist Arch, depicts a sign of supremacy and invincibility. This might seem to fit into the interpretation of Christ' hand gesture. But if we consider that the *traditio legis* motif;

> developed soon after the (for Christians) troubling but mercifully brief reign of Julian the Apostate, who was known for his particular fondness for and promotion for the solar cult, [this becomes] reason enough for most viewers of the *traditio legis* to resist identifying the Lord's gesture as a recollection of Sol Invictus.[73]

We could conclude that this association or interpretation with regards to *Sol Invictus* is not especially convincing.

The gesture of the right hand of Christ, recalls the Book of Psalms, emphasizing the strength of the right hand of God: "the sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of God does fearlessly. The right hand of God is exalted. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly."[74] The Book of Exodus glorifies the right hand of God: "Your right hand, O God, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O God, shatters the enemy. And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You; You send forth Your burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff."[75] The book of Exodus celebrates: "You stretch out your right hand, and the earth swallows your enemies."[76] Several other episodes

[72] Couzin, *The Traditio Legis:*, 26.
[73] Ibid 27.
[74] Psalm 118:15-16.
[75] Exodus 15: 6-7.
[76] Exodus 15:12.

illustrates how the right hand of God defeats the enemies of God and exalts his people.[77]The exonerative strength of the right hand of God would be more understandable for the clergy and for lay Christians in deciphering the gesture of Christ in the *traditio legis* scene. Old Testament references to the right hand of God are explicit.[78] The gesture of the right hand of Christ signifies both *auctoritas* of the hierarchy and the exoneration of Christianity.

Receiving the Law with Covered Hands

The *traditio legis* displays the transfer of authority from Christ to Saint Peter. A parallel *to* this is the Ascension of Elijah. Elijah is taken up to Heaven on a fiery chariot while he throws down his cloak onto Elisha (figures 7, 9 and 10), thus leaving his mantle of authority with his disciple. The *traditio legis* motif represents the transfer of authority from Christ to Saint Peter. In this explanation of the interpretation of *traditio legis* as the transfer of authority I will highlight and analyze three motifs that are common to most of the sarcophagus that has the *traditio legis* motif. These are the *traditio legis* motif, the Ascension of Elijah motif and the Moses receiving the law motif as typified on the Sarcophagus in Sant'Ambrogio, Milan (figure 6).

[77] Psalm 63: 8; 110: 1, Matthew 22: 44, Romans 8: 34.
[78] Couzin, *The Traditio Legis:*, 27.

Figure 7: Sarcophagus. Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. Left side with the details of the Ascension of Elijah (left), and Moses receiving the law (right).

These three scenes were the only ones depicted on the entire body of the Sant'Ambrogio and the Anicii sarcophagi (figures, 4, 6 and 7). The *traditio legis* shows Christ proclaiming the Law (whether the Old Testament Mosaic Law or the New Testament Gospel, which in this case is interpreted as the new law), or gives new Law to supplement the old Mosaic Law; in the presence of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

A closer observation of the motif reveals something that is quite striking and should be considered when analyzing the motifs as complementary to each other. Saint Peter receives

'the Law' from Christ with a piece of garment. Moses' receiving of the Ten Commandments is depicted receiving the Law from God with his bare hands (figures 7, 8, and 8). Covering the hands is an ancient ceremonial practice, when receiving something from a revered or holy person.[79] Covered hands were part of the sacred imperial etiquette and are depicted when the emperor is shown giving a sought-after appointment or a legal decision or distributing largesse on the Arch of Constantine or on the *Missorium* of Theodosius I. Ordinary individuals were required to appear with covered hands when about to receive anything from a person of divine status such as the emperor or God.

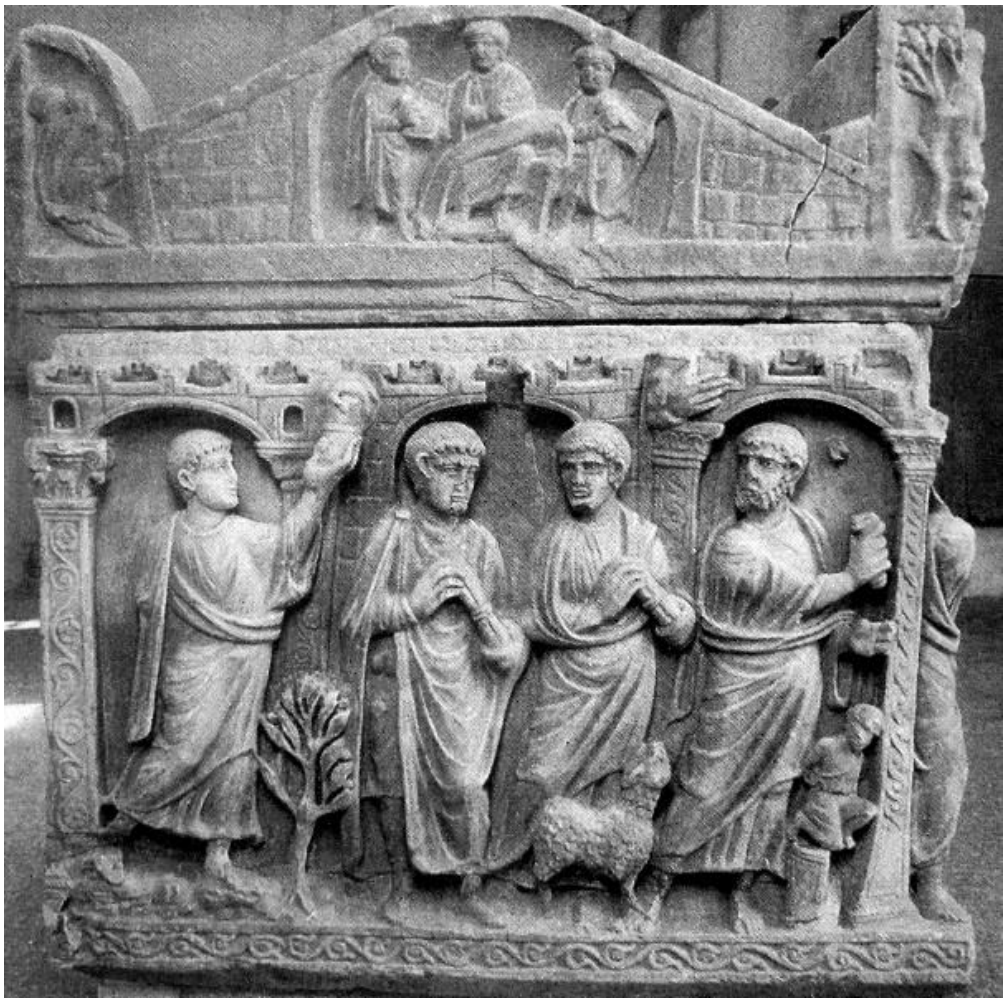

Figure 8: Sarcophagus of Flavius Gorgonius, Cathedral of Saint Cyriacus in Ancona. Left Side with the details of Moses receiving the Law and Sacrifice of Isaac.

[79]Andreas Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche,* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977).

This is how Saint Peter is depicted on the *traditio legis* scene. What is puzzling is that this element is found wanting on images representing Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. This is all the more intriguing considering that the two motifs are usually found together on the same sarcophagi and both were carved in the same workshop. The ascension of Elijah depicts Elisha, the disciple of Elijah receiving Elijah's robe with covered hands. This is a striking similarity that the ascension of Elijah motif shares with the *traditio legis* motif.

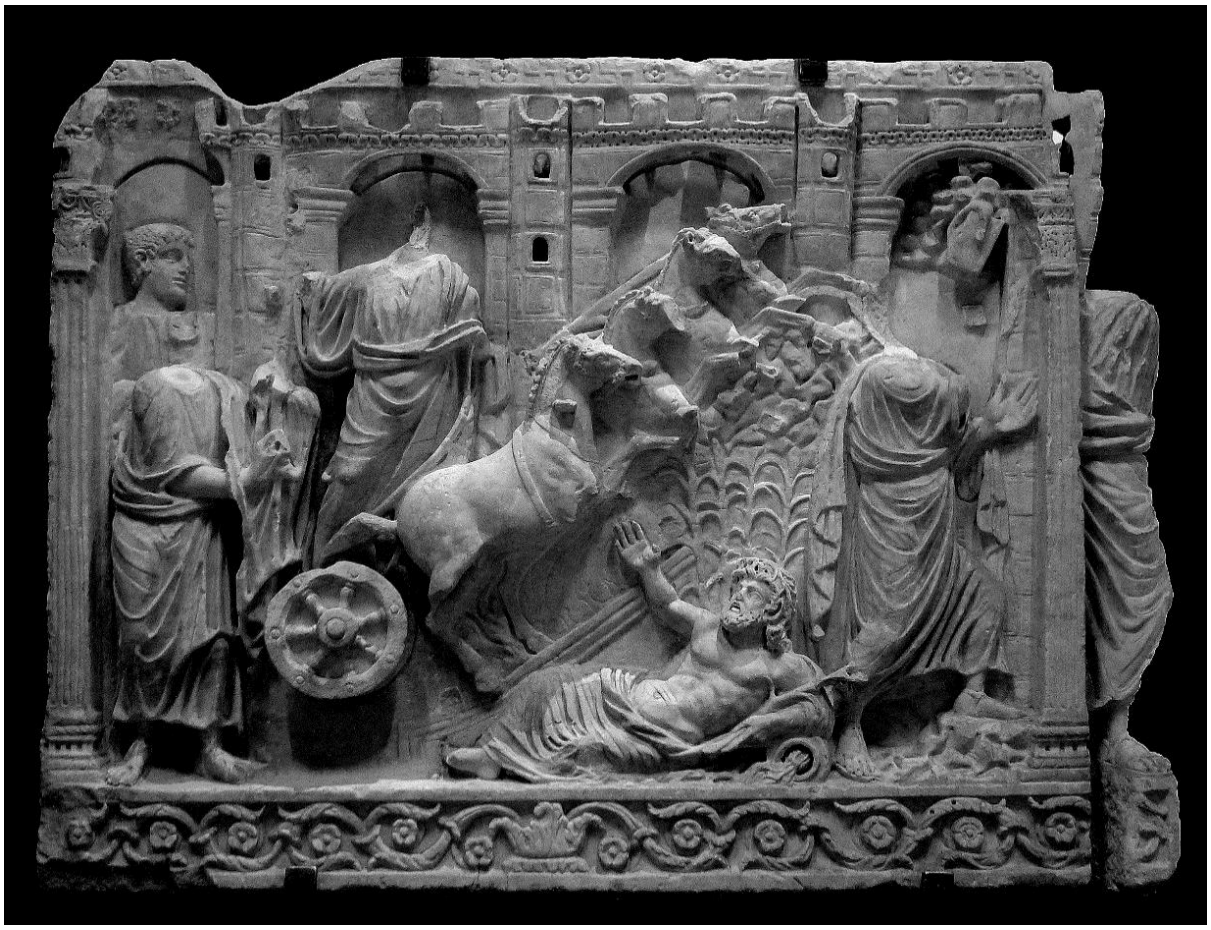

Figure 9: Left side of Sarcophagus of Anicii. Louvre Museum, Paris. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P1070873_Louvre_sarcophage_de_la_Remise_de_la_Loi_face_lat._droite_Ma2980_rwk.JPG

Peter, the apostle of Christ, and Elisha, the disciple of Elijah, receive an object from their master with a covered hand. There is a long standing tradition of ordinary individuals receiving any object from the divine with a covered hand as simply a divine or imperial etiquette. It is a plausible interpretation for the *traditio legis* motif as it is always interpreted in

the light of the Mosaic Law. But why is there a difference in the visual representations of covered/uncovered hand? A comparison of the covered hands and the piece of garment used to cover the hand (a cloak) is necessary.

In the Scriptures, an article of clothing that is used to cover a certain part of the body is usually refer to as a cloak, robe or mantle.[80] Prophets in the Old Testament wore a mantle to signify their divine calling and ministry.[81] A prophet's mantle is also a sign of his authority and mission as God's orator and oracle. The cloak is a symbol of authority in the Bible. Why it was not applicable with the Moses receiving the Law motif remains unanswered. The prophet Elijah gave his cloak to Elisha as a symbol of his ministry being passed to his disciple. Elisha acknowledged his master Elijah and pleaded to receive the authority to continue the vocation of a prophet in the line of his master, Elijah. His wish was granted, the line of authority and ministry continued.

Figure 10: Fragment (side) of a Sarcophagus. Vatican Museums. Late fourth Century. L. 0, 84; H. 0, 47. REPI. 115.

[80] Joshua 7:21, Hebrews 1:12, Job 1:20, Ezra 9:5.
[81] 1 Kings 19:13, 1 Samuel 15:27, 2 Kings 2:8.

This is exactly what happens between Christ and Saint Peter in the New Testament. Elijah asked his disciple a last request before his mission is ended on earth. Elisha's answer, without hesitation, was; "please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."[82] This implies that Elisha recognized the authority of his master Elijah and in all sincerity knew that this authority is the most important thing to ask for. Similarly, in the Gospels Peter recognized the authority of Christ when he proclaimed "you are the Messiah, the son of the living God."[83] Christ vested his authority to Peter via declaring; "and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."[84] When Elijah was taken up in the chariot, his mantle fell on Elisha who took it up and performed the same miracles as his master Elijah. In Elijah's ascension, the symbol of authority is the cloak, while in the *traditio legis,* the symbol of authority is the scroll or codex. Each is collected by the direct disciple who continues the office in the sacred calling.

In ancient Israel, up until the time of the Prophet Elijah, no linear succession of the prophets exists. Each prophet rose and functioned independently as a kingmaker or a messenger of God to influence decisively the social and political life of the people of Israel.[85] No evidence of succession of prophets exists. For example, Samuel did not pass his prophetic authority or office to Nathan who comes after him.[86] This is quite interesting because, "it is perhaps, possible that these prophets occupied the office of prophet and that after their demise the next major prophet automatically found himself the occupant of that office by virtue of his possessing the word of Yahweh."[87] The Book of Deuteronomy made it clear when addressing the laws regarding the appointment and regulation of Israel's religious leaders and officials:

[82] 2 Kings 2:9.
[83] Matthew 16:16.
[84] Matthew 16:18.
[85] This is illustrated in the lives of prophets such as Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
[86] 2 Samuel 7:2, 3, 17.
[87] Robert P. Carroll, "The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel" *Vetus Testamentum, 19/4* (Oct., 1969) 404.

> The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.[88]

Charisma makes the prophet, not appointment by his predecessor. Prophets are neither specified nor attached to a lineage, nor is it required to transfer their authority to their subordinate.

This procedure was altered and a new structure emerged with Elijah. Elijah's calling was not only to appoint the next king, or to influence the social and political life of his people, but also to appoint his successor. God instructs and commands Elijah to administer three functions:

> The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.[89]

God instructed Elijah on his duty as a prophet in line with previous prophets, such as Samuel. One of these functions is the function of the kingmaker. Elijah got one more function added to his already established functions, namely to appoint his successor. God gave one of the functions of Elijah's successor Elisha, which is to work in harmony to the kings of Israel and Syria. Elijah went to the Horeb, saw Elisha ploughing in the fields and he; "threw his mantle

[88] Deuteronomy 18: 15-28.
[89] 1 Kings 19: 15-17.

around him" [90] Elisha left his job and followed his new master Elijah, becoming his disciple.[91]This is what happens with Peter and Andrew, Christ's first two disciples. The Gospel of Matthew writes that:

> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people. "At once they left their nets and followed him.[92]

The mantle of Elijah was a symbol of his authority and a sign of the delegation of his authority to his successor Elisha. Elisha knew this and requested it as the last thing to get from his master. Elisha asked "please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."[93]He received the mantle for the second time when his master ascended to Heaven.

Saint Peter's is a similar case as depicted in the *traditio legis* motif. Peter received the mantle of authority and succession from Christ when Christ told him in the presence of the apostles that he Peter would succeed him as the head of his mission.[94] The mantle of authority and succession was doubled with Christ giving the scroll or codex to Peter as depicted on the *traditio legis* motif. Authority and succession from Christ was a theme emphasized by the bishops of Rome, particularly by Damasus. This might have contributed to the demand and production of *traditio legis* scenes on sarcophagi. Lay Christians utilized this scene of authority and translated it to their own use.

The *traditio legis* motif was used as to depict the transfer of authority even in the case of aristocrats. The inscription on the lid of Iunius Bassus sarcophagus now in the Tesoro of

[90] 1 Kings 19: 19.
[91] 1 Kings 19: 20-21.
[92] Matthew 4:18-20.
[93] 2 Kings 2:9.
[94] Matthew 16:18.

Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome sheds some light on the man who was buried in it. Iunius Bassus Jr (AD 317–359) the son of another Iunius Bassus Sr., the consul of the year in 331, who built a basilica on the Esquiline Hill, was the prefect of the city of Rome from 25 March to 25 August 359, and died as a newly baptized Christian convert (*neofitus*). No other information survives about him, except for his exquisite sarcophagus.[95] This single object of which he was buried with does leave us with clues, which when read, has been of great importance in understanding the religious transformation in fourth- century Rome.

Iunius Bassus Jr, was a praetorian prefect of the city of Rome, after his father who had the same post. Guesses are that if he did not die at a relatively youthful age of 42 years, he would have gotten to the position of his father as the consul of Rome. It seemed that his position of authority was from a lineage which included him rising to the position of authority as the praetorian prefect of the city of Rome like his father. He died in this position, but based on the elegy contained in his epitaph which described his death as an abrupt, we get a glimpse of not only how the people of authority are buried in fourth-century Rome, but also what his contemporaries believed about him. Iunius Bassus, was not expected to die. His death was a shock and brought sadness to the whole city of Rome. The cause of his death is unknown, but we know that his death brought "perpetual grief in the city".[96] At his 'citywide state burial', the historian Ammianus Marcellinus noted that the whole city of Rome, "wept – mothers, young boys, old men, the senate threw aside its togas and wept; the very roof-tops of Rome shed tears, even the paved street 'uttered groans' as the cortege passed over it!"[97]This showed

[95] Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus: Neofitus Iit Ad Deum*, (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1990).
[96] John Matthews, "Four Funerals and a Wedding: This World and the Next in Fourth-Century Rome" *Transformations of Late Antiquity, Essays for Peter Brown*, Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakiseds (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 133.
[97] Ibid 134.

that for Iunius Bassus contemporaries and people of Rome, an aspiring man who trod on the path of authority like his father is gone and would be missed.

The burial of Iunius Bassus , shows a great state burials in Rome: private and public: "the funeral was an event in the public domain; wending its way through the streets of Rome to St Peter's, the cortege was part of the urban theatre that in turn gave the public grief its opportunity for expression."[98] His final place of internment was "in the Constantinian apse, directly behind the *confessio* of St Peter's basilica, in a niche behind the altar designed for it."[99] Iunius Bassus was buried in a place of authority, where the *traditio legis* motif was first depicted.[100] His burial is not only because of his aristocratic lineage or being the son of a consul, but also because he was a person of authority who took the same path of authority as his father's. The authority is bestowed on him to get to the higher rank like his father and achieve great things in the footsteps of his father. This is why in the center of his burial object lies a scene known to the contemporaries as the scene of authority. The *traditio legis* motif. The rest of the narratives on the relief of his sarcophagus were geared towards and climaxed on the scene of Christ giving the mantle of authority and leadership to Apostle Peter. Peter walked and worked in the footsteps of Christ, just as Elisha did of Elijah, and Iunius Bassus the Younger of his father.

Christ standing on a mountain reemphasize his direct handling over of authority to Saint Peter. In the Gospels, after Saint Peter proclaimed Christ as the Messiah, Christ said to him; "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum:*, 11.

heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."[101] Christ is then, standing on the rock and giving his sole authority to Peter who is the rock and the foundation of his Church.

[101] Matthew 16: 17-19.

Conclusion

The fifth-century saw the disappearance of the production of Roman sarcophagus. This puzzles historians and archeologists. Scholars have suggested that the cause of this might have been the Sack of Rome by the Visigoths under Alaric in 410, or the Vandals under Gaiseric in 455. The end of the sarcophagus production, however, did not bring about the end of the *traditio legis* motif. A sign of the transfer of authority, this motif was used again and again by episcopal authorities and secular aristocrats alike, particularly between the ninth and the twelfth century. The *traditio legis* motif reappeared on mosaics during the reign of Pope Gregory IV (828 – 844) and the family conflicts in the Carolingian Empire. These facts strengthen the interpretation that any challenge to the episcopal or secular authority will mobilize the use of this motif. The Carolingian Renaissance illustrates how the imperial family employs this motif to showcase their authority.

The complex context of the fourth-century Rome allowed me to demonstrate the two-fold meaning of the *tradition legis* motif on the Roman sarcophagi in the fourth century. This visual and material culture that became very popular from the middle of the fourth-century in Rome, chronicled, in one scene, the quest and use of apology and authority for ecclesiastical bishops such as Liberius and Damasus of Rome and the understanding and interpretation of the transfer of authority for secular aristocrats in Rome, such as Iunius Bassus. This motif like its similar motif, the ascension of Elijah motif, showed the way in which the position of authority goes from one generation to another.

The *traditio legis* motif as part of the competition between Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople, is the core of my argument. The context of the episcopal disputes between Rome and Antioch forms the background of the popularity of this

theme. I do not deny that, in the background, relies the idea of the new, Christian Law, replacing the old, Mosaic Law. However, I argue that the emphasis is on authority.

Several aspects of the *traditio legis* motif remained unaddressed. For example the gaze of Christ, or the position of Peter on Christ's left instead of his right. Christ does not interact with the other characters, unlike other representations. This becomes prominent with regard to ascension of Elijah motif, where both men are looking at each other. The question of why Christ never looked at the apostles when handling over the authority or Law remains challenging and should be explored in further research.

One factor with the revival of the *traditio legis* motif in the later century is its depiction with the so called *traditio clavium*. This supports my interpretation of the motif as signifying the transfer of authority. *Lex* and *clavis* are two primary objects used during late antiquity to showcase the giving and transfer of authority from a person of higher status, such as the emperor or the bishops, to their subordinates. I would like to look into both motifs (*traditio legis* and *traditio clavium*) comparatively and how their contemporaries from the Carolingian times revived, employed and used this motif in their quest to establish authority. I think this would be interesting considering that in the later depictions of the *traditio legis* motif, the eschatological elements disappeared and even the objects used were no longer the funerary, but more episcopal and aristocratic villas, churches, carved ivories and other expensive objects.

The disappearance of the eschatological elements prove the central thesis of my work that they are not an interpretative key for the *traditio legis* motif, because this scene represents, above all, the transfer of authority from God to men. As long as humans keep longing for divine power to work efficiently in their societies, the ideal of a God-given Law and authority will always remain attractive, especially in visual art.

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