Lili Rebeka Toth

PAINTED TEXTILE FROM RIGGISBERG—AN OLD TESTAMENT CYCLE IN THE CONTEXT OF HELLENISTIC JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ART

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2020

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by

Lili Rebeka Toth

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

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of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Lili Rebeka Toth**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance 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

The thesis focuses on how classical art influenced the evolution of both Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian art in the Late Antique Roman World by taking a textile as a case study. The Textile was created in the fourth century Egypt and is one of the oldest preserved Old Testament narrative in the world. Its original cultural background is still disputed; therefore, its typological and iconographical choices give the possibility to consider a putative Jewish and Christian origin. While the Textile's Old Testament narrative speaks for exegetical function, the lack of direct religious indicators such as menorah or cross as well as the narrative's failed Biblical chronology make one uncertain about the Textile's original function. The most deviating visual solution concerns the scene of *Creation of Man* on the Textile, where a mythological figure, Psyche, is represented as the materialized form of the soul. The thesis analyzes these iconographical choices made by Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity under the influence of the classical art in the Roman Empire. Through this exercise one can learn about how Jewish and Christian art grew out from Hellenism and was rendered to transmit its own religion's exegetical and theological messages in Late Antiquity.

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Most of all, I would like to thank my undergraduate thesis advisor, Anna Eörsi, for offering me a topic that guided me in the past four years, György Geréby, for convincing me to apply to CEU and mentoring me ever since, and Béla Zsolt Szakács for supervising the art historical aspects of the thesis. I am thankful for my external reader Foteini Spingou and István Perczel who advised me how to continue the research. I would also like to thank the Medieval Department, the Religious Studies Center and the Visual Studies Platform at CEU, especially Katalin Szende, Carsten Wilke, Esther Holbrook, Zsófia Göde, Sámuel Gábor and Szonja Komoróczy. Concerning the editorial work, I am thankful for Zsuzsa Reed, Vera Eliasova and Tamas Olah.

Table of contents

List of Illustrations

Tables

Figures

Figure 41. *Fragment of resist dyed textile hanging with Old and New Testament scenes*, Fourth century, Egypt. London Victoria and Albert Museum, From: collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O141449/textile-fragment-unknown/, Accessed 25 May 2020

Figure 42. *Fragment of resist dyed textile hanging with Old and New Testament scenes*, fifth-sixth century, Egypt. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, From: clevelandart.org/art/1951.400, Accessed 25 May 2020

Figure 43. *Jonah hanging, linen and wool tapestry,* fifth-eighth century, Middle Egypt. Louvre, Paris. From: louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/jonah-wall-hanging, Accessed 25 May 2020

Introduction

My research focuses on how Hellenistic iconography and style influenced Early Rabbinic Jewish and ancient Christian artistic language. The existence of Jewish narrative art in the late antique Roman world and early Middle Ages can hardly be disputed. Even before the first period of the Roman Empire, Hellenistic Judaism used and transformed the language of Roman iconography to create its own pictorial language. While Jewish art flourished at the end of the second century, early Christianity also developed an extensive and complex iconographic language by adopting elements of Hellenistic and Jewish culture in the Roman Empire.[1]

Consequently, examining remains from the period between the Principate and the Byzantine iconoclasm (26 BC–727 AD), it is not always evident which religious community produced a given artwork, and what the exact meaning of the representation is. This confusion occurs when there is no explicit sign or symbol for identification indicated in the artwork.[2] As a result of the common pictorial traditions, defining the past and interpreting history through iconographical content are often tenuous and highly speculative.

To illustrate this situation of entangled history with a case study, my undergraduate thesis supervisor, Anna Eörsi, introduced me a fourth century textile from Egypt.[3] (*Fig. 1-23*) The Textile is one of the oldest preserved Old Testament narrative in the world. The artwork received quite little scholarly attention and most scholars consult it *vis-à-vis* Christian religious objects. Nonetheless, Anna Eörsi was not assured of this particular religious identification of the Textile and claimed that the Textile might have been used by a Jewish community. Therefore, I centered my undergraduate thesis exposing the question of whether the Textile

[1] Kurt Weitzmann, ed., "Introduction," in *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977), 19–26.

[2] An explicit sign or symbol can be the depiction of a menorah, a cross, or descriptions in Hebrew or Aramaic that would suggest the provenance. See: Lee I. Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity: Historical Contexts of Jewish Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 337–41.

[3] Old Testament hanging from Riggisberg. Inv no. 4185, In the following chapters the "Textile."

was created in Jewish or Christian background. From that research, I learnt that it is difficult to recreate and probably not even feasible to trace back the original Jewish or Christian community of an artwork from the fourth century. What is more beneficial, however, is to approach the artwork from the opposite direction and see what its uniqueness—its well-elaborated style and iconographical program—can guide us about the evaluation of the late antique pictorial language. Therefore, in this thesis I reformulate my questions concerning the Textile and look into the typological and iconographical choices of its narrative. Through this analytical examination I expect to learn about the entangled history of the Late Antique Egypt and about how art was rendered to transmit theological messages and exegesis by Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity. My main research questions are the following: What have been the original function of the Textile and how does its narrative speak for the Textile's context? And, as a part of a broader framework, how did Hellenism influence the evolution of the Jewish and Christian visual language in the late antique Mediterranean? Answering these questions will eventually help to decide which religious community used the Textile.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of three main chapters. To provide the research context, the first chapter of the thesis will be descriptive in manner and focus on the art historical interpretation of the Textile. It will introduce the Textile's restoration, conservation, condition, provenance, technical features and discuss relevant scholarship and its major questions. It will provide an overview on the Textile's narrative and a rough sketch on scenes.

The second chapter will expose the descriptive information into three different contexts in the late antiquity: the context of Hellenism, early Christianity and Judaism. The analysis will question different aspects of the Textile, such as style, function and iconography. Further, it investigates whether the Textile functioned as church decoration, conveying messages of Christology. It looks into assumed Christological motives, allegories that hide behind Old

Testament scenes (Eucharist, Trinity, universal baptism), and discusses the possibility of a Jewish context by seeking parallels in Jewish figurative art. Based on this comparative research and the methodology of iconographical analysis on the Textile's narrative, the Christian cultural origin is more persuasive.

The third chapter choses a different methodology for understanding the religious context of the Textile. Instead of concentrating on the entire narrative, this chapter will introduce the *Creation* scene of the Textile using the methodology of history of ideas. It will illustrate why this *Creation* scene is a special case of Judeo-Christian art, and introduce Pagan, Jewish and Christian examples of butterfly soul illustrations. The subchapter on history of ideas, using literary sources such as Philo, will be devoted to the late antique double-meaning of *psyche*, as soul and butterfly. The conclusion will focus on why depictions of the figure of Psyche as soul disappeared in the Judeo-Christian iconography and what the reason is for the fading the iconographical theme in which Psyche appears in the *Creation* scene.

This research is expected to provide more insight and reveal more about the formation of Jewish and early Christian artistic language, and the relations between Judaism and early Christianity in the context of the Hellenistic period. By choosing the Textile as a case study for these questions, I hope to call attention to the uniqueness of the piece and the importance of an interdisciplinary engagement in the fields of art history and religious studies. In addition, considering the intellectual milieu and the cultural historical background of the Textile as well, I hope to contribute to the field of intellectual history and ancient philosophy.

1. The Textile from Riggisberg

1.1 Introduction

The collection of the Swiss Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg preserves one of the oldest Old Testament narrative cycles in the form of a fourth-century painted textile from Egypt.[4] *(Fig. 1)* The Textile is exceptional in many aspects, concerning its iconography, technique and size. It was purchased in 1989 from an art dealer in a highly fragmented condition.[5] The torn, dusty and dirty linen pieces were taken to the restoration department, without any knowledge of the subject matter of the Textile or its original excavation circumstances. Recognizing that the Textile had discernible figural depictions, the collection's specialists' aim was to begin restoring the overall narrative, which lasted over a decade but resulted in an almost complete preservation of the narrative cycle.[6] The Textile in its current form is displayed behind a glass frame with other materials from late antiquity such as the Dionysos *(Fig. 24)* and Artemis hangings, *(Fig. 25)* both of them representing hunting scenes and—as a part of the collection's highlights—speak for the cross-fertilization and entangled history of Hellenism.[7]

1.1.1 Research history

The primary research source for the Textile is a monograph, published by the Abegg-Stiftung, immediately after finishing the restoration procedures of the artwork in 2004.[8] The book

4 Lieselotte Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," in *Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts*, by Lieselotte Kötzsche, Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, and Ulrich Schiessl (Riggisberg, 2004), 99.

5 Van Loon compares it to a detective story. Schrenk (2006) writes that most of the artworks are arriving to the Abegg-Stiftung, they are purchased for their artistic qualities in a highly fragmented form and their archeological context is lacking.

6 Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 99–100.

7 More about them in the website of the collection: abegg-stiftung.ch/collection/der-spaetantike-mittelmeerraum/, Accessed: 15 May 2020

8 Lieselotte Kötzsche, Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, and Ulrich Schiessl, *Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts*, Riggisberger Berichte 11 (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2004).

consists of three studies investigating the Textile from different scholarly perspectives. The first, written by Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, the chief conservator of the Textile, explains the phases of restoration.[9] In the second study, Ulrich Schiessl, a German art historian and conservator, writes about the technique of the Textile's paintings and places the artwork onto an imaginary map of material history.[10] The publication's third and main part contains the detailed iconographical analysis of the narrative by Lieselotte Kötzsche, a German art historian.[11] Kötzsche had already contributed to the Textile's research in 1995, when she introduced the acquisition of the Textile and her first analysis on the artwork.[12] In this article she calls the Textile the "new Dura-Europos" and raises the question of the cultural background and the original function of the Textile.[13] While initially Kötzsche identifies the Textile as a possibly Jewish artwork, most scholarship written later does not question the cultural origin of the Textile, and consider it in the discourse of Christian art.[14]

In the same year when the monograph was published, the Abegg-Stiftung published another study of late antique textiles, written by Sabine Schrenk.[15] In this publication, Schrenk offers an insight into the history of Abegg-Stiftung and the collection's pieces, cataloguing the Textile, too. Schrenk is the editor of the following year's publication of the Abegg-Stiftung's collection of essays from the institute's conference held in 2001. The collected papers analyze

9 Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, "Zur restauratorischen Rückgewinnung des bemalten Behanges," in *Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts*, by Lieselotte Kötzsche, Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, and Ulrich Schiessl (Riggisberg, 2004), 8–26.

10 Ulrich Schiessl, "Technologische Beobachtungen an der Malerei des bemalten Behanges," in *Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts*, by Lieselotte Kötzsche, Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, and Ulrich Schiessl (Riggisberg, 2004), 27–70.

11 Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 98–236.

12 Lieselotte Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. Doula Mouriki (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 65–66.

13 The third-century Dura Europos synagogue walls in Syria are the greatest and earliest figurative narrative cycle of Judaism.

14 Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," 65–71.

15 Sabine Schrenk, *Textilien des Mittelmeerraumes aus Spätantiker bis Frühislamischer Zeit* (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2004).

different kinds of archaeological contexts.[16] Although Kötzsche is not listed among the contributors to the conference and the restoration was not yet completed at the time, it is likely that the Textile was mentioned at the conference.[17]

Although I was unable to get copies of Schrenk's publications, in a functional analysis on late antique textiles in Egypt, Cecilia Fluck summarizes her notes on the Textile. Fluck provides a clear overview on textile decorations in churches, and her study serves as the basis of my functional analysis (Chapter 2.1).[18] Book reviews had been written about the 2004 monograph on the Textile by Jutta Dresken-Weiland, Christoph Markshies, Getrud van Loon, Kathrin Mälck, Claudia Nauerth and Yves Christe.[19] In her review—primarily focusing on Kötzsche's contribution—van Loon mentions a colloquium held by the Riggisberg collection in 2006 discussing the iconographical program of the Textile.[20] Unfortunately, the colloquium's results are unpublished.[21] Van Loon's review includes a critical approach to the Textile's analysis. While she mainly accepts Kötzsche's interpretation of individual scenes, looking at the compositional arrangements of the Textile, she disagrees with Kötzsche on several occasions. Her review ends by predicting a promising future for the Textile's research

[16] Sabine Schrenk, ed., *Textiles in Situ: Their Find Spots in Egypt and Neighbouring Countries in the First Millennium CE* (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2006).

[17] As I was unable to read the original publication I used Thelma K. Thomas' review on the book: Thelma K. Thomas, review of *Review of Textilien des Mittelmeerraumes aus Spätantiker bis Frühislamischer Zeit*, by Sabine Schrenk, *American Journal of Archaeology* 110, no. 2 (2006): 339–40.

[18] Cäcilia Fluck, "The Use of Textiles in Early Christian Churches – Evidence from Egypt," in *Church Building in Cyprus (Fourth to Seventh Centuries): A Mirror of Intercultural Contacts in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Marietta Horster, Doria Nicolaou, and Sabine Rogge (Münster: Waxmann, 2018), 247–64.

[19] Jutta Dresken-Weiland, "Review of Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. al.," *Das Münster* 59 (2006): 150–51; Christoph Markschies, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 9, no. 1 (2005): 181; Gertrud J. M. van Loon, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," *Eastern Christian Art* 5 (2008): 149–50; Claudia Nauerth, "Ein Außergewöhnliches Textil," ed. Lieselotte Kötsche, *Antike Welt* 39, no. 2 (2008): 88–88; Kathrin Mälck, "Review of Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. al.," *Beiträge zur Erhaltung von Kunst- und Kulturgut* 1 (2008): 116–17; Yves Christe, "Review of Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. al.," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 52, no. 205 (2009): 82–85.

[20] I was unable to read most of the review, except van Loon's and Dresken-Weiland's.

[21] I contacted van Loon and has no knowledge of a written version of it. I also contacted the Abegg-Stiftung, but they haven't responded.

history. Unfortunately, this future never arrived.[22] Van Loon considers the Textile as a representative piece of art, when she mentions it in the "Egypt" entry of the *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*. She uses the Textile as an example for the earliest surviving Christian narratives which speak for the early Christian heritage in the style of the Graeco-Roman "classical approach" of Hellenistic Egypt. Van Loon's interpretations will be discussed in the compositional and functional discourse on the Textile in the present thesis.[23] (Chapters 1.2, 2.1, 2.2)

Besides her review on the Abegg-Stiftung's monograph, the Textile is mentioned by Jutta Dresken-Weiland, in "Transformation and Transition in the Art of Late Antiquity." The article was written for the publication *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate,* a collection of essays from a 2015 conference about contemporary debates of late antiquity.[24] Dresken-Weiland contributed further analysis on the possible function of the Textile and placed it in the narrative of Christianization. Her results will be consulted in the context of Christianity (Chapter 2.2).

Another important contribution to the Textile's scholarship is László Török's study on art in late antique Egypt in 2005.[25] This study constitutes the core of the argument about the original context of the Textile in Chapter 2.2 below. In the chapter entitled "The Christianization of Art," he discusses the Textile within the discourse of the emerging creation of a Christian narrative cycle. Török's chapter, as well as his entire book is a significant

[22] van Loon, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," 149–50.

[23] Gertrud J. M. van Loon, "Egypt," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Michael Gagarin (Oxford University Press, 2010), 101–3.

[24] Jutta Dresken-Weiland, "Transformation and Transition in the Art of Late Antiquity," in *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate*, ed. Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 38–55.

[25] László Török, *Transfigurations of Hellenism: Aspects of Late Antique Art in Egypt, A.D. 250-700*, Probleme Der Ägyptologie, 23. Bd (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

contribution to late antique art supported by a very profound historical framework on the concept of Hellenism, its mechanisms and influences.[26]

Most of these studies undoubtedly place the Textile in the discourse of early Christian art, disregarding Kötzsche's suggestion of a possible Jewish origin. Only Jas Elsner mentions the Textile in the context of Jewish and Christian relations. Elsner focuses on the late antique iconography of the "Crossing of the Red Sea" which contains relevant ideas used in later chapters of the present thesis.[27]

This short overview of research history confirms that there is more possibility for elaborate research on the Textile.[28] In my opinion, a more comparative research on the Textile's narrative and iconography is missing from the discourse. Especially, the explanation of those "Christological motives" that saturated the cycle according to van Loon.[29] The present thesis will seek elements of this symbolism, primarily using Lieselotte Kötzsche's iconographical study, while comparing it to recent interdisciplinary studies on late antique Mediterranean and Middle East. Another possibility to continue the research on the Textile its contradicting dating, which escaped the notice of most scholars, therefore will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

There is one thing, however, that is still recognizable despite the shortness of the overview of research history. Scholarship seems to avoid confronting the question of cultural background. For art historians the Textile symbolizes two developments of late antiquity. On one hand, it speaks for the emerging artistic language of Christianity, that uses the naturalistic

[26] László Török, "The Christianization of Art in Late Antique Egypt," in *Transfigurations of Hellenism: Aspects of Late Antique Art in Egypt, A.D. 250-700*, Probleme Der Ägyptologie, 23. Bd (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 269–350.

[27] Jaś Elsner, "'"Pharaoh's Army Got Drownded"': Some Reflections on Jewish and Roman Genealogies in Early Christian Art," in *Judaism and Christian Art: Aesthetic Anxieties from the Catacombs to Colonialism*, ed. Herbert L Kessler and David Nirenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 15.

[28] According to György Geréby's informal communication, Foteini Spingou, professor of Edinburgh University, is currently working on a book about Coptic art that involves research on the textile as well, however, at this stage, I was unable to receive more information about her research.

[29] van Loon, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," 149–50.

style of Hellenism. On the other hand, the Textile also marks the end of that relatively short-lived style, and a change to a more rigid and unnaturalistic representation in Egypt. By neglecting the possibility of a potential Jewish origin, scholars narrow down the story of what the Textile can speak for, and loose interesting values of investigation. Therefore, in the second and third chapter, I will consider both cultural origins in equal measure.

1.1.2 Technique and stylistic features

The Textile's decorations show high-level artistic skills. Late antique textiles found in the Mediterranean are commonly ornamented with embroidery and weaving decoration, however, the Textile is a loosely wowed linen material that is decorated by painting. The linen was initially dyed with indigo blue, then was colored with white, yellow, red and brown tempera. This deep blue foundation allowed creating new colors and adding shadows to the figures, giving them plasticity. By now this indigo foundation turned brown, the original had lighter and brighter colors.[30]

The Textile is 146 centimeters tall and 436 centimeters long, with three 40-centimeter friezes. A one-centimeter natural linen colored border runs around the entire artwork with an approximately 7-centimeter rim inside, containing garland frames and alternating painted pearls and gems that separate the three registers.[31] Kötzsche calls them *gemma*-friezes.[32] By identifying these garlands and *gemma*-friezes, Kötzsche sees this motif on the Textile as a that speaks for the original context: an interior of a church.[33] (*Fig. 26)*

[30] Schiessl, "Technologische Beobachtungen an der Malerei des bemalten Behanges," 35–37.

[31] Flury-Lemberg, "Zur restauratorischen Rückgewinnung des bemalten Behanges," 24.

[32] *Gemma*-friezes were prevalent forms of decoration in antiquity. They are sequences of two-dimension imitations of oval and square shaped gems that were modelled from pearls and various precious stones. In late antiquity, they appear frequently in mosaics, for instance, in the Santa Maria Maggiore Heavenly Jerusalem illustration from the fifth century. See: Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 114–18.

[33] Lieselotte Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Gemmenfries: ein frühchristliches Ornament?," no. 60 (1994): 37–43.

Stylistically, the Textile shows the characteristics of Hellenistic style, which can be best observed on the shadow techniques and figures' plasticity and their movements.[34] The scenes and characters look almost like manuscript illustrations, like the figures on the Charioteer Papyrus from the fifth century Antinoë. (*Fig. 27*) In a comparative study of late antique book illuminations, Kurt Weitzmann describes these figures as the "purity of classical tradition" having straight, heavy outlines, round faces and low foreheads.[35] According to van Loon, this style can represent the very beginning of early Christian narratives in Egypt. As van Loon describes, early Christians had taken these naturalistic features from classical art but relatively quickly moved on to a more abstracted, elevated form representation as a choice of departing from the Graeco-Roman heritage. For this reason, it is better to call the Textile as a Hellenistic piece of art, not a Coptic one.[36] As stylistic and technical parallels, some highly fragmented hanging pieces in New York (*Fig. 28*) and Paris (*Fig. 29*) are comparable to the Textile.[37]

1.1.3 Provenience

A vast number of textiles were excavated in Egypt since the end of the twentieth century, however, these finds were often poorly documented.[38] The Textile's provenience is supported by three types of sources; scientific, stylistic and material evidence, well documented by the three authors of the Abegg-Stiftung's publication. The first technical analysis proves that the Textile was produced in Egypt in the fourth century.[39] These two pieces of information can be

[34] van Loon, "Egypt," 101–3.

[35] Kurt Weitzmann, *Late Antique and Early Christian Book Illumination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), 35.

[36] Kötzsche identifies this style with the Hellenistic „audacia." In: Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," 65–71.

[37] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 209–15.

[38] Annemarie Stauffer, *Textiles of Late Antiquity* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 3.

[39] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 207–15., Schiessl, "Technologische Beobachtungen an der Malerei des bemalten Behanges," 36–38.

deduced from the colors used for painting.[40] Radiocarbon analysis delivered a date of 129-346 with 96.7% probability, a discrepancy that still awaits answers.[41] Technical analysis on the textile's painting, which was applied by wax on the line further contextualizes the textile to Egypt.[42] Stylistic observations on various details such as hairstyles, shapes of altars, clothes, dishes and the characters' body features can also support the evidence of the fourth century Egyptian origin.[43] Thanks to the ideal preserving conditions of the sands of Egypt, a rich body of material evidence from the late antiquity leads to two possible cities of origin, Alexandria and Antinoë.[44] For example, there are some finds of the Louvre's excavation in Antinoë, using the same technique of the indigo blue foundation as the Textile.[45] In the following chapter these stylistic and material sources underpinned by scholarship on painted textiles will serve as analogues to explore and discover the Textile's original socio-cultural background.

[40] Schiessl, "Technologische Beobachtungen an der Malerei des bemalten Behanges," 53-4.

[41] Thomas, "Review of Textilien Des Mittelmeerraumes Aus Spätantiker Bis Frühislamischer Zeit."

[42] Schiessl, "Technologische Beobachtungen an der Malerei des bemalten Behanges." 36-8, 53-4.

[43] van Loon, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," 149–50.

[44] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 207–9. This evidence is supported by the inscriptions as well, which show that the Textile was created in a time before the parts of East and West Roman Empire were one.

[45] Schiessl, "Technologische Beobachtungen an der Malerei des bemalten Behanges."

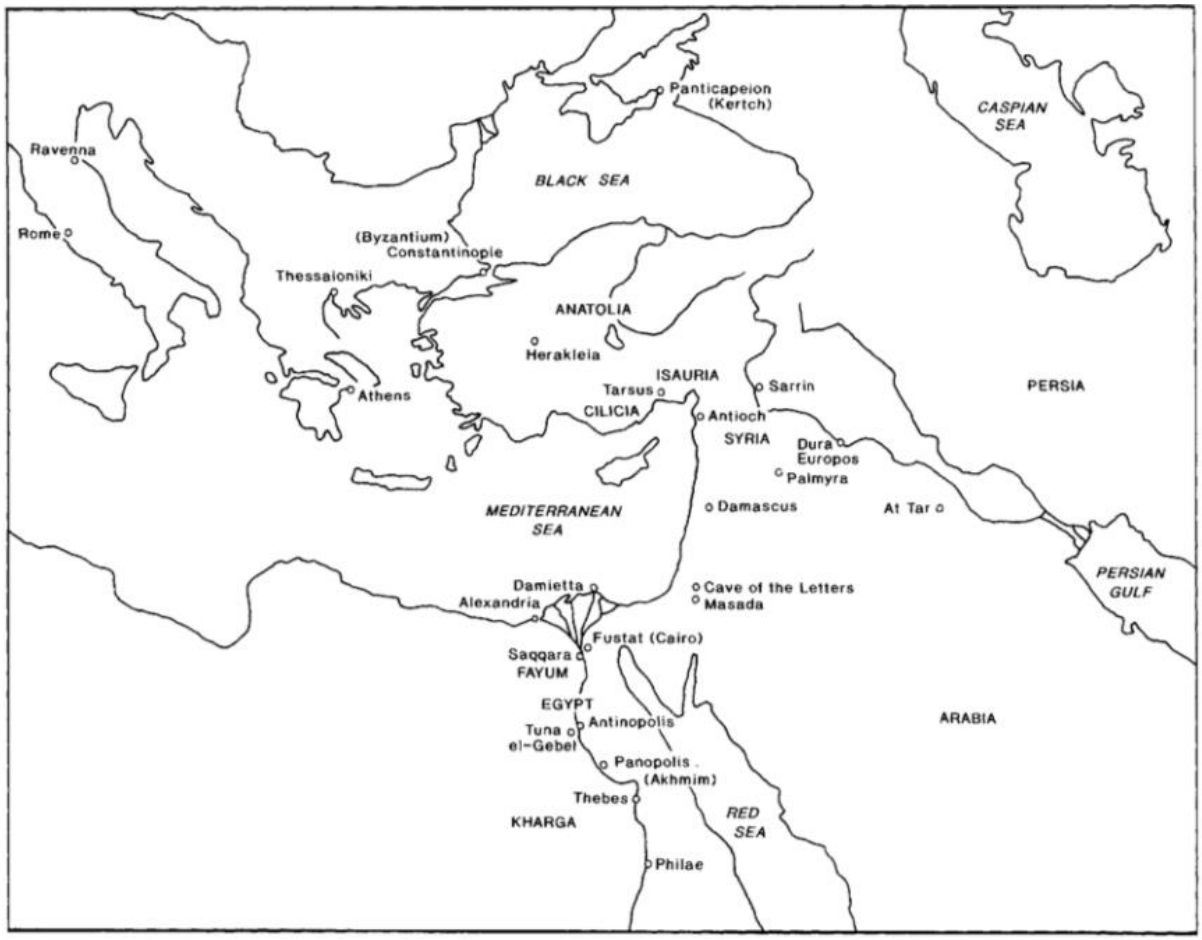

Table 1. Map of the late antique Eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor. Source: Textiles of Late Antiquity.

1.2 Narrative

The Textile's condition is fragmented; however, its theme is understandable. Greek inscriptions in the scenes can help to identify the entire narrative—and they probably helped the work of the conservators during restoration.[46] These inscriptions are not sentences, but names and concepts from the (Greek) Bible, alluding to stories from the first two books of the Old Testament, from the Genesis and the Exodus. The twenty-eight inscriptions are painted above the characters' head.[47] Kötzsche distinguished seventeen stories, which are in continuous arrangement in three parallel registers, reading them from left to right. They almost correctly

[46] It is difficult to formulate any critical approach towards this restoration. The long working process and the well-preserved parts suggest accepting this restoration.

[47] Kötzsche, Flury-Lemberg, and Schiessl, *Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg*, Tafel 1 (b).

follow the Biblical order, however, lacking any frames or architectural elements between them, the seventeen stories are not easy to separate from one another. *(Fig. 1-2)*[48]

1.2.1 Narrative parallels

Narrative parallels can be drawn from Jewish, Christian and antique examples for the Textile. The narrative cycle shows compositional similarities to wall paintings, book illustrations, triumphal arches and columns. From the very beginning of the Textile's research history, Kötzsche has compared the Textile to the first major Jewish artwork: the Dura Europos synagogue paintings.[49] The third century Palmyran wall paintings are the earliest figurative narrative filled with Old Testament scenes *(Fig. 30).* While the synagogue's wall paintings show stylistic and typological similarities with the Textile, the scenes are more separated from each other due to the frames between images and its narrative is oriented in the opposite direction, from right to left.[50]Another notable difference between the two narratives are the labels, which are absent from the walls of the synagogue. Early Christian basilicas could also serve as narrative analogues. In these basilicas, Old Testament scenes were usually juxtaposed with selected New Testament scenes—based on the *typos anti-typos* principle.[51] Accordingly, it is possible to imagine that the Textile had another pair (or even more pairs) that depicted New Testament scenes. Or had a pair with other Old Testament stories similarly to the original fifth-century mosaic of the Basilica Santa Maria Maggiore where the narrative started with the scene of *Sacrifice of Melchizedek* and ended with *Rehoboam and the Division of the Kingdom*.[52]

[48] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 124.

[49] Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," 65–71.

[50] Elsner, "'"Pharaoh's Army Got Drownded"': Some Reflections on Jewish and Roman Genealogies in Early Christian Art," 31.

[51] In church naves, starting from late antiquity Old Testament stories were depicted to one side, facing with New Testament scene on the other side. The Old Testament scenes were understood as prefiguration for the New Testament.

[52] "The Old Testament Mosaics in the Nave of Santa Maria Maggiore," accessed June 2, 2020, https://www.christianiconography.info/staMariaMaggiore/naveMosaics.html.

The *gemma*-friezes mentioned earlier were found in the mosaics of the Basilica as well. Among early Christian basilicas, the Roman San Paolo Fuori le Mura and the former San Pietro's Old Testament scenes could be noted as parallels. The second chapter of the thesis will return to these narrative cycles as well.

From classical art—primarily because of its continuous arrangement—the narrative resemble the spiral arrangement of reliefs on triumphal arches and columns. The Textile's continuously recurring characters also show similarities to these types of artworks. At the outset of the fourth century, Galerius erected a triumphal arch in Thessaloniki celebrating his victory over the Persians. *(Fig. 31)* On this arch, the stories of his campaign run in three registers, just like on the Textile.[53] These examples found in three different cultures in late antiquity are all broadening the possibilities of the functional and visual purposes of the Textile's creator, which I will narrow down in the second chapter.

In almost every aspect of it, the closest parallel to the Textile is the so-called Exodus painting, which is a five-element fragment of a textile now stored in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. *(Fig. 28)* Researchers assume that the Exodus painting was also a part of a hanging, originating from late antique Egypt. The hanging's name refers to its narrative, which shows scenes from the Exodus (or at least fragments of the verses 14:19–15:20) and has Greek inscriptions as well. On the left of the Textile, there is an angel, going behind the Israelites. In the center, the Philistines are depicted astonished at the Israelite success and the army of the Pharaoh (both of them are identified by inscriptions.) The narrative ends with the celebration Mariam who is holding a timbrel in her hands. The collection's catalogue resonates

[53] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 114–23.

with my leading hypothesis that we should treat the Textile as an artwork and "as the part of the developing visual language of the Judeo-Christian tradition."[54]

1.2.2 Scenes

This is how Kötzsche identifies the scenes:[55]

LIST OF SCENES			
I.	Creation of Man	X.	Joseph eats with his siblings
II.	Adam and Eve in Paradise	XI.	Joseph is led by an angel (Joseph and an angel)
III.	The Sacrifice of Cain and Abel	XII.	Isaac's blessing
IV.	The Flight of Lot and his wife from Sodom	XIII.	The Miracle of Manna
V.	Noah's ark	XIV.	Moses and the pillar of fire
VI.	Abraham at the Oak of Mamre	XV.	The Destruction of the Egyptian army
VII.	The Sacrifice of Isaac	XVI.	The Israelites survive
VIII.	Jacob arrives to Laban	XVII.	The Miracle of the Quails
IX.	Jacob's dream		

Table 2 List of scenes identified by Kötzsche.

I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	(VI.)
VI.	VII.	VIII.	IX.	X.	
XI.	XII.	XIII.	XIV.	XV.	XVI.	XVII.

Table 3 Stylized arrangement of the scenes. (Borders are drawn here to mark the different scenes, they are not there on the textile.)

[54] "Exodus Painting, Five Elements from a Painted Hanging Depicting the Crossing of the Red Sea | Byzantine | The Met," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed April 29, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/637714.

[55] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 74.

The first register starts with the *Creation of Men (Fig. 3)*, which illustrates two scenes from the Genesis (2:7, 2:21), the animation of Adam and the Creation of Eve. There are four word-fragments depicted: "ΨYXH" (*psyche*=soul) referring to the female figure with the butterfly wings in the left, who is the personified form of soul, "AM" as Adam and "EYA" as Eve. Adam's eyes are opened, Eve rises alone from Adam's side. Beneath Adam's legs, word fragments "YI" or "II" can be expanded as "ΦYCIC" (*physis*=nature) or "KTICIC" (*ktisis*=creation). If it is *physis*, then it could mean the created environment, if it is *ktisis*, then it can refer to the created humans. There is a missing part in the top left corner which offers the possibility to some form of appearance of a deity.[56]

The second scene, *Adam and Eve in the Paradise (Fig. 4)* (Genesis 3), is highly fragmented. Adam is on the left, reaching upwards, while Eve stands next to him. Both of them have a large blue nimbus with white lines around their head. Eve's hair is in braids, which—according to Kötzsche—was a typical hairstyle in the second half of the fourth century, corroborating the assumed date of the origin of the Textile. The letter "A" above Adam's head probably marks his name.[57]

The third scene is the *Sacrifice of Cain and Abel (Fig. 5)* (Genesis 4:3-4), a centralized composition with two figures with a nimbus and the horned altar between them. The figure on the left is probably Abel, because his hands are covered with a veil. Both figures have nimbuses. The word "APA" (*ara*=curse) is written beyond the altar.[58]

The fourth scene is the *Flight of Lot and his Wife from Sodom (Fig. 6-7)* (Genesis 19:16-26). It begins with an angel who grabs Lot's hand and urges him to leave. Lot is depicted looking back at his wife, who becomes a pillar of salt because she looks back at the burning city. In the center of the scene, the walls of Sodom and Gomorrah depicted. Above Lot's wife

[56] Kötzsche, 124–38.
[57] Kötzsche, 138–41.
[58] Kötzsche, 141–45.

head, the word “ΑΓΩΝΙΑ” (*agonia*=agony) is written, which can refer either to her fear or the city’s fear before the destruction.[59]

The fifth scene is *Noah, his Wife and his Family Leaving the Ark and Sacrificing (Fig. 7,8,9.)* (Genesis 8:15-20). A missing part advances the scene which starts with the horned altar of God, as on the third scene. The altar probably refers to Noah’s sacrifice after the end of the flood. In the middle, Noah’s family leaves the ark, a child-like and a female figure are depicted. On the right, a highly fragmented image of a person is named “ΝΩΕΛ” (Noel), who stands in the box shaped ark. Beyond Noah’s head a bird—probably a dove with the olive branch can be seen. The register ends with the figure of Sarah who belongs to the next scene. It is interesting to note that the direction of reading at this scene changes to from right to left.[60]

The second register starts with *Abraham at the Oak of Mamre (Fig. 9-10)* (Genesis 18:1-15) where Sarah show up on the previous panel. She stands behind the door of their tent and listens secretly. The bearded Abraham’s hand is covered with a veil, similarly to Abel’s, while he holds a bowl of meal to the three angels. The angel has a nimbus and holds a little dish in his hand. Both the names of Abraham “ABPAAM” and Sarah “CAPA” are written on the scenes.[61]

The seventh scene is *Abraham’s Sacrifice*, which is highly fragmented. *(Fig. 11-12)* (Genesis 22:1-18) On the left, there is an angel who has wings and a nimbus. He stops Abraham from killing his son, Isaac, whose name is written on the right side of an altar-like object. What was in the middle of this scene is all speculation, but probably Abraham and an animal sacrifice.[62]

According to Kötzsche, the next scene is *Jacob Received by Laban (Fig. 12,13,14)* (Genesis 29:1-13), but it starts with the names of Jacob and Isaac, probably because Isaac’s

[59] Kötzsche, 145–49.
[60] Kötzsche, 149–54.
[61] Kötzsche, 154–58.
[62] Kötzsche, 158–60.

blessing also belongs to this scene. There are three figures in the middle, they belong to the house of Laban. Jacob's name is written again, as he arrives at his uncle, Laban's. Laban's house here is a well-built brick house.[63]

The ninth scene is *Jacob's Dream (Fig. 15)* (Genesis 28:10-22), easily recognizable by the depicted ladder and the word "ΛΙΜΑ" which can be understood as "ΚΛΙΜΑΞ" (*klimax*=ladder), "YP" as "OYPANIA" (*ourania*=heavenly, celestial) and „IAKWB" (Jacob).[64] Jacob is the sleeping figure on the right. On the left there is a child-like angel figure from Jacob's dream who descends from the sky.[65]

The last scene of the register is the *Meal of Joseph's Brothers (Fig. 16)* (Genesis 37:25) which depicts a group of people who sit around a table and turning their heads towards the center of the frieze. The fragment can be expanded as [ΑΔΕΛ]ΦΟ[Ι] (*adelphoi*= brothers). Kötzsche identified the standing figure in the right as Ruben, the oldest brother.[66]

The third register starts with *Joseph Accompanied by an Angel* (*Fig. 17*) (Genesis 37:12-17). The words "ΙΟCΗΦ" (Joseph) and "[Α]ΝΓΕΛΟC" (*angelos*=angel) are both written in Greek. The angel has wings and nimbus again. He points ahead and Joseph follows him. There is a curtain-like object in the left corner. [67] The biblical passage here does not mention an angel here, just a man (*anthropos*) who shows Joseph the way to find his brothers.[68]

The twelfth scene is *Jacob Bringing his Father Isaac a Meal (Fig. 18)* (Genesis 27:25). The scene's composition is similar to Abraham's hospitality. We can see a figure holding a plate full of food towards another figure. Above his head the letter "A" is written, identified as the part of "[Ι]Α[ΚΩΒ]" (Jacob). His hands are covered with a veil, which symbolizes the goat

63 Kötzsche, 160–62.

64 Prof. Istvan Perczel suggested that κλίμαξ οὐρανία is improbable, as this expression came to use after the Ladder of John of Sinai was written. He advised to read these fragments rather as [Κ]ΛΙΜ[ΑΞ] and [Ο]ΥΡ[ΑΝΟΣ], as ladder and heaven.

65 Kötzsche, 162–65.

66 Kötzsche, 166–67.

67 Kötzsche, 167–70.

68 In Septuagint 37:15: "*καὶ εὗρεν αὐτὸν ἄνθρωπος πλανώμενον ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ· ἠρώτησεν δὲ αὐτὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος λέγων Τί ζητεῖς;*"

skin which Jacob used to imitate his brother, Esau's hand. The other figure is Isaac, who has a nimbus around his head, an empty plate in his lap and a cup in his hand. He finishes Jacob's meal, turns back and points his finger at Jacob to bless him.[69]

The next scene features three figures and the words "OY" (MOYCHC) and "MANNA" with awe on their faces. It is a scene from the book of Exodus, *The Miracle of Manna (Fig. 18,19)* (Exodus 16:13-16).[70] The fourteenth scene is *Moses and the Pillar of Fire (Fig. 19)* (Exodus 13:21-22) depicting a figure with a nimbus, who is Moses, and a column like object, which is the pillar of fire. Both of them are described by the inscriptions "MOY-[C]-HC" (Moses) and "CTYΛOC ΠYPPOC" (*sytlos pyros*=pillar of fire).[71] *The Destruction of the Pharoh's army* is the fifteenth scene *(Fig. 20,21)* (Exodus 14:23-28). A group of figures with Roman helmets and shields can be seen, followed by a bearded figure with a robe, who is identified "PAW" as "[ΦA]PAΩ" (pharaoh). There is one soldier who anticipates the pharaoh and jumps between two pillar-like objects.[72] After them we can see the *Isralites Saved (Fig. 22)* (Exodus 14:29-31), a group of figures turn back to the perished army. There are no inscriptions in this scene.[73] The last scene of the Textile is *The Miracle of the Quails (Fig. 23),* (Exodus 16:13), which begins with Aaron whose name is written above him "APWN". He is pointing towards a bird which hovers above Moses and the Israelites.[74]

Inscriptions suggest that the Septuagint was used by the Textile's creator as a textual model for the scenes.[75]

69 Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 170–72.
70 Kötzsche, 172–75.
71 Kötzsche, 175–77.
72 Kötzsche, 177–78.
73 Kötzsche, 178.
74 Kötzsche, 179.
75 According to Kötzsche and István Perczel.

1.2.3 Compositional arrangement

Most of the scenes, such as *The Flight of Lot, The Sacrifice of Isaac,* or *Jacob's Dream*, are following the compositional traditions of early Christian art. In contrast, there are scenes that use very unusual arrangements such as the separation of the *Miracle of Manna* and *The Quails* scenes.[76] It is most likely that scenes were made after compositional templates—different ones for the figures and the background—which may explain the similarity of the bodily gestures of most characters and some of the odd cuts of the scenes in the edges. Figures at the beginning of every register (Psyche, Abraham and Joseph) are turning to the right, extending their hands, and taking a step towards the center of the composition. The same similarity visible at the group of people depicted at *Laban's, The Miracle of Manna*, and *the Miracle of the Quails*, all taking a step to the right and turning their heads to the opposite direction.[77]

According to Kötzsche, the creator of the Textile was a confident and experienced textile painter, who made choices in compositional arrangement led by his own decisions concerning visual effects. She believes that every gesture and movement was planned to create a harmonious sequence.[78] This could also explain why Sarah is cut from the sixth scene of *Abraham at Oak of Mamre* and placed at the very end of the first register. Her figure and Psyche are looking at each other, framing the first register of the Textile. Van Loon argues that the explanation may lies elsewhere: she attributes a significant meaning to the fact that female characters (Psyche, Eve, the wife of Lot, the wife of Noah and Sarah) only appear in the top frieze. She argues that leaving out females from the later friezes may have been a conscious choice of the creator of the Textile, since later stories could have depicted female characters

[76] van Loon, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," 149–50.

[77] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 203.

[78] Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," 70.

just as well.[79] For instance, Rachel could appear when Jacob arrives to Laban, Rebecca could be present in the scene of Isaac's meal, or there could be a woman among the Israelites in the Exodus scenes. Although Van Loon's observation is interesting, she leaves fails to provide and explanation for it. I assume that leaving out female characters may be connected to the Textile's original function.

1.2.4 Biblical chronology

ORDER OF THE SCENES ON THE TEXTILE		CORRECT BIBLICAL ORDER OF THE SCENES	
I.	Creation of Man	1.	Creation of Man I.
II.	Adam and Eve in Paradise	2.	Adam and Eve in Paradise
III.	The Sacrifice of Cain and Abel	3.	Sacrifice of Cain and Abel
IV.	The Flight of Lot and his wife from Sodom	4.	Noah's Ark
V.	Noah's ark	5.	Abraham and the Oak of Mamre
VI.	Abraham at the Oak of Mamre	6.	Flight of Lot and his Wife from Sodom
VII.	The Sacrifice of Isaac	7.	Abraham's Sacrifice
VIII.	Jacob arrives to Laban	8.	Isaac's Blessing
IX.	Jacob's dream	9.	Jacob's Dream
X.	Joseph eats with his siblings	10.	Jacob Arrives to Laban
XI.	Joseph is led by an angel (Joseph and an angel)	11.	Joseph is Led by an Angel
XII.	Isaac's blessing	12.	Joseph Eats with his Siblings
XIII.	The Miracle of Manna	13.	Moses and the Pillar of Fire
XIV.	Moses and the pillar of fire	14.	The Destruction of the Egyptian Army
XV.	The Destruction of the Egyptian army	15.	The Israelites Survive

[79] van Loon, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," 149–50.

XVI.	The Israelites survive	16.	Miracle of Quails
XVII.	The Miracle of the Quails	17.	Miracle of Manna

Table 4. Correct chronological order of the scenes

The sequence follows the chronological order of the Old Testament with a few exceptions. According to the Exodus, the last scene should be *The Miracle of Manna* but the Textile has *The Miracle of the Quails* in its place. Moreover, *The Flight of Lot* should appear in the sixth story instead the fourth. *Jacob's Meal* should be placed before the other two stories of him.[80] Recognizing that the Biblical chronology breaks in some parts, however, is not to say that the scenes are not chronological, as van Loon suggests but it is an important aspect of the interpretation.[81]

As discussed in the compositional arrangement section above, Kötzsche's explanation for the odd compositional solutions and the seemingly arbitrary sequence overlooks the scriptural basis of the narrative and argues that the composition is led by visual aspects, as a sort of guide of fluidity. She says that the text was probably irrelevant for the Textile's creator who had a very vague idea of the meaning of these scenes. Her imagined creator's repertoire could have included pagan motives as well.[82] However, van Loon disagrees and suggests that the Textile was not made to please the eye, put to fulfill theological purposes. She argues that the Textile's scenes are saturated with Christological motives and the narrative contains hidden eschatological, sacramental and liturgical typology that could have served the purpose of teaching in a chapel. Therefore—she argues—that a compromise on account of aesthetics is out of the question in the discourse of the Textile.

[80] van Loon, 149–50.
[81] van Loon, 150.
[82] Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," 71.

1.2.5 Critical approach towards the identification of the scenes

Most scholarly contributions agree with Kötzsche's identification of the scenes. László Török offers a slightly different interpretation, identifying the fifteenth scene as *The Crossing the Red Sea*, and the last one as *Moses and Aaron*.[83] These identifications only broaden the possibilities of biblical identification, which, I believe is not necessary here unless one reads the scenes from the thirteenth (*The Miracle of Manna*) until the last one (*The Miracle of Quails*) as one "block of stories" from the *Exodus* onwards. It was not suggested by Török but treating this last section as one scene could perhaps solve the ambiguity of the separation of *The Miracle of Manna* and *The Miracle of Quails*.

Kötzsche's identification of the scenes should be observed critically. The Textile was assembled from thousands of pieces and there are significant gaps between some scenes, for instance between the fourth and the fifth.

The discussion of the Textile's narrative yielded some interesting and debatable aspects which await further explanation: the narrative's incorrect Biblical order, the absence of female characters in the two lower friezes, and a more elaborate analysis of the hypothetical Christological motives. These aspects will guide the functional and cultural analysis in the following chapters.

1.3 Cultural identification

Christian origin is emphasized by most researchers, even if there is no explicit symbol suggesting it. There is nothing specifically Jewish in the imagery either.[84] The fact that the scenes are Biblical is insufficient grounds to decide whether the Textile was created in a Jewish or Christian cultural context. To trace the origins, one needs to understand and overcome the

[83] Török, "The Christianization of Art in Late Antique Egypt," 280–81.

[84] This thought might lead us back to the question of dating. If it was created in the second century, at that time neither cross, nor menorah was an integral part of the visualities.

pictorial problems concerning Judaism and Christianity, impeding the examination of the cultural origin.[85] Moreover, the secondary meaning of the illustrated scenes must be considered even if they are out of context. While finding the original environment as suggested as a methodological framework for this research may not be entirely impossible, the main focus of this examination is understanding and construing the ways in which Classical art influenced the evolution of Jewish and Christian iconography. An additional aim of this thesis is finding a reason for the fading of particular iconographical themes in Judaism and Christianity, and through these movements, understanding what a Textile can capture about its socio-cultural background.

1.3.1 "Pictorial problems"

"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" says the second commandment in Exodus 20:4. The commandment that strictly forbids Jews from producing carved images resulted in cultural resistance and the restriction of creating a likeness in order to avoid creating idols in Judaism.[86] The pictorial problem in Christianity was its lack of opportunities to create their own artistic language at such an early stage due to the religion's social circumstances and—parallel to Judaism—their own resistance of creating likeness in order to oppose pagan polemics.[87]

There are exceptions from characteristics that support both Jewish and Christian backgrounds. The prohibition stated in the second commandment, seems to have been observed in Second Temple times, however, remarkable examples of figural images of humans and animals from the third and especially the fourth century are likely to appear.[88] Among Jews the

[85] In the following chapter, I use the term "pictorial problem" to illustrate visual difficulties related to Judaism and Christianity in the Late Antiquity. These problems bear partially biblical and partially historical roots.

[86] There is a considerable number of studies written on the Second Commandment, its origins, and impact of Judaism.

[87] Bezalel Narkiss, "The Jewish Realm," in *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977), 365–95.

[88] Catherine Hezser and Uzi Leibner, "Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context: An Introductory Essay," in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, ed. Catherine Hezser and Uzi Leibner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 1.

proliferation of figurative representations is a consequence of rabbinic tolerance or even approval. As previously stated, Hellenistic Judaism used and transformed Roman iconography to create its own pictorial language. Examples for this artistic heritage are the synagogue frescos in the Syrian Dura-Europos, as well as the synagogue mosaics of Sepphoris, Huqoq, Beith Alpha, in Galilee. The discovery of this heritage led to the current art historical view that no longer holds that the history of the relationship Judaism and art began or ended with the negation of the Second Commandment.[89] For Christians, the proliferation of images is a consequence of the historical events that turned Christianity from a persecuted faith to an official one (in AD 312), and soon the state religion (in AD 380). The growing number of Christian followers resulted in a growing number of artistic works. Using art was an effective tool for the church to propagate its new messages to the world which initiated the development of a dogmatic and thoughtful Christian visual language.[90]

László Török argues that both the quality and the style of the Textile indicate that the painter (or rather, painters) was educated in the tradition of Hellenistic narrative representation and calls his work a "significant early attempt at the creation of a Christian narrative cycle."[91] This means that he places the artwork in the history of Christian art. However, I argue that as both communities used Hellenistic prefiguration in their art, the stylistic features of the artwork will not disprove either assumption about the origin of the Textile. A striking aspect of the Textile, however, is the question of the narrative: how is it possible from either of these religions who are so faithful to their scriptures to produce something so monumental yet contain mistakes in the Biblical sequences?[92] The following chapters discusses these questions

[89] Joseph Gutmann, "Early Synagogue and Jewish Catacomb Art and Its Relation to Christian Art," in *Rise and Decline of the Roman World*, ed. Hildegart Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), 1314.

[90] Weitzmann, "Introduction," 19.

[91] Török, "The Christianization of Art in Late Antique Egypt," 280–81.

[92] There are some precedents listed in "The Earliest Christian Art: From Personal Salvation to Imperial Power" in *Picturing the Bible*, ed. Jeffrey Spier, 1-24.

and assumptions, setting off on a journey in the entangled history of the late antique Roman, Jewish and Christian Middle East, comparing the archeological evidence of the region.

2. The Textile in the Context of Late Antiquity

Many possibilities for investigation lie in the material and economic history of textiles of late antiquity. By focusing on the original function and socio-cultural background of the Textile, this chapter, however, will illustrate questions of entangled history and cultural knowledge history. It will sample literary sources and the cultural heritage of the Roman world, in order to illustrate the environment of the Textile's audience.[93]

When looking at materials that were born out of cultural co-existence and cross-fertilization, clear-cut religious identities tend to evaporate, which is clearly the case in the artistic heritage of Hellenism.[94] Therefore, in the first part of this chapter, regardless of their Judeo-Christian-Pagan cultural origin, late antique Egyptian textiles will be treated as one unit concerning their style and function. (Chapter 2.1) Nevertheless, this methodology cannot be applied in the analysis of the iconography and the visual language of the Textile: the choice of symbols and motifs have theological meanings, especially in environments where art almost exclusively fulfills religious purposes.[95] Accordingly, the rest of the chapter, which looks into the iconographical choices of the Textile's narrative, will divide the concept of the Hellenistic Judeo-Christian art into two components. The visual will be analyzed as Hellenistic Christian (Chapter 2.2) and Hellenistic Jewish (Chapter 2.3).

93 The above mentioned authors' examination in research history (Kötzsche, Török, Fluck, Schrenk and Thomas) helps this analysis.

94 Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch*, Greek Culture in the Roman World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3–4.

95 See: Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977).

2.1 Function of the Textile

2.1.1 Visual sources

The wealth of textiles preserved in Egypt are a primary source for the visual understanding of cultures in the late antique period.[96] These archeological sources prove that Egyptian interiors, churches and villas, must have been filled with textiles. As secondary usage, textiles were used to wrap up bodies and buried with the dead. Therefore, they were more often found in burial places than in their original context, as in the case of the Textile.[97] Reconstructing the primary function of these textiles relies primarily on images of curtains, veils and hangings depicted in works of arts, such as mosaics, frescoes and wall paintings, as well as descriptions in literary sources. Accordingly, textiles were represented functioning in different ways: as curtains, hangings, or tapestries fulfilling decorative and functional purposes.

In a pagan context, a curtain appears on the fifth century mosaic of Nea Paphos in Cyprus, in the central reception hall of a Roman palace, depicting the birth of Achilles. *(Fig. 32)* In the sixth century mosaic of San Vitale in Ravenna, depicting Empress Theodora in her court, a textile can be seen to cover the entrance. *(Fig. 33)* On the front panel of a sanctuary altar in Cyprus (Panagia Amasgou, Monagri) a painted *tromp l'oeil* curtain with gems and geometric motifs appears as a decoration. *(Fig. 34)* In a Coptic manuscript, illustrating the scene of Herod Antipas and Salome (Mark 6:27-28) *(Fig. 35)*, a wall hanging serves as background. In Jewish context, as a part of synagogue decoration, textiles were likely to be used as covers of the *aron ha-kodesh*, the Torah ark. This tradition can be observed on the floor mosaic of Beit Shean. *(Fig. 36)* The Textile from Riggisberg itself contains the image of a curtain, as noted above, in the scene of *Joseph Accompanied by an Angel*. *(Fig. 17)*

[96] Stauffer, *Textiles of Late Antiquity*, 43.
[97] Fluck, "The Use of Textiles in Early Christian Churches – Evidence from Egypt," 247.

2.1.2 Literary sources

In the first century, in *Naturalis Historia*, Pliny the Elder declares the technique of dyed painting as a new artistic method. He describes this technique deriving from Egypt:[98] "One folly, too, of this age of ours, in reference to painting, I must not omit. The Emperor Nero ordered a painting of himself to be executed upon canvass, of colossal proportions, one hundred and twenty feet in height; a thing till then unknown."[99]

By the end of the second century, in 197, Tertullian writes disparagingly about luxurious dyed textile products in *De Cultu Feminarum.*[100] Later, in the second half of the fourth century, Epiphanius of Salamis, the bishop of Salamis, Cyprus, mentions textiles used as church decoration in his letter written to John, the bishop of Aleia:

> when we came to the village called Anautha, we saw a lighted lamp and, upon enquiring, were informed that there was a church in that place. Having entered [the church] to perform a prayer, we found at the door a dyed curtain upon which was depicted some idol in the form of a man. They alleged that it was the image of Christ or one of the saints, for I do not remember what it was I saw. Knowing that the presence of such things in a church is a defilement, I tore it down and advised that it should be used to wrap up a poor man who had died.[101]

While the Egyptian finds that were discovered in burial places usually belong to wealthier social groups, the following letter of Epiphanius can give an idea of what church interiors looked like. Another iconoclast letter of Epiphanius was written to the Emperor Theodosius I:[102]

[98] "In Egypt, too, they employ a very remarkable process for the colouring of tissues. After pressing the material, which is white at first, they saturate it, not with colours, but with mordents that are calculated to absorb colour. This done, the tissues, still unchanged in appearance, are plunged into a cauldron of boiling dye, and are removed the next moment fully coloured. It is a singular fact, too, that although the dye in the pan is of one uniform colour, the material when taken out of it is of various colours, according to the nature of the mordents that have been respectively applied to it: these colours, too, will never wash out. Thus the dye-pan, which under ordinary circum- stances, no doubt, would have made but one colour of several, if coloured tissues had been put into it, is here made to yield several colours from a single dye. At the same moment that it dyes the tissues, it boils in the colour; and it is the fact, that material which has been thus submitted to the action of fire becomes stouter and more serviceable for wear, than it would have been if it had not been subjected to the process" Chapter 35.42

[99] Chapter 35.42 in Pliny the Elder, The Natural History, ed. and trans. by John Bostock, and H. T. Riley (London. Taylor and Francis, 1855). Available online, accessed April 30, 2020, data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0978.phi001.perseus-eng1:35.42

[100] Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women," in *The Writings of Tertullian*, vol. 1, Ante-Nicene Christian Library 11 (London: T&T Clark, 1869), 304–22.

[101] Cyril A. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 42 f.

[102] Török, "The Christianization of Art in Late Antique Egypt," 275.

> Seest thou not, O most God-loving emperor, that this state of things is not agreeable to God? Wherefore I entreat thee…that the curtains which may be found to bear in a spurious manner—and yet they do so—images of the apostles or prophets or of Lord Christ Himself should be collected from churches, baptisteries, houses and martyria and that thou shouldst give them over for the burial of the poor, and as [for the images] on walls, that they should be whitewashed.[103]

These literary and visual sources prove the wide-spread presence of textiles in late antiquity and help imagine how they were used in everyday life, either decorating a church or synagogue, or the aristocratic home of a devout member of either faith taking us more closely to the original function of the Textile.

2.2 A possible Jewish context

A synagogue is a place to "read."[104] Similar to the church context, images that appeared on synagogue walls and mosaic pavements were there to transmit theological messages. Seeing the Textile as a Jewish piece of art, the narrative massages of the scenes must be identified. Accepting Jewish hostility towards images as a "potential among many," little is known about Jewish narratives/figurative images that survived not only on mosaics but on other artistic media, such as wall paintings or manuscripts, that give us the possibility to imagine how Jewish continuous narrative was existent or was it at any rate a way of expression of Judaism?[105]

Under such circumstances, it is difficult to find artistic parallels for the Textile, but not entirely futile, given the fact that Jewish art is a relatively new field of scholarship. The comparison rests on a twofold basis. First, the increasing material evidence of Jewish figurative art that reached critical mass with the discovery of the Dura Europos synagogue wall painting generating further successful excavations in the Middle East.[106] The second is the hypotheses

[103] Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, 42.

[104] Roland Deines, "God's Revelation Through Torah, Creation, and History - Interpreting the Zodiac Mosaics in Synagogues," in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, ed. Catherine Hezser and Uzi Leibner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 156.

[105] David Nirenberg, "Introduction," in *Judaism and Christian Art: Aesthetic Anxieties from the Catacombs to Colonialism*, ed. Herbert L Kessler and David Nirenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 1–2.

[106] Gutmann, "Early Synagogue and Jewish Catacomb Art and Its Relation to Christian Art," 1314.

in this nascent field which emerged in response to these discoveries and which interprets early Rabbinic Jewish art in the entangled history of the late antique Mediterranean and Graeco-Roman heritage. In this respect the two of them can work together as an interdisciplinary method of archaeologists, art historians, classicists and scholars of religions.[107]

The closest narrative parallel, as mentioned in the first chapter, is comprised of the images found on the walls of Dura Europos synagogue. (*Fig. 30*) These, though their reading direction and the framed images are different, still have a lot in common with the Textile. Joseph Gutmann argues that the third-century paintings of Dura Europos are the earliest continuous Biblical narrative in the world, and the fact that there are no other instances of such Biblical representation—neither in Jewish, nor in Christian art—may suggest that the elaborate Christian visual language has its roots in Jewish models. To confirm his thesis, Gutmann takes several scenes found in the synagogue and compares them to medieval Christian artworks.[108] If the Textile was indeed created in Jewish context, then could be similarly used to undergird Gutmann's argument about a Jewish model for Christian artistic language. However, if the Textile was created in a Christian community, then it would clearly contradict with his hypothesis that no similarly elaborate Biblical narrative is known from earlier. As far as I'm concerned, by stating that Christian narrative cycles were not so elaborated until the fifth century, Gutmann ignores the rich material evidence of Biblical stories found on smaller artefacts, such as on early Christian sarcophagi. But to return to the question of the Textile's origin, I do not think that the lack of such coherent Biblical narratives among Christian finds would legislate the Jewish cultural background of the Textile. A more legitimate way to envisage such questions is to examine the parallelism with the iconographical content of the Dura Synagogue.

[107] Hezser and Leibner, "Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context: An Introductory Essay," 19.
[108] Gutmann, "Early Synagogue and Jewish Catacomb Art and Its Relation to Christian Art," 1314–38.

Scenes that are depicted on both the Dura synagogue walls and on the Old Testament hangings are *The Sacrifice of Abraham (*Aqedah) (*Fig. 11*), *Jacob's Dream* (*Fig. 15*) and *The Crossing of the Red Sea* (*Fig. 19-22*). The elaborate shadows, and the characters' dynamism and plasticity as well as the compositional arrangement of *Jacob's Dream* and the *Crossing of the Red Sea* are quite similar in the two artworks. They are in stark contrast with *The Sacrifice of Abraham*, which is heavily stylized on the Dura synagogue walls.

The motive of *Aqedah* was a popular figurative choice of Judaism, which, similarly to the Christian understanding, represents Abraham's faith and loyalty to God in the mosaics of Beth Alpha (*Fig. 37*) and Sepphoris (*Fig. 38*), both located in the territory of ancient Israel.[109] At the same time, it is difficult to stylistically compare these mosaics to the Textile. The Sepphoris mosaic pavements (dated between the third to the fifth century) show more superior artistic skills than the sixth-century Beth Alpha's.[110] This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that Sepphoris as a Rabbinic center, was wealthier and enjoyed a higher social standing than Beth Alpha.[111] Similarly to the Textile's narrative, on the Sepphoris mosaics, Abraham's hospitality anticipates the scene of *Aqedah*. It survives in an even more fragmented state than the Textile, however, the way in which Sara is standing in the portal in the scene and how Abraham offers the food resembles to the Textile's compositional arrangement. (*Fig. 48*) The well-established visual language that appear in the Sepphoris mosaics (within other figurative mosaics in the Middle East) examined within the context of Roman-Byzantine religion, literature and art has attracted a great deal of attention in scholarship.[112]

[109] Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 268.

[110] Levine even risks calling the style of Beth Alpha mosaics as primitive. See: Levine, 268.

[111] See: Levine, Chapter 14, 15.

[112] Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity*; Zeev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message Through Its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2005); Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

These studies seek both the explanation for the spread of Jewish figurative art in Late Antiquity and its iconographical interpretation. These explanations rely on the growing acknowledgment of Rabbinic studies in the context of anti-Christian subjects which were strengthening Israel's identity against Christianity. These subjects reflect on the images and motifs of the Jews: a group under pressure needs to reassure itself about its core beliefs and hopes and about its on Scriptural sovereignty.[113] Visual symbols therefore were related to the temple (*menorah*), its own covenant and belief in God (*Aqedah*) and to holidays (*shofar, etrog, lulav*).[114]

Most sources found are either mosaic pavements or small finds, whose visual story was read in a very different way than that of the Textile. For example, while considering the mosaics the issue of its reading direction is important, the message works together as a whole. Another problem of comparisons like that is that in more pieces of the puzzle are needed from archeological evidence—from Egypt as well—to be able to logically connect Textile and these contemplations of a flourishing figurative language of Judaism. Just like Dura Europos in Syria and Sepphoris in the North Galilee, Alexandria was also a central place in Late Antiquity, where the Jewish, Christian and Pagan communities co-existed, as is abundantly supported by literary sources. For an art historical point of view, more art works would be needed to prove the Jewish origin.

2.3 A possible Christian context

As mentioned in the overview of research history above, most scholars classify the Textile as a case of early Christian narrative art. Two motifs are recognized by Kötzsche that speak for this classification: the *gemma*-friezes and garlands which frame the three registers. In her article, written in 1994, Kötzsche analyzes how *gemma*-friezes are integral part of late antique

[113] Deines, "God's Revelation Through Torah, Creation, and History - Interpreting the Zodiac Mosaics in Synagogues," 180.

[114] Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 337–41.

church decorations.[115] In the next year she contradicts her idea and says that the inconsistence of the Biblical narrative in the Old Testament hanging is not compliant with the clergy. Therefore, it is more likely that the Textile was used in a private mausoleum, rather than in a church.[116] In support of her argument, she points out that the garlands on the Textile are in fact motifs used in a burial context.[117] What might disprove this assumption is the loosely woven linen that constitutes the Textile's fabric, an unlikely material to be used in a sepulchral environment.[118] Favoring the latter view, Dresken-Weiland places the Textile in the narrative of Christianization of everyday objects and considers the Textile as a wall hanging in a noble family's house decoration. Underpinning this, she points out that when Christianity became the state supported religion at the end of the fourth century, wealthy Roman families who had for long converted to Christianity still decorated their villas with images of mythological themes. This wealthy social class existed for a relatively short time which may explain the small number of "portable luxury goods" with Old and New Testament scenes.[119]

2.3.1 The Textile as a church decoration

Cecilia Fluck and László Török conducted more elaborate research on hangings as genuine parts of the elite Christian households, as well as public, and cult buildings. To illustrate how the textiles found in burial places originally served as church decoration, Cecilia Fluck compares them to wall paintings in church interiors, such as the Red Monastery in Egypt *(Fig. 39, 40)*. The Christian symbolism of these textiles, she argues, attest to the beliefs of their former Christian users.[120] Inventory catalogues of churches, listing textiles, demonstrate the

[115] Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Gemmenfries," 37–43.
[116] Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," 65–71.
[117] Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Gemmenfries," 37–43.
[118] Kötzsche-Breitenbruch, "Der Neuerworbene Wandbehang Mit Gemalten Alttestamentlichen Szenen in Der Abegg-Stiftung (Bern)," 65–71.
[119] Dresken-Weiland, "Transformation and Transition in the Art of Late Antiquity," 50.
[120] Fluck, "The Use of Textiles in Early Christian Churches – Evidence from Egypt," 250–52.

use of sacred objects in the form of wall hangings and curtains.[121] Churches were designed to be furnished with textiles, functioning as room dividers in the sanctuary, or as entrances to smaller niches. They could also serve as a substitute for the nave's dividing walls in smaller churches, establishing the tripartite division. In those churches where the altar stood under a ciborium, curtains were often used to close the spaces between the pillars or columns during the ritual of the Eucharist.[122] The narrative program of these textiles must have resonated with their determined place in the church. Thus, to contextualize the Textile in a church setting, it is important to consider what the scenes were communicating.

Giving significance the presence and importance of wall hangings as church decorations in late antiquity, László Török approaches the topic from stylistic observation. His meticulous investigation on the development and evolution of Christian art from the Classical provides a holistic overview on the period of the formation of Christian iconography in Egypt. He places the Textile to exemplify the emerging style of the fourth and fifth centuries. In this style, Christian and pagan works of art were closely associated, which Török explains by the social and cultural homogeneity of the contemporary governing elite. This Hellenistic style was applied on large and luxurious textiles, defined by a certain character mannerism, involving the rendering human faces, large round eyes, continuous eyebrows, all coming to existence from modelling them from sculptures, wall paintings, and mosaics.[123] The Textile's style, however, survived for a relatively shortly time and transitioned to a less naturalistic and more elevated way of expression, that might be called Coptic art.[124]

[121] Fluck, 247.
[122] Fluck, 252–55.
[123] Török, "The Christianization of Art in Late Antique Egypt," 277–87.
[124] Christians in Egypt called Cops from the Arabic word Qibt, which derives from the Greek *Aigyptioi*. See: Thelma K Thomas, "Christians in the Islamic East," in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261,* ed. Helen C Evans and William D Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 244–57; Coptic style, defined by Beckwith was the local Egyptian style that implied a stylistic progression from Hellenistic (third–fourth century) to a not-so- Hellenistic (sixth–seventh century and later). According to Thomas, there was a significant stylistic shift between the fourth and the fifth century Christian Egyptian art, and the reason of this change and its stylistic evaluation is still an open question. See: Thelma K

2.3.2 Christological motives on the Textile

Analyzing Christian narrative subjects, Grabar argues that these scenes are independent from Scriptures: "Christian theological iconography in late antiquity was incomplete and accidental, taking initial steps in various directions, retaining a few of the results, and quickly abandoning others. Nevertheless, it did exist."[125] While Christian art was stylistically dependent on mythological solutions to form its exegetic message, the stories of the Old Testament were models for its emerging visual language. The third century witnessed the formation of narrative as demonstrated by the Dura Europos synagogue (*Fig. 30*) and church paintings in the Roman catacombs. (For instance in Catacomb Callisto *Fig. 46.*)

In contrast to important church fathers such as Eusebius or Epiphanius, who were clearly against anthropomorphic images at that time, Török presents a very profound and complex survey on the period between the third to the fifth century and finds that "the survival of the Classical tradition of Egyptian Hellenistic art was a complex process of transformation that occurred in and was determined by changing cultural and social contexts."[126] For Török, the Textile, together with other painted textiles with Old and New Testament scenes *(Fig. 40, 41)* demonstrate the evaluation of a remarkable Christian narrative art in Egypt. He sees the repeatedly alternating Old Testament scenes as an intention to articulate theological concepts, similarly to van Loon, who argues that the Textile is saturated with Christological motives.[127] She does not indicate specifically which motifs she means by this, but the following section here will look for these motifs to develop this idea.

Thomas, "Coptic and Byzantine Textiles Found in Egypt: Corpora, Collections, and Scholarly Perspectives," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26; Török collects the most relevant literature on Coptic art, (e.g. Kitzinger, Beckwith, Riegl), see: Török, *Transfigurations of Hellenism*, 358.

125 André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 112.

126 Török, "The Christianization of Art in Late Antique Egypt," 312.

127 van Loon, "Review of Der Bemalte Behang in Der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine Alttestamentliche Bildfolge Des 4. Jahrhunderts. Lieselotte Kötzsche et. Al.," 149–50.

For an investigation of this kind, the symbolic and the illustrative value of the scenes must be examined together, acknowledging that the significance of images lies primarily in their allegorical references. In that sense, images on the Textile fulfill exegetical purposes and work as visual typologies that might have parallels in early Christian art.[128] Early Christian art was born in a funerary and baptismal context, which determines that most of the material evidence is found in connection with cemeteries both in their form and illustration: sarcophagi and catacomb wall paintings are our first sources of Christian visuality. New venues, such as church apses and nave walls come later, around the late third century.

In a long debated question of the hypothetic Jewish origin of Christian art, already brought up in Chapter 2.2 of this thesis, Kurt Weitzmann and Erwin Goodenough argue for a lost Jewish model that influenced Christianity and explains the popularity of Old Testament scenes in the early stages of Christian iconographic tradition.[129] This argument leads to a broad and controversial discussion which is better left out from the investigation of the Old Testament scenes on the Textile. Therefore, if looking for Christian symbolism on the Textile it is arguably better to approach the application of Old Testament scenes. In a way, by accepting Jewish patriarchs and prophets in the Old Testament, Christianity anticipated and announced the coming of Jesus as the Savior.[130]

This makes it possible to consider the Textile Christian, even if it only has Old Testament scenes and translate them to typological analogues for Christianity.[131] My analysis below will show how the Old Testament scenes can be translated to stories in the New Testament.

[128] The tradition of biblical exegesis might have had Jewish roots. Hellenistic Judaism had a tradition of biblical exegesis with the writing of Philo of Alexandria, whose work in turn influenced the great third-century exegete, Origen. Origen outlined a three level system of interpretation which was very influential in his times. See: Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 77.

[129] Margaret Olin, "'Early Christian Synagogues' and 'Jewish Art Historians'. The Discovery of the Synagogue of Dura-Europos," *Marburger Jahrbuch Für Kunstwissenschaft* 27 (2000): 11.

[130] This is called the typological interpretation of the scripture, based on based on Colossians 2:16–17. To find out more about typographic juxtaposition read Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine See: Grabar, *Christian Iconography*.

[131] See examples in: Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 60–77.

Later, moving out from the sepulchral context, theological concepts using Old Testament scenes appear in late antique textiles as well.[132] The Jonah hanging in the Louvre represents Jonah and the whale, symbolizing the Resurrection of Christ and the Triumph of Christianity. *(Fig. 43)* Although this Textile was found in a tomb it probably adorned a wealthy private house previously.[133] The Elijah hanging in Riggisberg *(Fig. 44)* was probably originally displayed in a church. Its narrative is parallel with the murals of the main church of Deir Abu Fana in Middle Egypt from the fourth and fifth centuries.[134] These examples, however, always have some direct indicators that prove their use in Christian context. In the center of the Jonah hanging there is a complex cross combining an *ankh* (a Pharaonic symbol of life) and a Greek cross between two columns, each decorated with stylized "XP" (=chi-rho) signs, the Christian monogram symbolizing the victory of the Christian faith.[135] On the Elijah hanging, a large cross is woven into the middle.

As it was explained above, applied in Christian art, scenes from the Old Testament are antitypes for New Testament stories and their symbolical meaning often refers to sacraments.[136] Observing the narrative of the Textile accordingly, three major themes can be recognized: the Eucharist, the Trinity (Theophany), Salvation/Universal baptism.[137] Sacramental interpretation gives the images on the Textile a great deal of programmatic consistency, accounting for the context, composition and selection of the art itself. Exploring the sacramental symbolism of

[132] Or at least, we don't have any earlier material evidence.

[133] *Jonah Wall-Hanging*, IIIe - Ve siècle après J.-C., tapisserie en lin et laine, H. 1.19 m; W. 2.1 m, IIIe - Ve siècle après J.-C., Louvre, https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/jonah-wall-hanging.

[134] Fluck, "The Use of Textiles in Early Christian Churches – Evidence from Egypt," 261–62.

[135] Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 130–55.

[136] Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, Section 3.

[137] More about sacramental symbolism in: Engelbert Kirschbaum, Wolfgang Braunfels, and Günter Bandmann, eds., *Lexikon Der Christlichen Ikonographie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968); Grabar, *Christian Iconography*; Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1956). Danielou explains why eucharist can be in a form of meal and how symbols in the Old Testament refer to the eucharistic rituals. He explains that bread and wine are allusions to the prophet of Melchisedek and Manna to the desert.

the narrative's eucharistic and baptism scenes will inform our understanding of the original function of the Textile.[138]

Eucharist

There are a large number of motifs on the Textile which could be connected with eucharistic or communional symbolism.[139] The eucharist can be visualized in the form of sacrifice: either as presenting a scene of sacrifice (understood as Jesus as the sacrifice itself) or a meal that refers to the sacrificial manifest in Christ (the manifestation of Jesus body in the sacrament, as it was referred to in the Last Supper, or direct allusion for the communion.) [140]

Direct references of sacrifice are found in the following scenes on the Textile: *Sacrifice of Cain and Abel* (*Fig. 5*), *the Sacrifice of Noah* (*Fig. 7*) and *the Sacrifice of Abraham (Fig. 11,12)* Meals as Eucharistic symbols are *Abraham at the Oak of Mamre (Fig. 10), Joseph Eats with his Siblings (Fig. 16), Isaac's Blessing (Fig.18),* and *The Miracle of Manna and the Quails (Fig.19,23).* The multiple altars that appear on the cycle could also suggest that the Textile was in connection with the altar (or rather, the table) in the church space.[141] Conceivably, it could have embraced the sides of an altar.

The *Sacrifice of Cain and Abel* frequently appears in catacomb paintings and later on in frescoes of church naves. However, it was more popular to feature Melchisedek instead of Cain, for instance, in the San Vitale in Ravenna. (*Fig. 45*) Since the Textile has no description indicating Cain's name, it is possible that Melchisedek is depicted with Abel.[142] Writing the

[138] Jensen suggests that the nature of symbols is never restricted to one meaning. Finding sacramental symbolism in Early Christian art does not rule out other interpretive possibilities. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art.*

[139] Talking about eucharistic rituals in this early stage of Christianity is not clearly accepted. However, Justin Martyr in the First Apology and the Dialogue with Trypcho, (ca.150) is already talking about rituals as such.

[140] References to meals are allusions for communion, e.g. the scenes of Manna and the Quails and meals in the desert. See: Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 143.

[141] The altar's connection to the eucharist is explained by Saint Ambrose as „The altar is the figure of the body, and the body of Christ is upon the altar." (De Sacr. IV, 7) Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 130.

[142] Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 85.

word *ara* on the scene, meaning prayer, may also have some significance. Since this word was not customarily used in Greek, finding its etymological origin may provide clues for the original environment of the Textile.[143] *The Sacrifice of Abraham* is also a popular theme on oil lamps and sarcophagi. This scene symbolizes faith in God.[144] Isaac was later understood as the Old Testament antitype of Jesus and symbolized the Resurrection which is written in the Epistle of Hebrews.[145] *Joseph Eats with his Siblings*, a scene of meal is a direct reference to the scene of the Last Supper.[146] Here represented as a table and the participants depicted in the foreground, this composition of people having a ritual *agape* around a table appears in the third century, as it can also be seen in Catacomb Callisto. (*Fig. 46*)

Following Matthew 4:4, the Alexandrine tradition (from Clement to Origen, following Philo) understands the manna to be the figure of the word of God, eucharistic interpretation based on John 6:31-33. Manna is a figure of the Eucharist, and receiving manna is a direct reference to the communion.[147] The theme of falling manna appears only in the Cyriaca Catacomb in Rome.[148]

Trinity (Theophany)

Depicting the Trinity was one of the greatest challenges for early Christian artists. Its implementation often failed because the topic's difficulty and the ambiguous theological message. One scene from the Old Testament, however, offered an acceptable way of representation: *The Three Angels at the Oak of Mamre*. The scene appears in the hypogeum of Via Latina, on the Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, and in the mosaics of the San Vitale in

143 Comparative linguistic analysis on Coptic translations may explain the application of the uncommon word on the Textile.

144 According to James 2.21-24.

145 "*yzth*k" in Hebrew means „he will laugh," referring to the savior of Isaac, by God. This savior was put into parallel with the Resurrection of Christ.

146 Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*.

147 Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 130.

148 Grabar, *Christian Iconography*.

Ravenna.[149] (*Fig. 47*) The scene of *Abraham at the Oak of Mamre* from Ravenna is very similar to the one on the Textile: the visitors are shown simply at the table, served by the patriarch. The three angels are often depicted with similar features. Here, given the image's fragmented quality, this is not possible to discern. This sort of representation (called *Abraham's hospitality*) of the theophany was accepted by the church and became popular later, in Byzantine art. The presence of three people in Abraham's vision while expressing theophany, becomes the Old Testament antecedent of the Trinity.[150] The dove with the olive branch on the scene of *Noah's ark* (*Fig. 8*) could also symbolize the presence of the holy spirit and God's will in the story but it is better to understand this motif as a theophany.

Salvation/Universal baptism

In the early period of Christian art, the hope of resurrection from death, which was initially promised through the sacrament of baptism and reinforced through life in the worshipping Christian community, was a theme frequently expressed on sarcophagi and catacombs. From the Old Testament, the scenes of the Exodus offered an allegorical representation for baptism and suggested more interpretation. These scenes could allude to the transition from paganism to Christianity through Christianization. In other words, they refer to the transition from persecution to salvation, where Christ, the leader of salvation, is an analogy of Moses, the leader of the Exodus. Scenes that were chosen from the Exodus belong to the *Crossing the Red Sea* (scenes XIII-XVII) and are reflected by Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 10,1-5).[151]

[149] The presence of the three figure is theophany (See: Justin Martyr – Dialogue with Trypcho)

[150] Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 113–14.

[151] 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

Jas Elsner introduces the manifold rhetorical meanings of the *Pharaoh and his Army Perished*, scene which depends on specific exemplary purposes. He shows the different takes on the story by church fathers, such as Ambrose (who takes Moses as the model of triumph) and Gregory of Nyssa (who aligns with the Paulinian understanding of crossing as a baptism.) Elsner introduces many examples of early Christian sarcophagi representing the scene of the destruction of the Pharaoh's army and the remarkably different takes on a single biblical narrative. He also looks at the scene of the Textile's narrative and compares it to early Christian narratives such as the lost frescoes of the Old Saint Peter in Rome, the early fifth-century wooden doors of Santa Sabine in Rome, the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, and the fourth-century images of the Via Latina catacomb.[152] Elsner emphasizes that this scene leaves any anti-Semitic approaches behind, and draws a parallel between Christians and Jews, symbolizing how Christian people moved on—through a miracle—from oppression by pagan persecutors to freedom. Thus, a great story of Jewish triumph is appropriated as a theme of Christian salvation.[153] With water depicted as a medium of purification and sanctity rather than of destruction, the *Crossing of the Red Sea* becomes the Old Testament prefiguration of Jesus's baptism.[154]

The Exodus is not the only theme that refers to baptism and salvation in the Textile. The Noah's Ark, *(Fig. 8-9)* a popular scene among early Christian catacombs, can also be understood as a reference to these, echoing the association unpacked in the New Testament:

> "Who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1Peter 3:20-21)

[152] Elsner, "'"Pharaoh's Army Got Drownded"': Some Reflections on Jewish and Roman Genealogies in Early Christian Art," 14–32.

[153] Jas Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31.

[154] Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 100–105.

The scene *Noah and his Family Saved through the Flood (Fig. 8)* depicting Noah and his family, who were saved by the water, may refer to the sacrament of baptism.[155] In early Christianity, the flood also often symbolized the persecution against Christianity, with the ark as the Church. Baptism is a complex rite with expansive theological significance, encompassing the promise of eternal life and the expectation of resurrection. The living water (*hydor zon*) as the source of life and death is a motif that accompanies both of these themes and connects the sacrament of baptism with salvation.[156]

Summary: Looking at the narrative as a history of salvation

In *Bible and Liturgy*, Jean Danielou writes, *"*the Eucharist is a spiritual and universal sacrifice; that is the nourishment of the people of God in their journey toward the land of promise; that is, finally, the preparation of all nations in the communion of divine blessings."[157] Reading the narrative of the Textile as a whole, it can be seen as an early example for the history of salvation, which begins with the Creation, continues with the Fall and the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, and ends with the salvation offered by the scenes of Exodus. In this chapter I presented an analysis underpinned by analogous examples and a brief exposition of significant theological currents, which together strongly suggest that the Textile's scenes of the Old Testament refer to the Resurrection and the second coming of Christ.[158] Closely related to this, the next chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss the possible Jewish context.

155 Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 48.

156 In the Old Testament, Jeremiah describes God as the source of living water in 2:13, 17:13. In the New Testament it appears in John 4:1.

157 Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 161.

158 It is difficult to place a single reference here. These are conclusion of Professor Gereby's Bible for Medievalists class.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

Late antique Jewish art marginally anticipated the time of Christianization of the Roman Empire, and the beginnings of church art. Lacking their own visual language of any sorts, both Jewish and Christian art followed the models of the Graeco-Roman artistic traditions.[159] Therefore, they all built their visual tradition on their environment's figurative representation. The decisions that they made and the differences they made in their own representations can be only determined through comparisons with the artistic context in which they expressed themselves. Marcel Simon suggested that the iconography of "Jewish-Christian" ways never parted. This interpretation is true when viewing the stylistic and compositional choices of religious artifacts, but misleading regarding the visual content.[160] Accordingly, the Textile's iconographical program was observed against the background of the two religious contexts.

Evidence in support of the Jewish cultural background remained weak, which stems from three reasons. First, that the investigation was not extant, and a more elaborate research could result in more evidence. (The scope of the research could be broadened by looking into the Rabbinic Jewish literature.) The second is that the field of Jewish art history has a shorter tradition than the Christian. More discoveries are needed to logically connect existing material evidence. The third reason could be that the Textile was simply not made to serve a Jewish community.

Exposing the Textile to the Christian context, at this stage of my research, van Loon seems to be correct in suggesting that the narrative of the Textile is filled with Christian motifs. The Christian typology detected and interpreted is convincing. The Textile's narrative could offer the reading as a history of Salvation. There is one detail which does not align with the

[159] Hezser and Leibner, "Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context: An Introductory Essay," 12–14.

[160] Steven Fine, "The Menorah and the Cross: Historiographical Reflections on a Recent Discovery from Laodicea on the Lycus," in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations: In Honor of David Berger*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 42–43.

dogmatic purpose of the Textile: the mythological figure on the first scene, Psyche. (*Fig. 3*) While the previous chapter treated the Textile's narrative as a whole, to provide an exhaustive iconographical analysis, the following chapter will center around the Creation scene and Psyche.

3. The Creation Scene, Psyche and the Iconography of Soul

3.1 Creation Scene on the Textile

In the second chapter we have seen the initial steps of the visual choices of Jewish and Christian art, their typological similarities and their emerging characteristics that imported stylistic features of Hellenism in Late Antiquity. However, it is not just style that can be seen as developed from the Graeco-Roman world; it is also pagan motifs that were imported and utilized by the Hellenistic Jewish and Christian community. So far six synagogue mosaics have been found in Palestine representing the Zodiac signs. The adoption of the Zodiac as a purely pagan motif has been explained by numerous scholars.[161] Levine sees this process as a conscious choice, a kind of reaction of Jews towards the wide-spread Christianity, who, on the other hand, rejected these representations.[162] By choosing this motif for implementation in their visual expression, Jews adopted what the Christian society had rejected. This does not mean that Christianity was reluctant to import any pagan motifs. Rather the contrary: a large number of Christian images were built on borrowing from the Classical world and adapted to serve Christian teachings.[163] This is how, for instance, Hermes in the form of the Good shepherd carrying a lamb became the allegory of Christ.[164]

This adoption is well visible on the Textile's first scene as well *(Fig. 3)*, the scene that simultaneously represents three actions from Genesis: the moment of Creation, the Animation (Gen 2,7) "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" and finally the Creation of Eve

[161] Scholars and their explanations can be found in Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity*, Chapter 16.
[162] Levine, 322.
[163] Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 10.
[164] Jensen, 37.

(Gen 2,21-22) “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”

As it was said in the first chapter, Greek inscriptions define the characters: Psyche, Adam and Eve are depicted on the Textile. In the right corner of the scene, we can accept that the fragment “YY” that refers to *physis* means the natural order of the created world. While Adam and Eve are Biblical characters, Psyche, the female figure with butterfly wings and long dress, is from the Greek mythology. In the first part of the thesis we have seen that adoption of pagan motifs is a trend among Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity. Nevertheless, the representation of Psyche in the Creation scene has no tradition in either community. Therefore, in the following pages, I will present how such an imagery could develop and what is the art historical significance of this iconography applied on the Textile.

3.2 Psyche and Hellenistic theories of soul

The character of Psyche appears in the Greek mythology: in the story Cupid and Psyche, she is a mortal woman who became divine after marrying Cupid. The story was written down by Apuleius in the *Metamorphoses* in the second century AD and was a well-known tale in late antiquity.[165] Platonic arguments seem to appear in Apuleius’ story as allegories, for instance, the laborious ascent of the winged soul (Phaedo 248) and the union with the divine achieved by soul through love (Symposium 212b). Psyche in Greek means both soul and butterfly, hence in antique art she is the personification of the human soul. Its representation appears in the

[165] Apuleius’ *Methamorphoses* is a novel that connects myths, the genre of folktale with expressing philosophical, allegorical thoughts.M. J. Edwards, “The Tale of Cupid and Psyche,” *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 94 (1992): 77–94.

Graeco-roman art, much earlier than Apuleius. Before the fifth century BC, she was depicted as a butterfly or bird and later as a woman with butterfly wings.[166] *(Fig. 49)*

If one understands that Jewish and Christian philosophy adopted ancient and Hellenistic ideas of the soul (by Plato and Aristotle), then it is not so surprising to encounter with the figure of Psyche in the Textile. The platonic dualistic ideas seem to be resonating in Judaism and Christianity as well, especially, that the soul is immortal and that the soul animates the body as a living thing.[167] The platonic tradition was concerned with the moral development of the soul and held that the soul could exist apart from the body after death. However, in order to understand how such an iconographical solution happened, first we should look into the classical tradition of representing the *Creation of Man*.[168]

3.3 Representation of the soul in the Creation of Man

In Graeco-Roman art, the *Creation of Man* is represented by the story of *Prometheus plasticator*.[169] In this iconographical tradition, Prometheus is depicted as giving shape to man from earth, with the help of Pallas Athene who sends in the soul. The soul in these kinds of representations usually appears as a small butterfly figure, but there are precedents where it appears in a female's body, for instance, on the Prometheus sarcophagus in Rome from the second century.[170] *(Fig. 50)* This classical iconographical tradition seems to be taken up in the Textile's scene as well. As this visual solution is not maintained later in Jewish and Christian

[166] Soul as butterfly in Plato Phaedo: 246a 256 e. Later in Christian context: dove as holy spirit. See: Engelbert Kirschbaum, Wolfgang Braunfels, and Günter Bandmann, eds., "Seele," in *Lexikon Der Christlichen Ikonographie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 138–42.

[167] Hendrik Lorenz, "Ancient Theories of Soul," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2009), plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/ancient-soul/.

[168] Paul Vincent Spade, "Medieval Philosophy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/medieval-philosophy/.

[169] Olga Raggio, "The Myth of Prometheus: Its Survival and Metamorphoses up to the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21, no. 1/2 (1958): 44–62.

[170] Raggio, 44–62.

art, I will look into late antique understanding of soul in both religions and their possible depiction of receiving the soul in the moment of creation in order to understand the Textile's cultural origin.

3.3.1 Jewish understanding of the soul and its representation

The word soul in the Hebrew Bible corresponds with the words *nefesh, ruah, neshmat* and *ov*. *Nefesh* can be understood as a living being as well—the one who has breath passing her throat. *Neshmat* rather means spirit and breath, or can refer to a breathing being, similarly to the word *ruah*.[171] The dualistic understanding of body and soul and the soul's afterlife can be found in postbiblical Jewish sources, for instance in Philo of Alexandria and Josephus Flavius.[172] Josephus Flavius is talking about man receiving spirit and soul during creation in *Antiquitates Judaicae*.[173] Accordingly, in Jewish anthropology humans are made of body, spirit (*ruah/pneuma/spiraculum*) and soul (*nefes/psyche/anima*). This means that the progress of creation has to have three different stages where the Textile's scene could represent the stage of receiving the spirit or soul. Given the fact that Psyche is written on the Textile, it rather represents the receiving of soul. In this explanation, the figure of Psyche is an integral part of the act of Creation.[174] To visualize this philological argument, I created a table (Table 5.) for the translation of the most important words in the Creation of Man:

171 David Calabro, "Soul, Jewish (Encyclopedia of Ancient History)," accessed May 17, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/8076695/Soul_Jewish_Encyclopedia_of_Ancient_History_.

172 According to Philo human being has four parts: body, sensibility, speech, intellect see De Opificio Mundi and De Somniis. Josephus Flavius has written the Antiquitates Judaicae around 100 AD.

173 Ursula Schubert, "Eine Jüdische Vorlage Für Die Darstellung Der Erschaffung Des Menschen in Der Sogenannten Cotton Genesis-Rezension?," *Kairos* 17, no. 1 (1975): 436.

174 Schubert, 435–38.

HEBREW	GREEK	LATIN	ENGLISH
Neshmat / Ruah	Pneuma	Spiraculum	Spirit, Breath (mind)
Nefesh	Psyche	Anima	Soul/being
Neshmat Chayam	Pnoe dsoes	Spiraculum vitae	Breath of life

Table 5 Translation of the expressions for soul and Ensoulment in Genesis 2,7.

Another supporting evidence to this argument for the Jewish origin from artistic heritage can be found on the walls of the synagogue of Dura-Europos. In the third century Ezekiel-mural there is a scene from the book of Ezekiel called the Valley of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37,1–17), where women figures with butterfly wings appear.[175] *(Fig. 51)* These figures belong to the following passages from the book of Ezekiel (37,9–10):

> "Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude."

The four winds in the English translation are *ruah* in the original Hebrew—a noun which means both breath and spirit as we have seen it above. *Ruah* is often used in the Old Testament to express the spirit of God in the form of winds. One of these personified forms of *ruah* on the mural resembles the Psyche on the textile: it also wears a long female dress and reaches out her hands towards the lying bodies.[176] Consequently, the Ezekiel Mural that originates from the Jewish community could have served as an example for the creators of the Textile. Or *vice versa* in a scenario where we accept that the Textile was created earlier.

[175] This scene represents the Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37,1-14).

[176] Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "The Ezekiel Mural at Dura Europos: A Witness of Ancient Jewish Mysteries?," *Brigham Young University Studies* 49, no. 1 (2010): 4–49.

An additional explanation could rely on philological assumptions: similarly to the creators of the Ezekiel Mural, the Textile's creators also read the Bible in Greek—as the Septuagint—and interpreted it the same way. According to my assumption, breath (*ruah/pneuma*) appears as an independent entity in both the Genesis and Ezekiel passages. This entity was depicted as a butterfly-winged character in both places following the Hellenistic tradition. The reason why this figure could have obtained a female character is that as a separate entity, *pneuma*, was understood as soul, and soul as *psyche* already had a developed representation in antique tradition. Thus far, the postbiblical dualistic Jewish understanding of soul makes it possible to presume that the Textile was created in a Jewish environment. Indeed, dualism defined Christianity as well. Hence in the next section I will analyze how Psyche could appear in the Christian context.

3.3.2 The representation of soul in Christianity

Following Plato's ideas, in the second century, Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyon, talking about the *Creation of Man* (Adversus Haereses, V/6.1) stated that man is made of three components: body (*soma*), spirit (*pneuma*), soul (*psyche*) which resonates with Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (1Thes 5,23): *"*May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."[177] The Jewish Philo's doctrine of the Creator Logos, that became part of Christian theology, did not conceive the Logos as a corporeal entity.[178] This incarnation distinguished the Christian from the Jewish conception of the Logos. Christian apologists merged the

[177] Schubert, "Eine Jüdische Vorlage Für Die Darstellung Der Erschaffung Des Menschen in Der Sogenannten Cotton Genesis-Rezension?," 434–36.

[178] In *Questions of Exodus*, Philo says: "But the divine Logos, which is established over all things, immaterial, being, as it were, not impressed by upon them but expressed, for it is external to all substances and to all corporeal and incorporeal elements" (II. 122.).

incarnate Logos of Saint John with the Creator Logos of Philo's philosophy and identified it with Christ.[179] This why Christ can appear on the Christian *Creation* scene.

The classical *Prometheus plasticator,* the myth that often appeared on pagan gems and sarcophagi in the first Christian centuries was embraced by Christian iconography. The scene provided the possibility to visualize the dualistic concept of body and soul, the Platonic and Neoplatonic concepts human nature.[180] This visuality, however, was in contradiction with the Christian teaching of the simultaneous act of creation by the Trinity. The possibility to make a dogmatic error by incorporating this visual symbol raised the attention of the Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, who commented in the Apologeticum that *"*the only god who founded the universe, and formed man from the soil,--for this is the true Prometheus, who ordered the world by fixed arrangements and endings of seasons," highlighting similarities and differences between God and Prometheus.[181] However, Christianity had still taken up this iconographical tradition, initially on sarcophagi and later in manuscript illustrations.

The three distinct stages of *Creation of Man* (creation, enlivenment, animation) in the fifth century Cotton Genesis probably attest for this tradition.[182] The presumably Alexandrian Cotton Genesis gave the foundation to the iconographical program of the thirteenth century mosaics of the Venetian San Marco Cathedral, where, illustrating Genesis 2,7, the Creator—here Christ—holds a butterfly-winged figure to ensoul Adam. (*Fig. 52*) The butterfly-winged figure, who helps Christ to ensoul Adam, is again the personification of the spirit. The Latin inscription *spiraculum* helps to attribute it. Aside from the butterfly wings, his portrayal does not resemble the Psyche figure on the Textile. He is neither a woman in a long dress nor is

[179] John 1,1-14: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...[…] And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth..."

[180] Raggio, "The Myth of Prometheus," 47.

[181] Original: *Deus unicus qui universa condiderit, qui hominem de humo struxerit: hic enim est versus Prometheus.* Trans.: "Tertullian : J. E. B. Mayor - Apologeticus. Translation by Alex. Souter," accessed May 18, 2020, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/mayor_apologeticum/mayor_apologeticum_07translation.htm.

[182] Raggio, "The Myth of Prometheus," 48.

standing independently. Rather, he is a naked juvenile figure and an individual, materialized form of the spirit.[183] However, apart from their dissimilarities, the Venetian cupola-mosaic and the Textile's creation scene could attest to a common pictorial prefiguration, for a putatively Alexandrian iconography which applied the *Prometheus plasticator* and the figure of the soul-butterfly.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

Following the examination of the butterfly-winged figure, a clear image of its past convention in artistic heritage can be seen. Her presence as a soul-butterfly at the scene of Creation first occurs in Graeco-Roman art. *(Fig. 49,50)* As both Jews and Christians used antique prefiguration for developing their artistic language, it could explain the idea of positioning her to the Biblical *Creation* scene as well. The Ezekiel wall paintings of the Dura-Europos synagogue, where women-like butterfly-winged characters appear, serve as evidence that the creators of the textile could be Jewish or had the chance to see the murals. *(Fig. 51)* At the same time, the Ensoulment of the Venetian San Marco proves that Christian iconography also acquired and used the Hellenistic soul-butterfly as the personified form of the Spirit via the putatively Alexandrian prototype. *(Fig. 52)*

In fact, this analytical examination of the scene of *Creation* that regardless of the cultural origin, the soul as a butterfly-winged character could be applied on the Textile for three reasons: first, because Greek was the *lingua Franca* in the Eastern part of the late antique Roman Empire, second, the story of Psyche was a commonly spread story in the region, and third, mainly deriving from the first two reasons: *psyche* meant both soul and butterfly.[184] In light of these arguments, we can understand that using the character of Psyche was a very convenient solution for the Textile's creators to express dualistic thoughts.

[183] Herbert Leon Kessler, "The Cotton Genesis and Creation in the San Marco Mosaics," *Cahiers Archéologiques. Fin de l'antiquité et Moyen Âge* 53 (2009): 17–32.

[184] Kirschbaum, Braunfels, and Bandmann, "Seele," 138–42.

Nevertheless, the explanation of why this iconographical solution has faded away is not so apparent. It might be in connection with the lack of deity in the Textile's composition of the *Creation* scene, which absence is very unusual from both Jewish and Christian. If it were represented in Jewish context, then it was in the form of God's hand or a cloud, a standard in the period (e.g. in the Dura Europos synagogue's narrative (*Fig. 30, 51*)). If we are talking of a Christian artwork, Christ could be depicted here (just like in the mosaics of San Marco Cathedral (*Fig. 52)*) but he, as the Creator in Christian tradition, appears later. Kötzsche argues that the presence of mythological figure excludes the presence of deity of the scene.[185] Without representing this theophany, the Textile composition places the winged figure into an acting role which might have suggested false theological intentions in a religion (either Jewish or Christian), where God is omnipotent and responsible for the creation of everything.

While this iconographical analysis gave us the opportunity to understand how Psyche appeared on the Biblical creation scene, it did not determine the religious background of the Textile, which might be because of two reasons. The first is that iconography is not always a sufficient methodology. Taking one motive without dealing with its context and looking at an entire narrative will possibly lead to incomplete or false arguments. The second reason is that even if the butterfly winged figure is just one detail from the narrative, it opens up questions beyond the scope of this research, for instance the Neoplatonist ideas of soul in Judaism and Christianity or the Hellenistic cult of Psyche.[186] Studying the character of Psyche applied in Judeo-Christian pictorial language would need more examination. However, this research has shown that there was an iconographical solution which did exist and was not inherited in later tradition.

[185] Kötzsche, "Der bemalte Behang in der Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg: Eine alttestamentliche Bildfolge des 4. Jahrhunderts," 136–38.

[186] Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult Und Unsterblichkeitsglaube Der Griechen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). (Original work published in 1898.)

Conclusion

This research was devoted to understanding the entangled history of Jews, Christians and Pagans in the late antique East Mediterranean by reconstructing religious cultural environment of the Old Testament Hanging's original audience. The aim with this research was to understand how Hellenism influenced the evolution of Jewish and Christian art in the observed period. For this examination, the Textile was taken as a case study and examined against the background of the evolving Jewish and Christian art in the Roman Empire. This analysis exposed the socio-cultural environment of the Textile, a community that was open to borrow stylistic, compositional and iconographical elements from the Pagan culture and, at the same time, put emphasis on transmitting its own exegetical messages.

In the first part of the thesis, the Textile was introduced by consulting its restoration, provenance and research history which goes back to the end of the twentieth century. Questions of research history are about the Textile's original function, its contradictory creation date, and the religious context. Stylistic analysis showed that the Textile's creator was trained in a Hellenistic environment and possibly worked in Alexandria. The closest parallel to the Textile concerning its style, technique, origin and subject, is the Exodus painting from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (*Fig. 28*) Description of the Textile involved introduction to the scenes and the pictorial problems that concern late antique Judaism and Christianity.

The second chapter was focused on the reconstruction of the original context of the Textile by making a functional and iconographical analysis. Literary sources by historians and church fathers who reported on textiles were discussed. Visual sources depicting textiles made it possible to imagine how the Textile could have been used at the time. Jewish narrative images, such as Dura Europos (*Fig. 30*), and the mosaics of Sepphoris (*Fig. 38,48*) show that Judaism sustained an elaborated visual language where Old Testament scenes were chosen to

be represented. Both functional and narrative parallels found in Christian context were much more than in Jewish context, which was explained by three reasons: 1. the investigation on Jewish material was not so extant, 2. At this stage the field of Jewish art history has a shorter tradition than the Christian one. 3. The Textile was not made to serve a Jewish community.

The results of this analysis support the idea that the Textile was created by a Christian community. Textiles found in burial places in Egypt attest to the custom of their widespread usage as church decoration. Christological motives discovered on the Textile suggest the interpretation of the Textile's Old Testament scenes as typological analogues for sacraments such as baptism and eucharistic symbolism. The entire narrative of the Textile can be read as a history of Salvation which begins with the Creation of Man and the original sins and ends with the Crossing of the Red Sea.

In the third chapter it was introduced how Psyche as the material form of the soul was used to express dualistic ideas by Classical, Jewish and Christian art. Representing her on the *Creation* scene suggest a putatively Alexandrian iconographical prototype which does not seem to be maintained in later representations. This presumed Alexandrian tradition may have been in use by both Jewish and Christian art. The examination of the Textile's scene suggests the idea that other scenes might also have some characteristic features that point towards an Alexandrian visual tradition. This assumption could serve as a fundamental hypothesis for continuing the research on the Textile. This could be done by a comparative research on manuscript illustrations and late antique archeological finds from the late antique Roman Empire.

Besides considering the comparative research on manuscripts, other directions for future research on the Textile could tackle a more developed and targeted analysis of each scene. This research could include the observation of word choices that appear on the Textile. A more profound philological approach could be beneficial for understanding the Textile's audience. Additional iconographical studies could seek for more persuasive answers of the

failed Biblical chronology of the Textile's narrative. Compositions of early Christian sarcophagi suggest that Old Testament sequences were often confounded to serve as typological analogues for New Testament scenes. The intention of positioning female characters only on the upper frieze could be further discussed.[187] Additional studies on the Textile could concentrate on the contradictory date of origin. The stylistic arguments examined here (based on Kötzsche and Török) were convincingly attesting to the fourth century origin, while the earlier date that goes back to the second century, the carbon date examination, was not exhaustively consulted. If the Textile was found to originate much earlier than discussed above, it would change the perspectives of the iconographical analysis. While well elaborated Christian narrative cycles are rather rare, the Dura Europos narrative strengthens the Jewish background.

Most importantly however, further analysis should concentrate on a critical approach to Kötzsche's identification of the scenes. This could answer the question of the failed Biblical chronology and some of the odd solutions of the Textile's composition.

Concerning the analysis of the Textile's narrative, to provide an equal research platform for the Jewish background, literary sources of Rabbinic literature could be analyzed. From the 1960s it has been a debate between scholars how the Jewish exegetical motives in Christian art relate to each other. Making an analysis on the Textile in light of Jewish literature would be not just favorable from the perspective of determination of the Textile itself, but for the overall perspective of the debate on late antique Jewish-Christian connections regarding Biblical exegesis and Old Testament iconography.

Overall, this study strengthens the idea that the Textile was used in a Christian liturgical space. The significance of this study is adding the medium of textile to the research on the field

[187] A vague idea of mine is that, if the Textile was connected to religious rites, a sort of parallel could be drawn between the Jewish circumcision and Christian baptism, both rites attest the relationship between God and the believer. The Christian baptism is unisex, while the Jewish circumcision includes only men.

of late antique pictorial language, which opens new avenues of the debate of the Jewish-Christian iconographic chain. The Old Testament hanging in the Abbeg-Stiftung is not just monumental in size, but it bears unique significance. It is among the earliest survived Old Testament narratives with deep theological implications. It is underrepresented in scholarly fields and certainly deserves more scholarly attention.

This thesis tried to offer a convincing argument of the Textile's Christian origin supported by comparative anaalysis on material evidence, literary sources and iconographical elements. Correspondingly, it filled in a gap of interpretation of Christological motives on the Textile's narrative. Lastly, it recognized a presumed Alexandrian influence applied on the scene of *Creation*. All things considered, these findings may be of interest to art historians and historians of religions.

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Illustrations

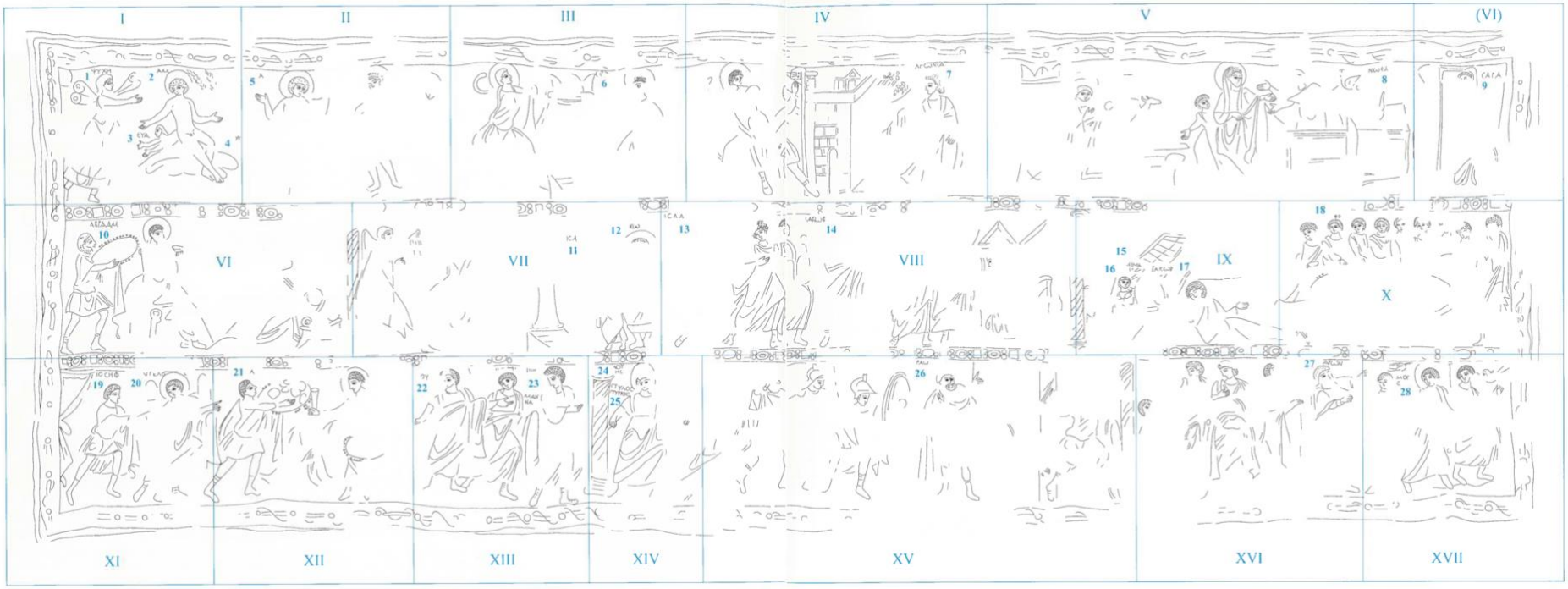


Fig 1. *Stylized illustration of the Old Testament Hanging*, fourth century. Riggisberg, Abegg-Stiftung

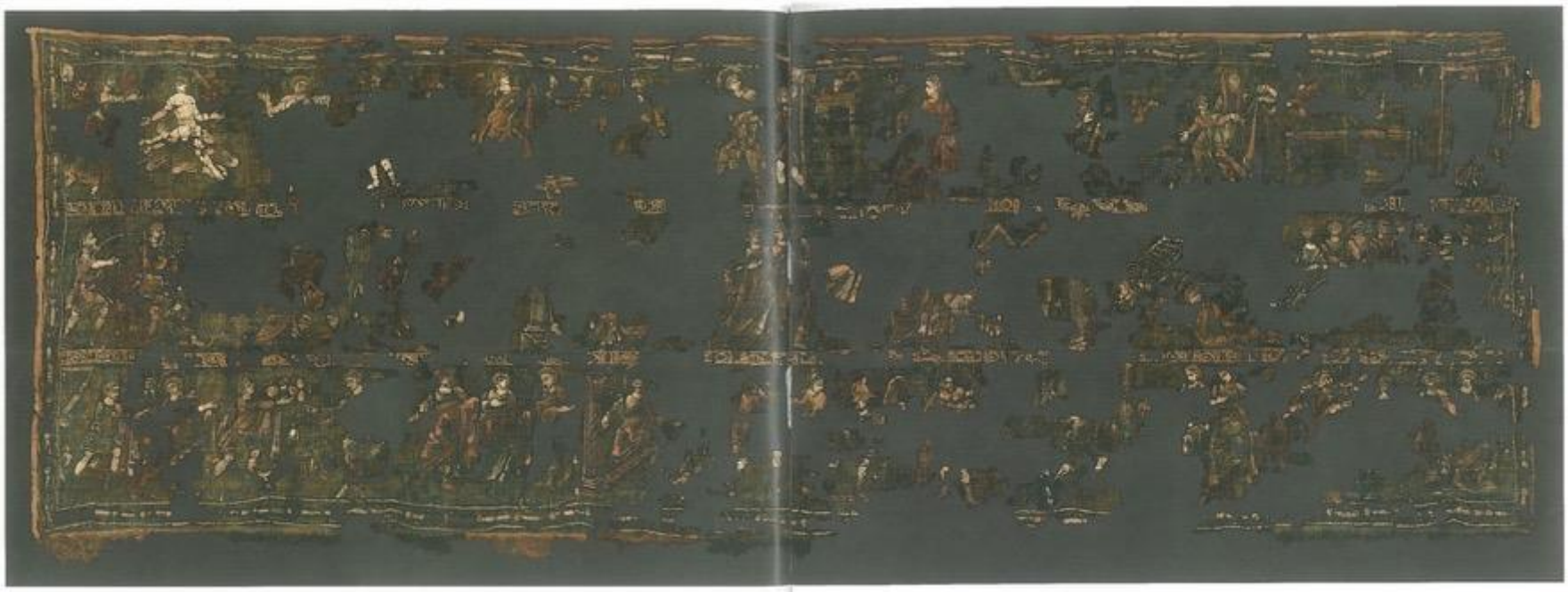


Fig 2. *Old Testament Hanging*, fourth century. Riggisberg, Abegg-Stiftung

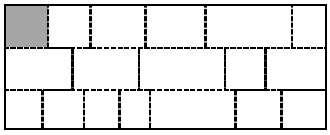


Fig. 3. *Creation of Adam and Eve* (I.)

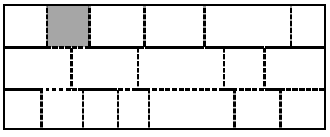


Fig. 4. *Adam and Eve in Paradise* (II.)

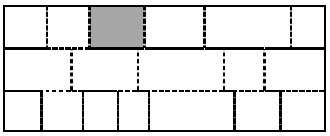


Fig. 5. *The Sacrifice/offer of Cain and Abel* (III.)

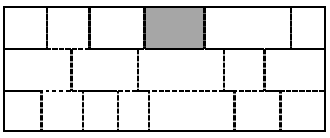


Fig. 6. *The Flight of Lot and his wife from Sodom* (IV.)

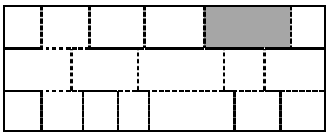
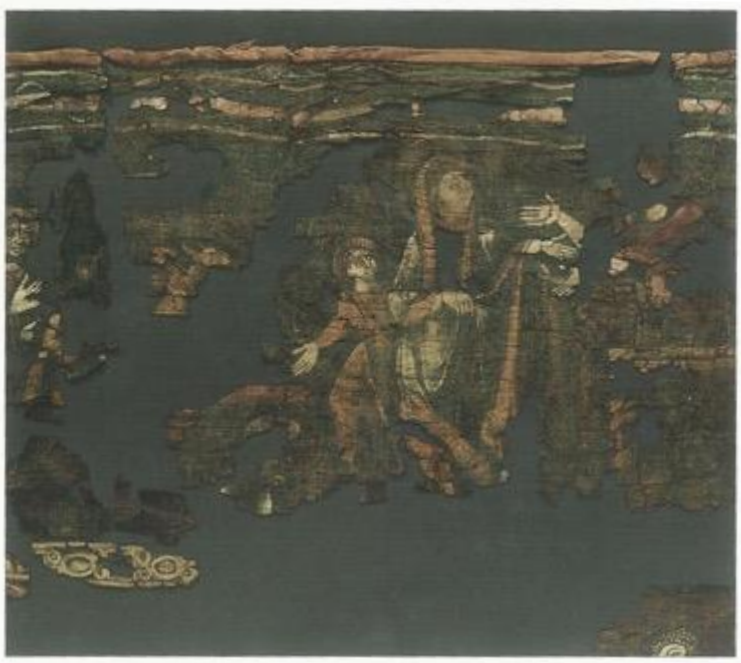


Fig. 7. *Lot's wife from the scene of and Noah's sacrifice* (IV-V.)



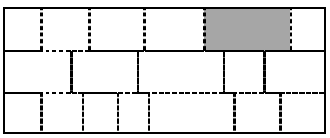
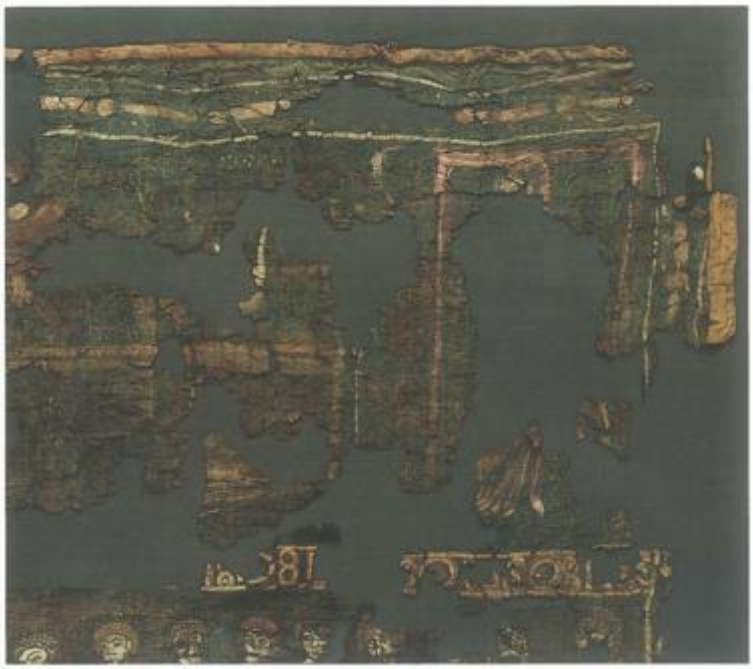


Fig. 8. *Noah and his family from the scene of Noah's ark*. (V.)



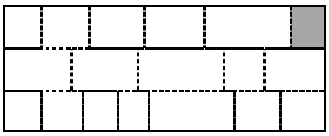


Fig. 9.*Noah's ark and Sarah from the scene of Abraham at the Oak of Mamre* (VI.)

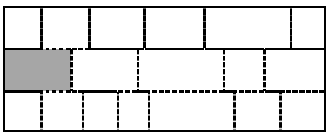


Fig.10. *Abraham at the Oak of Mamre* (VI.)

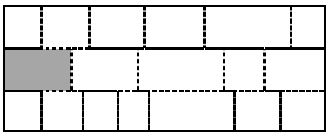


Fig. 11. *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (VII.)

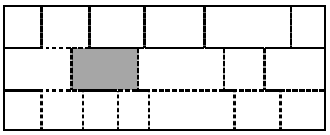


Fig.12. *The Sacrifice of Isaac. Jacob arrives at Laban's* (VII-VIII.)

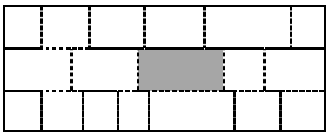


Fig. 13. *Jacob arrives at Laban's*. (VIII.)

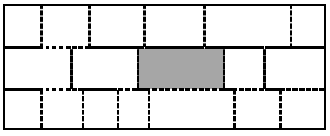


Fig. 14. *Jacob arrives at Laban's*. (VIII.)

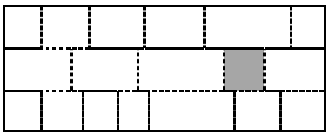


Fig. 15. *Jacob's dream* (IX.)

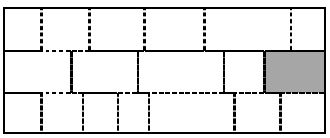


Fig 16. *Joseph eats with his siblings* (X.)

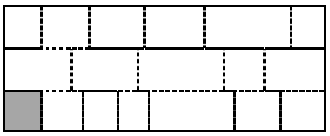


Fig. 17. *Jacob and the angel* (XI.)

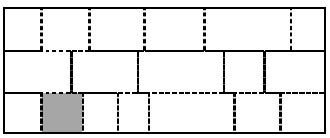


Fig. 18. *Isaac's blessing, and Moses from the scene of the Miracle of Manna* (XII-XIII.)

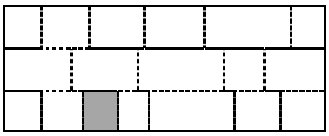


Fig19. *The Miracle of Manna and Moses and the pillar of fire* (XIII-XI.)

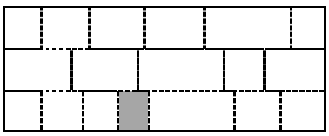


Fig 20. *The Destruction of the Egyptian Army 1.* (XV.)

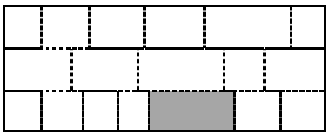


Fig. 21. *The Destruction of the Egyptian Army 2*. (XV.)

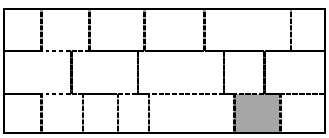


Fig. 22. *The Israelites survive* (XVI.)

Fig. 23. *The Miracle of the Quails*. (XVII.)

Fig. 24. *Dionysos Hanging*, fourth century. Riggisberg, Abegg-Stiftung, inv. no. 3100a
Source: *abegg-stiftung.ch/en/collection/late-antiquity/* Accessed 25 May 2020

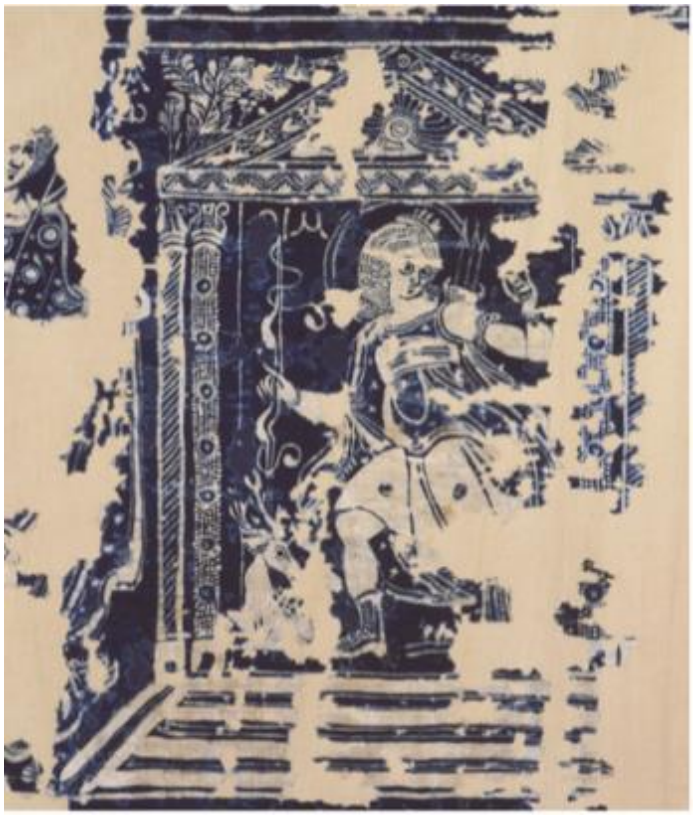


Fig. 25. *Artemis Hanging*, fourth-sixth century. Riggisberg, Abegg-Stiftung, inv. no. 1397.

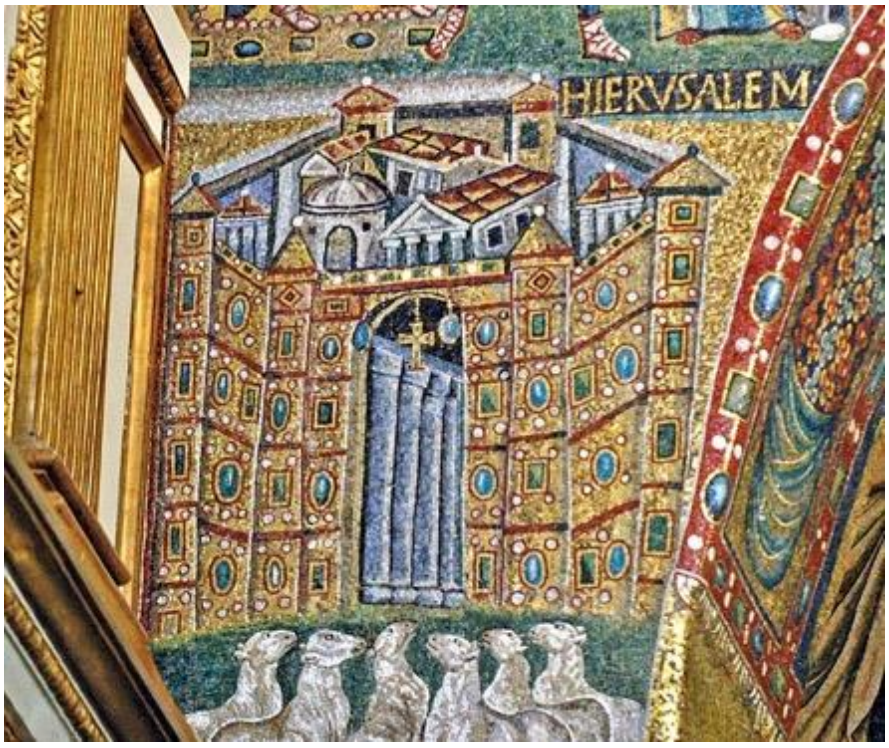


Fig. 26.: *Heavenly Jerusalem*, fifth century. Mosaic in Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore.

Fig. 27. *Charioteer Papyrus*, fifth century, Antinoë. London Egypt Exploration Society

Fig. 28. *Fragment with Miriam from a hanging*. Four-fifth century, Egypt. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 29. *Fragment with an angel from a hanging*. Egypt, Four-fifth century. Paris, Département des Antiquités égyptiennes, Inv. Nr. E 12600.

Fig. 30. *Dura Europos Synagogue walls*, third century. Damascus, National Museum

Figure 31. *Triumphal arch of Galerius*, fourth century. Thessaloniki, Greece.

Fig. 32. *Mosaic of the birth of Achilles*, fifth century. Nea Paphos, Cyprus.

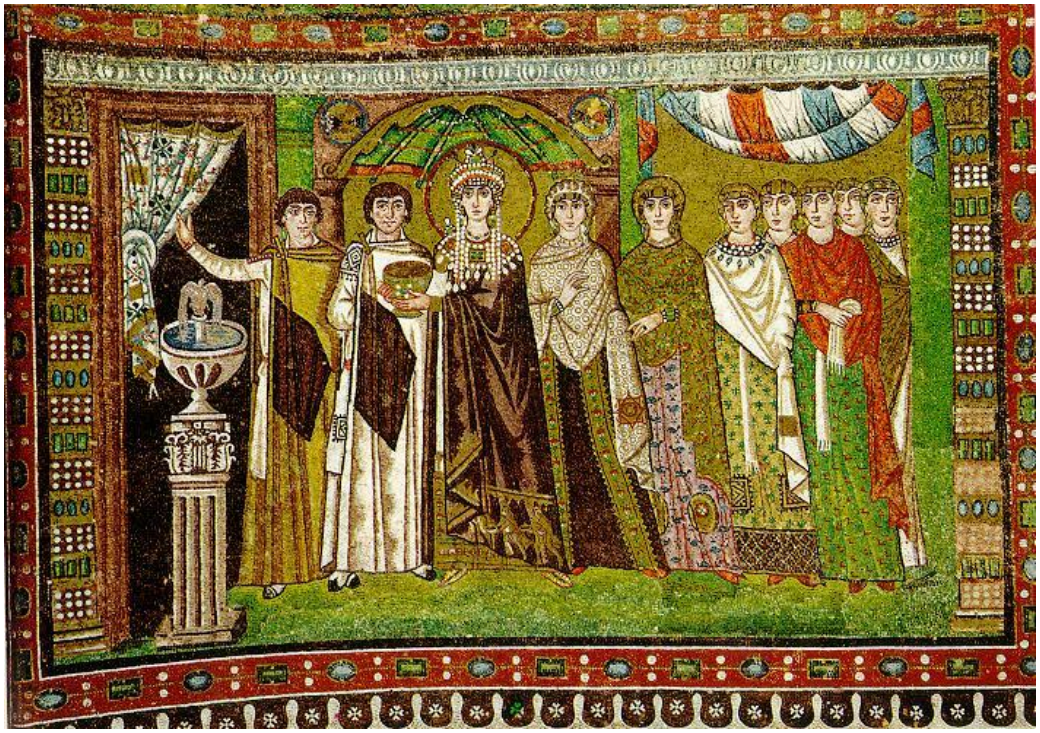


Figure 33. *Mosaic panel of Empress Theodora in her Court*. Sixth century. Ravenna, San Vitale.

Fig. 34. *Front panel of an altar*. Twelfth century. Panagia Amasgou, Monagri, Cyprus.

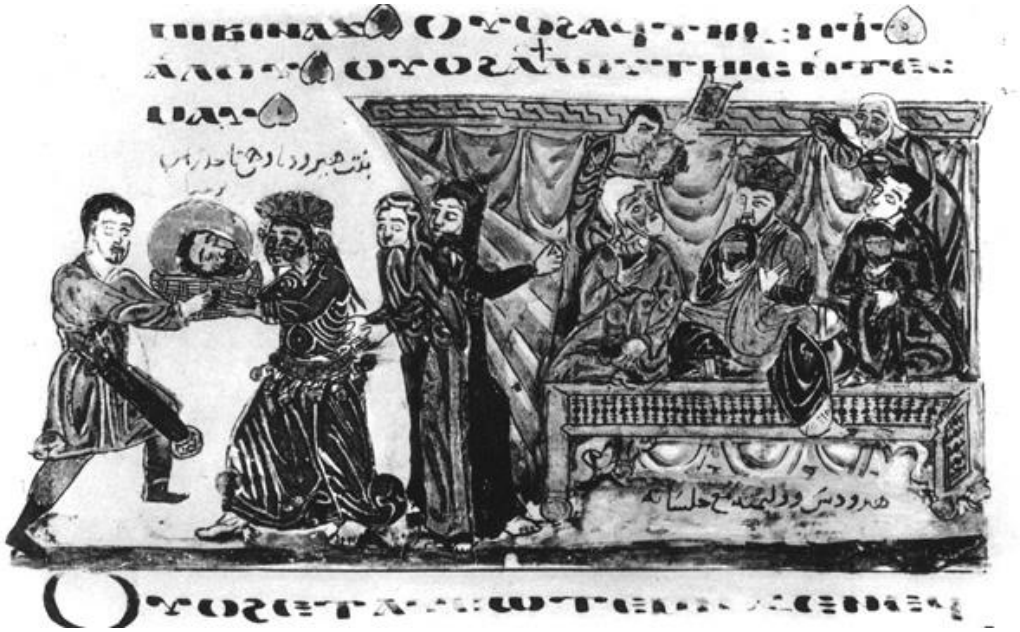


Fig. 35. *Coptic manuscript illustrating Herod Antipas and Salome*, 1178–1180, Damietta, Egypt. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

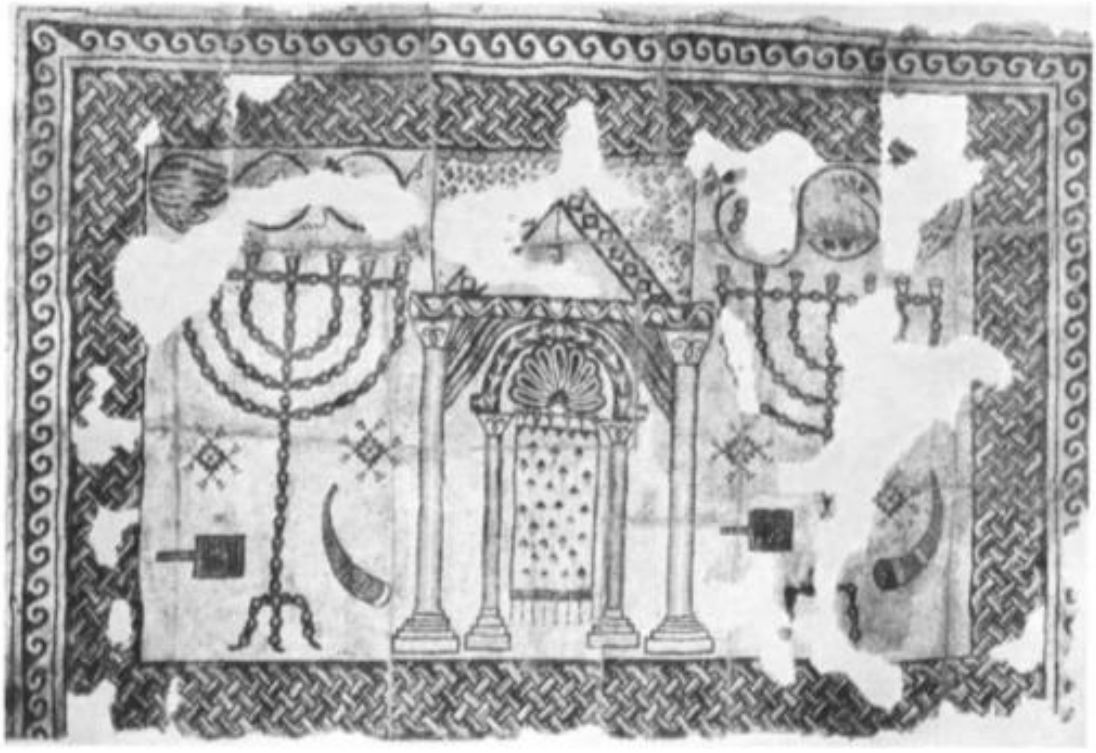


Fig. 36. *Mosaic from the synagogue of Beit Shean*, fourth-fifth century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Fig. 37. *Aqeda*, 500-524 AD. Synagogue mosaic of Beth Alpha.

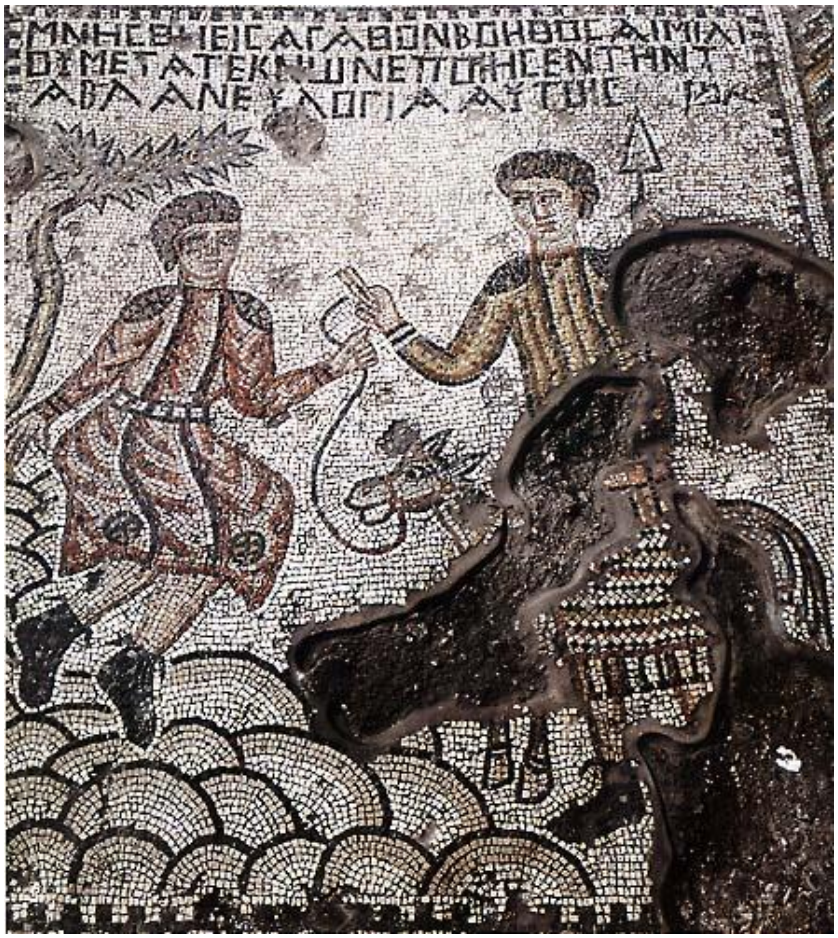


Fig. 38. *Two servants from the scene of Isaac's binding*, 400-450 AD. Sepphoris. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. From: *Index of Medieval Art*

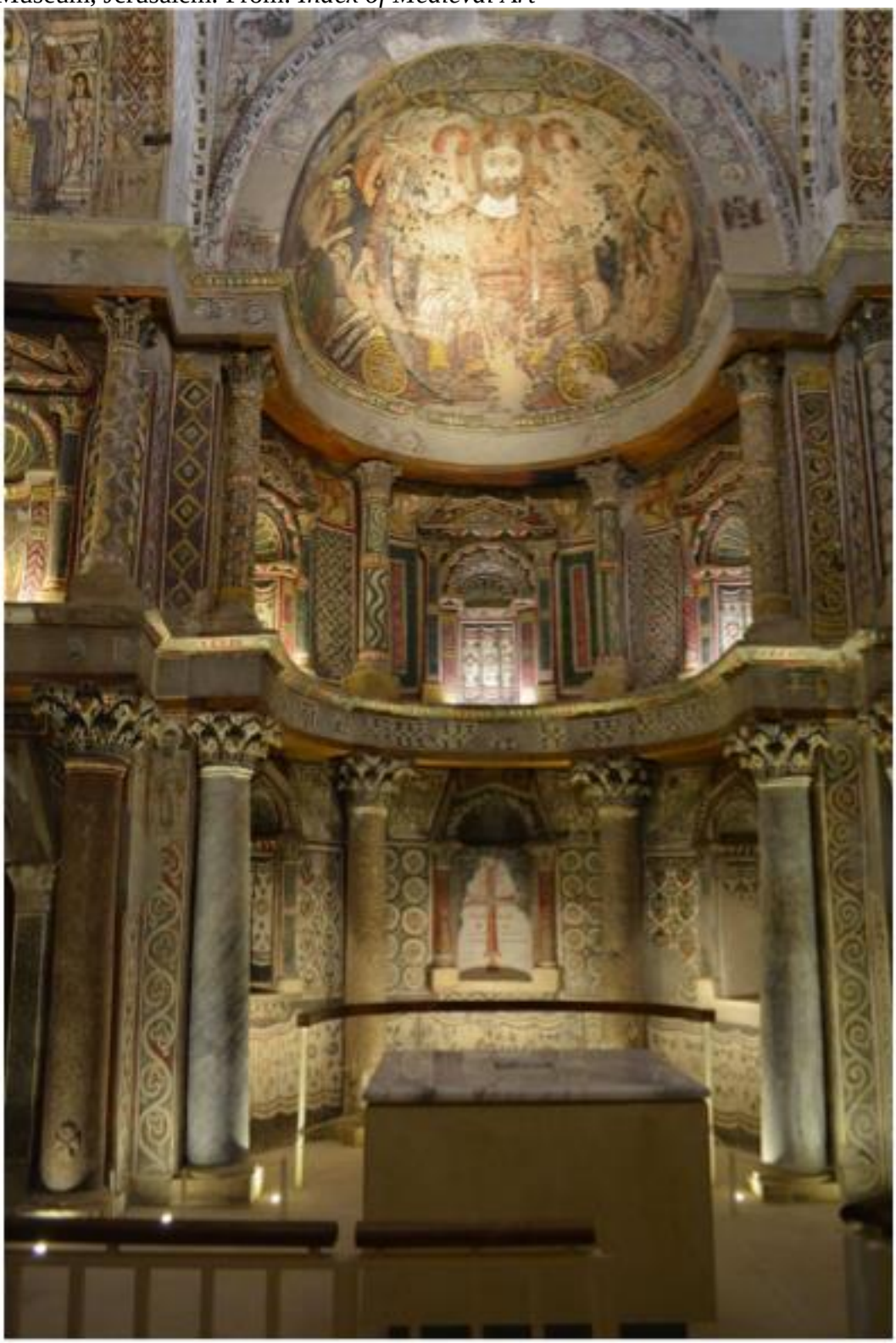


Fig. 39. *Niches and lower zone with painted curtains in "Red Monastery,"* sixth century. Sanctuary of the main church of Deir Anba Bishoi near Suhag, Egypt.

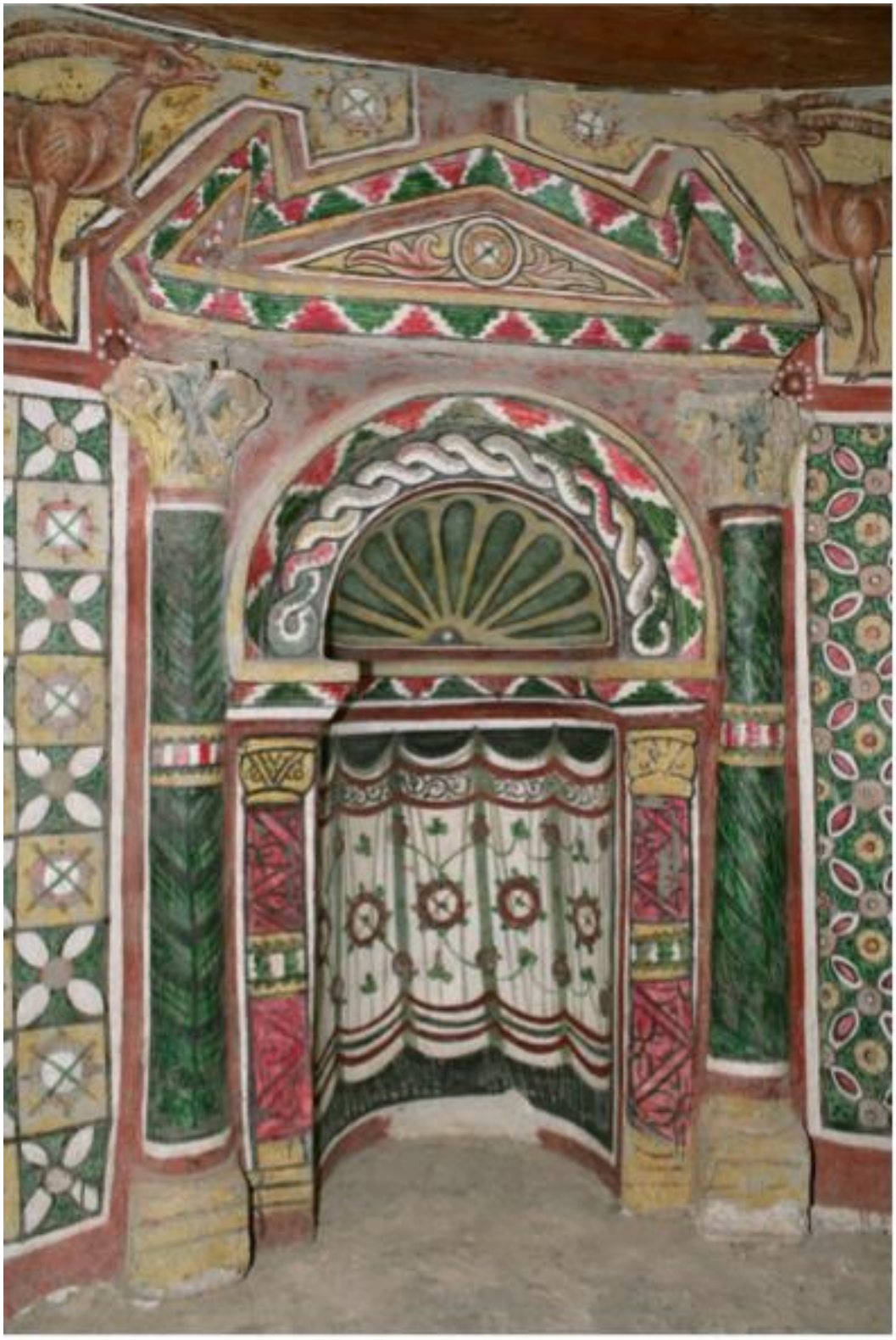


Fig. 40. *Niche with curtain in the sanctuary of the main church,* sixth century. Sanctuary of the main church of Deir Anba Bishoi near Suhag, Egypt.

Fig. 41. *Fragment of resist dyed textile hanging with Old and New Testament scenes*, Fourth century, Egypt. London Victoria and Albert Museum.

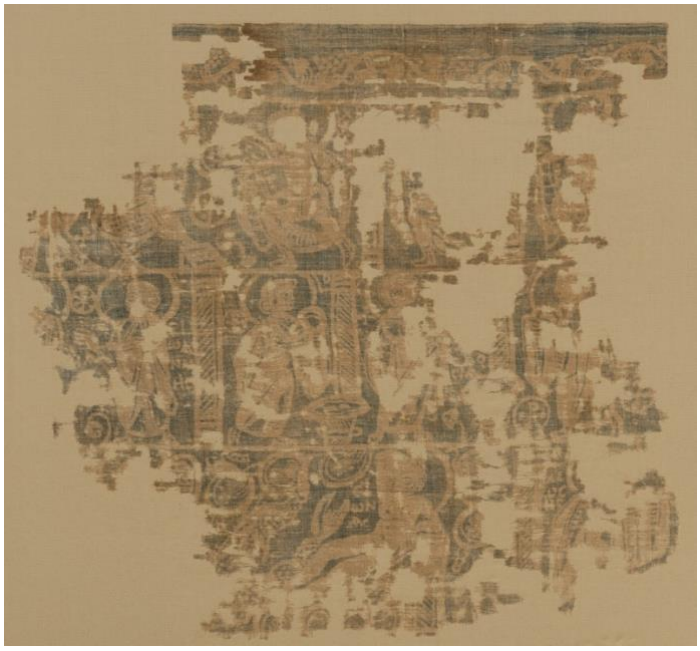


Fig. 42 *Fragment of resist dyed textile hanging with Old and New Testament scenes*, fifth-sixth century, Egypt. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art.

Fig. 43 *Jonah hanging, linen and wool tapestry*, fifth-eighth century, Middle Egypt. Louvre, Paris.

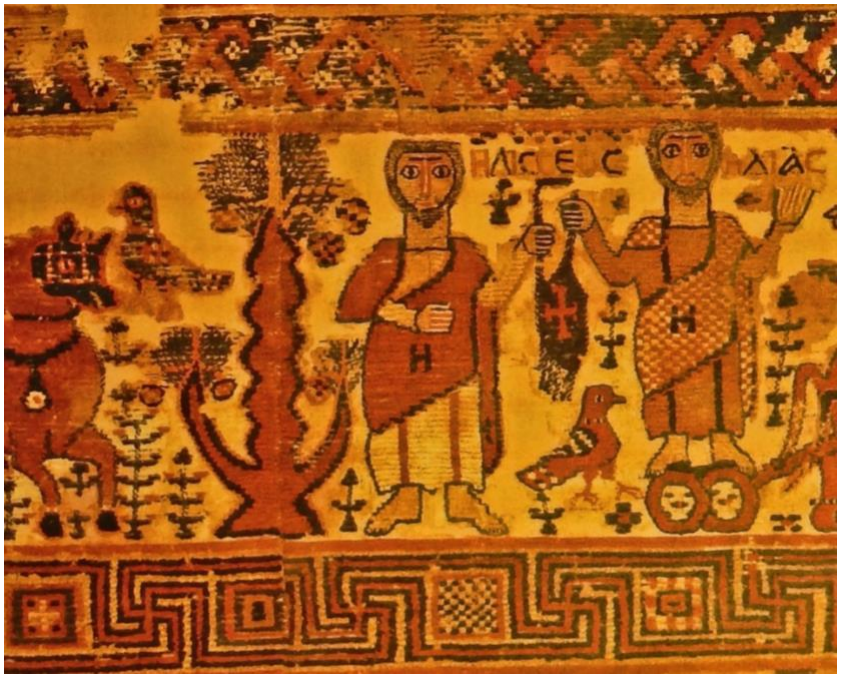


Fig. 44. *Eliah hanging, linen and wool tapestry*, fourth-fifth century, Egypt. Riggisberg.

Figure 45. *Mosaic of Abel and Melchizedek*, sixth century. Ravenna, San Vitale


Fig. 46. *Agape scene in the Early Christian Catacomb of San Callisto*, third century. Rome, Italy.

Fig. 47. *Mosaic of Abraham at the Oak of Mamre*, sixth century. Ravenna, San Vitale.

Fig. 48. Reconstruction of *Abraham at the Oak Mamre*, 400-450 AD. Sepphoris.

Fig. 49. *Eros and Pysche*, third century AD. Hatay Archeolgocal Museum, Antakya.


Fig. 50. Sarcophagus of a child with scenes of the myth of Prometheus and the Creation of Man, third century BC. Rome, Capitoline Museums, Palazzo Nuovo.

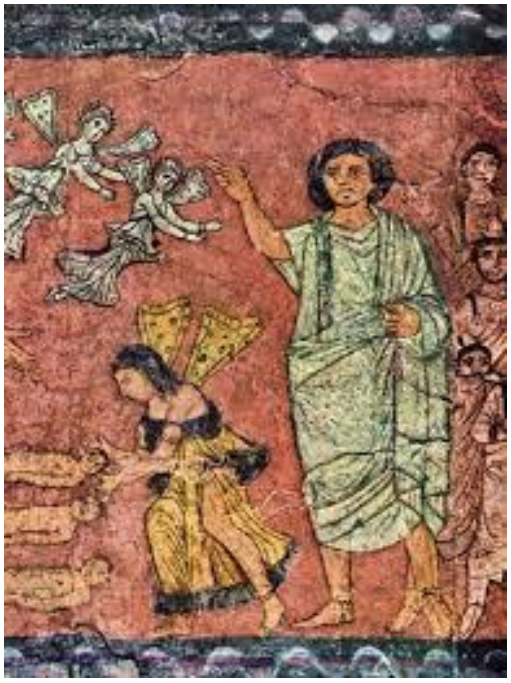


Fig. 51. *The Ezekiel Mural from Dura Europos Synagogue*, third century. Damascus. National Museum.

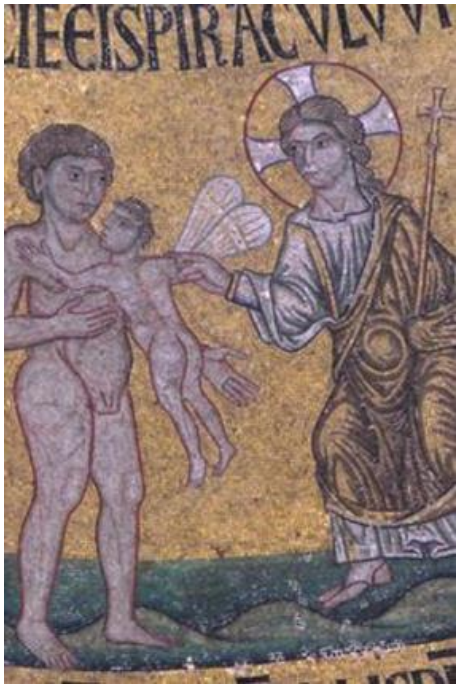


Fig. 52. *Animation of Adam*, 1215-1280. Cupola mosaic, Venice, San Marco.