

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the century, Adolf von Harnack pointed out that in the history of the ancient world people were forced to search for comfort, consolation, expiation and healing in the realm of religion.¹ Harnack cited several ancient sources as evidence of this phenomenon, but he claimed the greatest testimony can be found in the popularity of the cult of Asclepius. The god of healing, Asclepius, enjoyed a fair share of prominence in Late Antiquity, largely due to his effectiveness in healing the populace of their bodily ills and providing comfort. As Christianity began to grow, Christians encountered several non-Christian deities that influenced their perception of Jesus and were conceivable threats. One of these figures was Asclepius, and as a result, Christians further emphasized Christ's abilities as a healer and physician. The evidence for the Christ-Asclepius conflict is apparent in the writings of the church fathers. Apart from textual evidence, art and imagery of Late Antiquity is an underestimated corpus that reflects the dispute. Images of Christ performing healings and miracles were quite abundant in the second, third, and fourth centuries and rapidly proliferated towards the end of this time period.² Harnack hints at such a visual competition, or at least an influence, in his landmark text:

¹ Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (trans. and ed. by James Moffatt; New York: Harper, 1962), 105.

² In terms of periodization, "Late Antiquity" is slightly ill-defined and is often used as a "catch-all" phrase for the transition from Classical antiquity to the Middle Ages. However for the purposes of this study, it is used throughout to refer to the period of the mid-second century through the fifth century. Even in this usage, it is not a perfect term. It cannot be said that "Late Antiquity" began in the second century, although features of the religious and cultural developments that arose in the fourth century began to appear in the second century. The images central to this dissertation emerge in the fourth century, and while the term "Late Antiquity" is

No one has yet been able to show that the figure of Christ which emerges in the fifth century, probably as early as the fourth, and which subsequently became the prevailing type in all pictorial representations, was modeled upon the figure of Asclepius. The two types are certainly similar; the qualities predicated of both are identical in part; and no one has hitherto explained satisfactorily why the original image of the youthful Christ was replaced by the later. Nevertheless, we have no means of deriving the origin of the Callixtine Christ from Asclepius as a prototype, so that in the meantime we must regard such a derivation as a hypothesis, which, however interesting, is based upon inadequate evidence.³

In the dissertation that follows, I will provide evidence to elucidate Harnack's stated claim.

Unlike Harnack, I am at an advantage since there is more uncovered visual evidence than what was available at the time of his writing. I will argue that images of Christ performing healings and miracles, what this dissertation labels as images of Christ the Miracle Worker, were influenced by existing pagan traditions, including the cult of Asclepius.

The theme of Christ the Miracle Worker was unquestionably important in developing the Christian faith. In the synoptic gospels as well as John's gospel, the miracles of Christ were given prominence. Healings and miracles were critical to shaping the early Christian understanding of the person and nature of Christ, indicated by the manifold references in the gospels of the healing power of Christ. There are over thirty-five references of the healing power of Christ in the four gospels, the most belonging to Matthew. These do not include nature miracles, such as the Cana miracle, the walking on the water or the feeding of the five thousand. The healing accounts do not include exorcisms either, but consist of physical healings and resurrections. As this dissertation will exhibit, the term "miracle" can include healings and resurrections, and can be supported by early Christian texts and images.

perhaps overburdened in its usage here, its limitations are noted from the outset of this dissertation. There is much quibbling when Late Antiquity began, see Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 1-4; and Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150-750* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

³ Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 118-119. The predominant image of Christ Harnack was referring to was the bearded Christ.

Healings and miracles were not isolated in their importance to early Christianity. In fact, early Christians naturally emphasized their gravity given the prominence they enjoyed in the Greco-Roman world. Healings and miracles were important in the cultic life of non-Christians and imperative in the cult of Asclepius. The most common evidence of healings and miracles are found in ancient texts. Often the documentation of a successful healing was left at the temples of Asclepius engraved in stone, clay or wood tablets known as *stelai*, praising the effectiveness of the god's therapeutic power. Miracles, as well as healings, were captured in narratives demonstrating some type of divine intervention that can only be described as ineffable. These narratives were catalogued in such diverse Greco-Roman works attributed to Diodorus Siculus, Cicero, Pliny the Elder, Aelius Aristides, and Julian the Apostate. They are also found in Jewish and Christian scripture, most notably in the gospels with the miracles of Jesus.

“Miracle stories,” Greco-Roman or otherwise, were not thoughtfully considered until late in the nineteenth-early twentieth century. With the advent of biblical form criticism scholars such as Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann began to take notice of the miracle stories. However, they were often dismissed as evidence of Christianizing pagan narratives and were considered non-Christian material, and thus not relevant for any useful gospel study.⁴ Miracle stories narrowly featured Jesus the Miracle Worker, not Jesus the “herald of the Kingdom of God.” The miracle-performing Jesus bore the mark of pagan influence, and in the view of the form critics, was unimportant to the Christian story.⁵ In any subsequent

⁴ Dibelius labels Jesus' miracles stories with the patronizing moniker “tales,” in his *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. by Bertram Lee Wolf; New York: Scribner, 1965), 70. Also see Rudolf Bultmann's *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. by John Marsh, rev. edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

⁵ Dibelius, *From Tradition*, 80.

Christian inquiry, the miracles of Jesus were intentionally neglected as secular in nature and not containing any real value.⁶

This pattern in Christian thought was deeply affected by the seminal work of Adolf von Harnack, one of the first social historians of the early church. Most church historians and biblical scholars were influenced by his *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den Ersten Drei Jahrhunderten*. The reception of Harnack's position on miracle stories was easily recognizable. Miracle stories were diminished in influence due to Harnack's persuasive theory of the Hellenization of Christianity. Harnack's position proposed "an almost complete isolation of primitive Christianity from its historical environment."⁷ His argument would be challenged from the "History of Religions" school of thought with pioneers such as Lüdemann who drew connections between early Christian thought with the Judaism and Hellenism of the same time. However, Harnack's classic text is indicative of most Christian histories of the era: Greco-Roman sources that shed light on Christianity were usually eschewed or used only to elucidate the Christian era. Harnack's legacy was his distinction between external and internal factors in the expansion of Christianity. He briefly explained the external conditions of the Late Antique historical landscape (the emergence of clubs and associations, the Hellenization of culture, the expansion of the Jewish diaspora) to justify the expansion of Christianity, focusing instead on the internal factors such as a desire for monotheism and salvation.⁸ In short, Harnack hung the expansion of Christianity on a very myopic painting of Late Antique history and culture. As a result, miracle stories in

⁶ Dibelius, *From Tradition*, 79.

⁷ W.G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of Investigation of its Problems* (trans. by S. McLean Gilmour and Howard Clark Kee; London: SCM Press, 1973), 206.

⁸ L. Michael White, "Adolf von Harnack and the 'Expansion' of Early Christianity: A Reappraisal of Social History," in *Second Century* 5.2 (1985/1986), 104.

Christianity were not compared with similar instances in Greco-Roman religion.⁹ Without placing them in historical context, they were not properly considered.¹⁰

Later scholars consider this move unfortunate and rather too simplistic. Ramsay MacMullen notes that Harnack's work *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den Ersten Drei Jahrhunderten* included thousands of source references, but not a single non-Christian source, implying that the Christian mission was created *ex nihilo*.¹¹ Robert Wilken has recently offered a counter-argument to Harnack's established theory that Christianity was thoroughly Hellenized in the first centuries. Instead, Wilken argues that the obverse appears to be true; Hellenism was thoroughly Christianized by the church fathers from Origen to John of Damascus.¹² This is not to say that early Christians did not utilize Hellenistic or Jewish influences. The early Christians rather utilized them so extensively that the culture was transformed by Christianity into something unique.

Wilken's theory obviously applies to early Christian thought. His theory is also applicable to early Christian art. Christians appropriated the artistic corpora that were available to them, including the visual imagery of their pagan neighbors. By incorporating pagan elements into their developing visual language, pagan artistic elements were effectively Christianized. Christ often appears quite like his opponents whether it is Jupiter, Dionysius, Sarapis, or Asclepius. It can be argued that stylistic traits of rival gods such as Jupiter,

⁹ Arguably, Harnack's position debilitated his ability to compare the early images of Jesus to Asclepius as witnessed in the opening quotation; however his position was not primarily concerned with imagery.

¹⁰ Howard Clark Kee criticizes Dibelius for this move quite eloquently in his *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 76-77.

¹¹ Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 206, n. 16. Robert Wilken recognizes this as well in his *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (2nd ed.; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), xviii. Michael White points out that Harnack did quote three pagan detractors, Pliny, Celsus and Porphyry, see his "Adolf von Harnack," 105, n. 39.

¹² Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), xvi-xvii.

Sarapis or Asclepius were incorporated into the depictions of Christ, with the intention of characterizing Christ as the most powerful religious figure. Scriptural episodes that involved Christ were featured in early Christian art, and among these the miracle stories were the most popular. The miracle stories of Jesus were prominently featured in Late Antique art and imagery, largely due to their ability to exhibit the power of Christ.

The early development of Christian imagery was directly influenced by the practices of pagan and Jewish contemporaries of the early Christians. Primary examples of visual art in the catacombs and on relief sculpture frequently portray Christ performing healings and miracles. Indeed, the image of Christ the Miracle Worker is undoubtedly the predominant theme in depictions of Jesus by the fourth century. The image of Jesus working healings and miracles can arguably be described as propagandistic in nature. Frequently depicted with what appears to be a staff, a persistent inclusion that intentionally recalls Moses, the images of Christ the Miracle Worker portray Jesus as indebted yet superior to earlier traditions, becoming the dominant religious figure in an increasingly diverse landscape.

Prior to images of *Christus victor* that are normative after the fifth century is *Christus medicus*. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker served a certain purpose for Christian audiences in the third and fourth centuries. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker cultivated a strong sense of self-definition among early Christians. By incorporating elements of prominent healing cults, as well as the influence of magic and miracles in Late Antiquity, the image of Christ the Miracle Worker served as a unifying and supplanting figure. However, the image is not an example of Christian Hellenization. Early Christians selected suitable elements of pagan and Jewish milieus and incorporated them for their benefit into narrative and art, and thus provided a Christian understanding to Hellenistic motifs. Just as Wilken argues that early Christians transformed Greco-Roman culture into

something new, this dissertation will argue that the same can be said for early Christian art. The art and imagery of Christ the Miracle Worker appropriated artistic elements of Late Antique culture and transformed those elements into representations that are similar to their antecedents, but uniquely Christian.

Any blanket claim that all figures in Christian art were derivative is problematic. For example, the images in the Christian catacombs were influenced by Roman prototypes. In the Callistus catacomb and beyond, Endymion became Jonah, a Roman stevedore became the paralytic, Osiris became Lazarus, and a Greco-Roman magus, philosopher, or physician was possibly the prototype for Jesus. The catacomb of Callistus images certainly bear pagan influences, but any conclusions that early Christians were purely mimetic are specious. Such an argument is shortsighted without viewing the immediate context of the image under discussion, the accompanying scenes, and the narrative purpose. To the scholar Paul Corby Finney's own admission, the process of iconographic interpretation is not an exact science.¹³

Since Christian art borrowed elements from the visual resources available in Late Antiquity, it was up to the viewers to use their belief system to fill the image with meaning.¹⁴ The burden of interpretation was placed upon the viewer. Patrons, sculptors, and viewers were not indifferent as to how their subjects were depicted in imagery. Features such as Jonah's resemblance to Endymion and the appearance of Hercules and Orpheus in the catacombs can be explained: Christians were influenced by the pagan imagery surrounding them. Christian patrons ordered a specific image, and sculptors crafted it using the

¹³ Finney, *The Invisible God*, 186. To be clear, Finney believes that the early Christians were creating something unique, however his statements regarding image prototypes can be misinterpreted. Finney defends the early dating of Callistus convincingly, although this dating should still be considered uncertain.

¹⁴ This is the view of Jás Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100-450* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153, and more recently, James Francis in his conference paper "Biblical Not Scriptural: Perspectives on Early Christian Art from Contemporary Classical Scholarship," at the Fifteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies, August 6-10, 2007, Oxford, UK.

accustomed mode of depiction, thus resulting in the enduring manner early Christian images appear.¹⁵ With the lack of adequate evidence detailing the intent of the artist, it is impossible to determine what the authorial intents of these early images of Christ exactly were.

However, with the multiple examples of Christ performing healings and miracles, it is easier and perhaps more edifying to measure how viewers responded to these artworks. As this dissertation will show, the response towards these images of Christ helps indicate how they understood Christ. The early Christian viewers understood Christ as a healer and miracle worker, greater than any other in an environment that included more than a few.

A careful attention to the chronology of images of Christ will reveal that the image of Christ performing healings and miracles became ubiquitous in Late Antiquity, especially in the fourth century, and dissipated after the fifth century nearly disappearing altogether. The pervasiveness of the image of Christ the Miracle Worker can be partially explained due to a rivalry with Christian opponents. By depicting Christ in text and imagery as the definitive healer and worker of miracles, early Christians constructed a competitive and instructive image. Depicting the feats of Christ was not unique to Christian art. Devotees of a particular god in the Greco-Roman pantheon would expect a depiction of their favored god's exploits. Few devotees would anticipate anything less than a depiction of the strength of their god; the images served as displays of devotional worthiness.

The images of Christ under discussion did not occur in a vacuum. With the severe Christian stance against pagan idolatry, the images of Christ healing and performing miracles were similar to images of heroes and Olympian gods but they were created in a context of antagonism between Christians and pagans. Christ as a great miracle worker may have been expected by Christian viewers. However, Christians likely recognized Christ in an arena of

¹⁵ See Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, 153ff.

competition as informed by the constant barrage of invectives from Christian leaders against the idolatrous ways of their neighbors.¹⁶ A Christian observing an image of Christ in the act of healing may be reminded of the perils of entering a temple of the cult of Asclepius. The healing Christ cured one's body and soul while wandering into the Asclepion for a remedy put one's soul in peril. Moreover, these images largely occurred in a funerary environment, reminding observers of the future resurrection and life through Christ. As a result of appearing as the greatest healer and miracle worker, early images of Christ provided a sense of understanding and identity to early Christians. A viewer could witness their chosen healer and miracle worker as greater than any rival for not only was Christ's brief tenure as an earthly healer always efficacious, he continually provided for the future life.

By the late fourth century when the church was firmly established, the image of Christ healing and performing miracles not only persisted but increased. Remarkably, in an age of Christian peace the image of Christ the Miracle Worker was more popular than in the earlier age of Christian persecution. Sermons and treatises of church fathers such as Ambrose and Augustine reveal the utility of reiterating the image of Christ as the supreme physician and miracle worker. Church leaders did not desire their congregations fractured in their observance. Congregants were likely tempted to participate in myriad pagan festivals and rituals that included the healing cult. In order to curtail what may have been a losing battle, church leaders preached the image of Christ the physician and miracle worker, reminding their hearers of the ultimate Christian "healing" in baptism, the perils of idolatry, and the final resurrection made apparent by the miracle working Christ. The verbal image of

¹⁶ For example, consider Tertullian's attack against Christians attending the games or partaking in pagan festivals in *On the Shows*, 13, ordering them to keep their gullets free from any contagion of idol food, (Glover, LCL). Also see Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 38.1. More recently see Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Christ the Miracle Worker corresponds and illuminates the popularity of the visual image; they are both vehicles that send a similar message of Christian dominance to their audiences.

In an era when Christ had less threatening opponents, the image of Christ performing healings and miracles was used by early Christians to sate the ears and the eyes of the populace. The fourth-century imagery, particularly the relief sculpture, reveals a dutiful attention to the Christ as captured in John's gospel. This dissertation will study the rise and eventual predominance of the image of Christ the Miracle Worker in the early Christian era, examine the contributions of the church fathers, and demonstrate that this early Christian image appropriated elements of pagan traditions that included the healing cult of Asclepius as well as drawing upon the person of Moses to create a paramount religious figure.

I. Issues of Terminology: *Superstitio*, *Deisidaimonia*, and *Religio*

The terms *superstitio*, *deisidaimonia*, and *religio* appear quite frequently in the literature concerning healings and miracles in antiquity. From Cicero's *De natura deorum* onward, *superstitio* was the bête noire of classical and patristic literature.¹⁷ In antiquity, the Latin term *superstitio* and its Greek cousin *deisidaimonia* were popularly imbued with a negative valence. Pagans and early Christian writers preferred to describe true religion in philosophical terms while denigrating superstitious behavior. Into the first century, the negative valence was duly branded upon *superstitio* and was reflected in any further usage of *deisidaimonia*.¹⁸ In both pagan and Christian contexts, *superstitio* became a term to describe an alien cult, or the

¹⁷ Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.42.

¹⁸ A form of *deisidaimonia* is used by the author of Luke/Acts in Acts 17:22, and should not be interpreted as a favorable expression. The positive references of *deisidaimonia* faded along with positive instances of *superstitio*, directly after Cicero. For more in-depth discussion of these terms, see my "Superstition and the Significance of the Image of Christ Performing Miracles in Early Christian Art," *Studia Patristica* (forthcoming).

irrational fear of the gods.¹⁹ *Religio* was the pure ambit that lies between the abominable polarities of superstition and atheism, distinguished by piety and philosophy.

The understanding of the term *superstitio* as a term of abuse, describing alien faiths in relation to Roman *religio*, persisted into the era of Christianity. A form of *deisidaimonia*, used by the author of Luke/Acts in Acts 17:22, is translated in some biblical versions as “superstitious” and others as “extremely religious.”²⁰ Arguably, the term “extremely religious” can be interpreted favorably, even with the modifier, as Paul may appear to compliment the Athenians on their attention to matters of faith.²¹ Acts 25:19 offered a similar usage with the Roman procurator Festus relating Paul’s case to the Jewish king Agrippa, describing the conflict between Paul and the Jews as a “dispute about their own superstition (*deisidaimonia*).” The usage may appear ambiguous, but Festus was a Roman, and his characterization of Judaism and Christianity as a superstition was read as a veiled insult, not as a general term of “religion.”²² At the time of writing of Luke/Acts, this interpretation seems far from likely. The positive references of *deisidaimonia* faded along with positive instances of *superstitio*, directly after Cicero. “Extremely religious” is an apt translation, however it should have a pejorative sense meaning “excessively religious,” and thus would not be a compliment to the Athenians.

¹⁹ Against the Christians, see Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.3-4; 11.15.1; 13.32.3; Suetonius, *Life of Nero* 16.2.

²⁰ Recent translations such as the RSV, NRSV and NIV prefer “very religious” or “extremely religious,” while the KJV translated it as “superstitious.” The New English Bible prefers a more ambiguous translation, “uncommonly scrupulous.”

²¹ See Patrick Gray’s “Athenian Curiosity: Acts 17:21,” in *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 47, no. 2 (April 2005), 109-116.

²² See H. Armin Moellering, “*Deisidaimonia*: A Footnote to Acts 17:22,” in *Concordia Theological Monthly* 34 (1963), 466-471. Armin Moellering thinks otherwise, claiming that *deisidaimonia* in Acts 25:19 is “used in a neutral, objective sense for ‘religion’” (471). However, his evidence for neutral or positive examples of *deisidaimonia* leaps from Xenophon and Theophrastus to the New Testament, leaving a considerable chasm. Given the fact that any usage of the term in the first century is either decidedly negative, or at least by Moellering’s admission, ambiguous, Paul’s use of the term does not appear to be neutral.

At every opportunity, the apologists attempted to couch Christianity as a *religio* in a similar manner.²³ In Late Antiquity, *deisidaimonia* and *superstitio* were interchangeable; expressing excessive fear or piety of the gods or of an alien cult.²⁴ The understanding of *superstitio* and *deisidaimonia* as terms of abuse persisted in the writings of the church fathers. *Superstitio* became the comprehensive expression to rebuke non-Christians and cast Christianity as the true religion.²⁵ The term became less of an articulation of excessive devotion and more of a label connoting religious perversion. Lactantius made the Christian definition clear.²⁶ In his opinion, the Ciceronian distinction between *superstitio* and *religio* was far too slight. Pagan *religio* was superstitious since it addressed false gods, while true *religio* was the worship of the one true God.²⁷ For the church fathers, anything outside of this understanding was *superstitio*. Roman authors implored their audience to abandon atheism and *superstitio* by describing *religio* as the broad, philosophical middle. Christian authors subsequently followed suit and discovered the utility of the term *superstitio* to describe anything non-Christian. The aim of the apologists' polemic was to attempt to portray Christianity within that religious middle and not near any polarity.

Pagans and Christians appeared united in differentiating divine healing from *superstitio*. Religious miracle stories were abundant in antiquity, and healing accounts were arguably given the most prominence.²⁸ Pagan miracle stories accentuated healings and

²³ See Justin, *First apology* 2-3 (PG 6, 329-331B).

²⁴ As can be witnessed in Plutarch's essay *On Superstition* 169D, *deisidaimonia* continues to hold a negative interpretation.

²⁵ Justin, *1 Apol.* 2 (PG 6, 329A-B); Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 1.9.2 (CSEL 47.301); *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 10.6 (CSEL 20.167); *Apology* 6.7-8 (CSEL 69.17); Notably throughout Minucius Felix, *Octavius*.

²⁶ Lactantius, *Divine institutes* 4.28 (CSEL 19.388-391).

²⁷ Ibid.

indicated that pagans did not consider divine healing as *superstitio*.²⁹ Similarly, for the church fathers the healings and miracles of Jesus did not fit into the category of superstition. Healings and miracles were not considered superstitious and are rather cherished qualities of their chosen deity. The images of Christ healing and working miracles reflected this understanding of superstition and display the melding of supercessionism with pagan and non-pagan influences.

II. Issues of Terminology: Miracle, Medicine, and Magic

The belief in divine healing maintained an exceedingly large role in ancient medicine whether doctors liked it or not. Physicians attempted to minimize the role of the divine, what we will generally call “religion” with some trepidation, in medical treatment; they claimed any successful treatment of a patient was due to the prescription, not an incantation or the will of gods, more importantly neither was the cause of the malady due to the gods.³⁰ Still, citizens of all walks of life placed a high value on religiously associated healings. Facing the choice of heeding the advice of his physician or the cult of the healing god Asclepius, the second-century orator Aelius Aristides touted the divine prescriptions.³¹ Methods of healing

²⁸ This is evident in Christian scripture. For example, there are over twenty references of the healing power of Christ in the four Gospels, the most belonging to Matthew. These do not include miracles or exorcisms, but healings. For a more recent discussion of superstition, see Dale Martin in his *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), especially 2-4 for his treatment of *superstitio* in Tacitus and Suetonius.

²⁹ Illustrated by the allure and influence it held for sitting emperors, including a healing performed by Vespasian. See Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81-82; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1.6; Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1:235d. For example, Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 7.38; Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.21

³⁰ The writings of the Hippocratic Corpus argue that disease has less to do with philosophy and more to do with medical explanations dealing with the physical body. The author of the treatise *Sacred Disease* attacked any notion that disease is caused by the gods and that any proper treatment can be performed by magical incantations and the like, see *The Sacred Disease* 1.2 and Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 65.

in antiquity encompassed medicine, miracle, and magic, and religion bleeds through all three genres. Medicine was a category that included practicing physicians in the empire. Late Antique physicians treated patients usually for a fee, and prescribed any number of healing methods. These prescriptions may include the drinking of wine or gentle exercise as prescribed by Asclepiades, or the balance of humors and attention to anatomy as expounded by Galen. Medicine was not without its severe critics. It was also not a-religious. Galen, perhaps the most well known and influential Late Antique physician, dedicated his first essay on anatomy to Asclepius, and credited the divine cures of the god as efficacious.³²

“Miracle” is perhaps a more difficult term to define given the context of Late Antiquity. Miracles in paganism and Christianity were a result of a direct appeal to the gods—or in lieu of a direct appeal—were acts of divine benevolence bestowed upon believers in response to faith. In the early twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann deconstructed the formula of a miracle story, claiming it was a three-part sequence with a problem, the resulting miracle, and a demonstration of the efficacy of the miracle, occasionally followed by praise for its effectiveness.³³ The healing of the paralytic in Matthew 9 follows this sequence. A paralytic is brought to Jesus, and then Jesus orders the man to take up his mat and walk (9:6). The paralytic walks home, and the awe-struck crowd praises God.

Miracle stories contained an evangelistic dimension to them. Faith in God by the watchful crowds or by Christian opponents was often the end result of healing accounts in the gospels, as many ended with the “amazement” of the crowds at Jesus’ miracle. In Acts

³¹ Aristides, *Orations* 49.8-15 (Behr). Even to the apparent detriment of his health.

³² Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 279; Kee, *Medicine*, 61.

³³ Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic*, 210.

13:4-12, belief was carried not through healing but miraculous punishment. Paul and Barnabas summoned by the governor in Cyprus encountered a magician who Paul rebuked and struck blind in the name of God. The dénouement of the miracle was the belief of the witnessing governor. As A.D. Nock notes, miracle stories occasionally ended with the “conversion and cure of the opponent,” thus securing the expansion of the faith.³⁴

The evangelistic element of miracle accounts was not relegated to Christianity. Philostratus reported miracles of Apollonius followed by recognition and belief, such as the imprisoned Apollonius removing his leg from the fetters, astonishing and inculcating belief in his follower Damis.³⁵ Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* described Lucius’ transformation from an ass to a human as miraculous evidence enough for his conversion to the Isiac mysteries.³⁶

The pagan and Christian miracle stories in antiquity followed a combination of Bultmann and Nock’s formula. Arguably, Asclepius’ tales enjoyed the most prominence, given his reputation as a healer of the people. According to some stories recounted by Plato, Cicero, Justin, Clement, and Tertullian, Asclepius was killed by Zeus for performing a resurrection.³⁷ Servius claimed Asclepius was killed for the sole resurrection of Hippolytus, drawing the ire of Hades and forcing the divine retribution of Zeus.³⁸ Still, Diodorus Siculus maintained Asclepius raised a great many people from the dead, and Apollodorus in the first century specifically reported six people Asclepius resurrected.³⁹ Regardless whether

³⁴ A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1933), 14.

³⁵ Philostratus, *Life.* 7.38. Damis retells this story and how he came to recognize Apollonius as divine in 8.13.

³⁶ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5.

³⁷ See the testimonies collected in Emma and Ludwig Edelstein’s *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies, vol. I and II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), 48-57.

³⁸ Servius’ *Commentary on the Aeneid*, 6.398 in Edelstein, T. 111. The resurrection of Hippolytus is often mentioned, see Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.27.4-5 and Sextus Empiricus in *Against the Professors* 1.260-262.

Asclepius was guilty of performing one resurrection or many, the result of his action was death at the tip of Zeus' thunderbolt.

Christ is credited with several resurrections in the four gospels, most notably the raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-10. Although resurrection stories can be described as “miracles,” scholars have questioned whether healings should be considered miracles. Bultmann provided a handy categorization of miracles stories to aid in this discernment. He divided miracle stories into four distinct groups: healings, exorcisms, resurrections, and nature miracles.⁴⁰ Given his attitude towards miracle stories, these categories still deserve a further look. Healings in the gospels, such as the healing of blind Bartimaeus and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood may not be as dramatic as a resurrection from the dead, but they were still memorable events, evidenced by their appearance in separate gospels.⁴¹ In John, the Lazarus story is not necessarily a healing but it is restorative. Lazarus is not resurrected to eternal life just yet. He is restored to a human condition; he is vulnerable to disease and will die again. A resurrection may not appear to be a healing based upon scriptural and testimonial healing reports in antiquity. However, in scripture and art resurrections and healings operate in the same way. They are evidence of the healer's power, and are meant to instill awe and gain support of the believing public.

Reports of Asclepius or Apollonius of Tyana resurrecting men could have the same effect as reports of Jesus raising Lazarus. Like a miraculous healing, a resurrection would gain support for the healer from the throng of people. Miracle and healing stories achieved a desired result by amplifying the dramatic tone within the narrative. Simply put, miracle

³⁹ Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History* 4.71.1-3; Apollodorus, *The Library* 3.10.3-4.

⁴⁰ Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic*, 218-244.

⁴¹ For blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10:46-52; Matthew 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43. For the woman with the issue of blood, Mark 5:21-34; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-48. For further on a resurrection as a healing, see Chapter Five, 170.

accounts were excellent marketing and public relations tools for religion. The nature of the healing that occurred certified that the tale would be remembered, and the success and popularity of the healing deity involved would be subsequently spread. Several accounts of healings by Asclepius also embodied an ineffable sense of drama. Prior to the era of Late Antiquity in the work of Aristophanes from 380 BCE, two snakes purportedly licked the eyes of the patient Plutus, and his vision was subsequently healed.⁴²

Although miraculous healing accounts existed in antiquity, bountiful evidence also exists of patients healed through the means of ancient medicine or by the cult of Asclepius. These healings can be described as fairly mundane. Even without the “miraculous” element as in the snakes of Plutus, healings procured by divine aid were still credited to the divine, even if they lacked the panache of miracle stories. Howard Clark Kee argues that the number of ordinary healings in the early centuries indicates the difference between this era and earlier Hellenistic medicine, claiming “there is no miraculous healing at a stroke.”⁴³ It would be a mistake to claim that miracles and healings were becoming separate entities. In fact, the development of Greco-Roman medicine exhibited an even more intertwined relationship between healings and miracles. Beginning in 160 CE with Julius Apellas’ report of his healing at Epidauros, Asclepius was seen not only as a divine friend and helper; he was seen as a savior. Asclepius’ treatment altered the course of his life, and Apellas sincerely believed his life was now under the care and protection of the god.⁴⁴

Apellas’ belief marked a new direction in Asclepius devotion in Late Antiquity. Efficacious healings by Asclepius were followed by wider transformation of the patient’s life.

⁴² Aristophanes, *Plutus* 633-747.

⁴³ Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 89.

⁴⁴ Kee, *Miracle*, 88.

Aelius Aristides indicated that Asclepius was not only a healer of the body, but a healer of the soul as well. Asclepius healed inwardly and outwardly. This characterization of healing recalls the healings of Christ in the gospels. Jesus healed both body and soul. The man born blind in John 9 was healed and cleansed of sin. Healings through divine channels in Late Antiquity can be classified under the heading as miracles since it is an inward and outward transformation. It is for this reason that the images involved in this dissertation are referred by the title of Christ the Miracle Worker. The title of Christ the Miracle Worker involves Christ in healings, resurrections, and nature miracles.⁴⁵

While healings and miracles can be described as intertwined in antiquity, the same cannot be said with miracles and magic. Miracles were products of divine agents while magic involved the human manipulation of the divine for personal means. Magic was more of an act of repetition in order to effect a desired end. Like *superstitio*, the term magic and the practice of magic were maligned. Respected by some but despised by many, magic is most often described as originating in Persia. Pliny the Elder devoted much of book 30 of his *Natural History* ridiculing magic.⁴⁶ In republican Rome, the practice of magic usually involved love spells. Any negativity towards magic in Rome was usually out of concern that it could be used to threaten established property rights.⁴⁷

In imperial Rome, magic began to take on its negative and familiar personification, in part due to the heightened sensitivity towards non-Roman influences as recorded in Pliny

⁴⁵ What critics call the marks of a magician, Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1978), 81. For evidence of Christian healings as superior, see Chapter Three, 92 and the apocryphal *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, 11.

⁴⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* 28.10.47; 28.12.49; 28.4.21; 28.5.28.

⁴⁷ Fritz Graf, "Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*. Edited by Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Boston and Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 41. Sulla in 81 BCE dictated edicts against the use of sorcery, although this was an edict against those that used poisons or magic for murder.

the Elder's *Natural History*. Since then, the term magic has always been interpreted quite negatively.⁴⁸ In disputes concerning magic, the issue of authority was most commonly raised. In *Against Celsus*, it is apparent that both Origen and Celsus despised magic, even if they both admittedly found it to be effective. For Celsus, the miracles of Jesus were the marks of a magician, proving that Jesus is a charlatan and not a true philosopher. Origen defended Jesus, claiming his miracles were not magic since they were aimed towards moral and inward transformation.⁴⁹ Origen and the church fathers denigrated magic and magicians by asserting that they operated under the authority of demons. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus both pointed out that Simon Magus was a wicked magician since his works illustrated that he was in league with demons.⁵⁰ Tertullian argued that Christians can distinguish magic from miracle since magic is so obviously the work of demons.⁵¹ In Christian art, Christ is often portrayed healing and working miracles with a staff that appears very much like a magic wand. This omnipresent instrument has allowed contemporary scholars to distinguish Christ as a magician, when in actuality the distinction between miracle and magic is much more complicated and less obvious.⁵² With this iconographic inclusion, the image of Christ the Miracle Worker perpetuates the erroneous concept that Jesus was a magician. This dissertation will argue that the imagery was never intended to associate Jesus with magic.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*. Edited by Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Boston and Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 16. Smith argues that magic is an evaluative term, used to characterize "the other."

⁴⁹ Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.65 (PG 11, 781B).

⁵⁰ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 26 (PG 6, 368A); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.13, 2.31.2. Also see Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 56

⁵¹ Tertullian, *The Soul* 57.7.

⁵² See Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 54-91.

III. Review of Secondary Literature

Primary sources from Late Antiquity, both patristic and classical are of the utmost importance in a study of this kind. More importantly, primary evidence of the visual art is similarly critical. This dissertation has paid close attention to both textual and artistic evidence in formulating arguments and conclusions. This study is also clearly indebted to the secondary literature devoted to the patristic era as well as art and imagery of Late Antiquity. As the visual art of Christ from the second through the fourth centuries has been analyzed and catalogued by previous scholars, a short review of the relevant secondary material is appropriate.

Josef Wilpert, F.W. Deichmann, G. Bovini, and Hugo Brandenburg contributed classic works to the understanding of early Christian catacomb and sarcophagus images, and any study of these images must take their work into account.⁵³ Deichmann's catalog of relief sculpture in Rome and Ostia is more useful than the earlier Wilpert catalog, and this dissertation relies to a large extent on Deichmann's dating of the relief sculpture, discussed in Chapter Six. In addition to Deichmann's catalog of relief sculpture, the Benoit volume treats the Gallic material in detail.⁵⁴ Fasola's study concerning the San Gennaro Catacomb, while not a focus of this dissertation, is an unparalleled resource concerning the wall paintings in Naples.⁵⁵ Within the genre of art history, André Grabar's work on Christian iconography was extremely influential, even if some of his views concerning audience

⁵³ Josef Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1903), and *I Sarcophagi cristiani antichi* (Rome, 1929). G. Bovini and H. Brandenburg. *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarcophage. I.* (ed. by F.W. Deichmann; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1976); Bovini, *I sarcofagi paleocristiani; determinazione della loro cronologia mediante l'analisi dei ritratti* (Città del Vaticano: Società amici catacombe presso Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, Roma, 1949).

⁵⁴ F. Benoit, *Sarcophages paleochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille* (Paris, 1954), 39, 51.

⁵⁵ Umberto Fasola, *Le Catacombe di S. Gennaro a Capodimonte* (Rome: Editalia, 1975).

response to Christian imagery have been challenged by authors such as Thomas Mathews.⁵⁶ Similarly, Ernst Kitzinger's work on pre-Byzantine images, refuted by Mary Charles Murray, still holds an important place in the historiography of early Christian art.⁵⁷ Mary Charles Murray's important work on Christian funerary art and its parallels to Orpheus are cited in Chapter Five. For Jewish art and symbols, Edwin Goodenough's twelve volumes on Jewish symbols, and the work of Joseph Gutmann were groundbreaking, although not as useful today.⁵⁸ For the specific case of the Dura synagogue, Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler are helpful resources as well, although their work must be used with caution.⁵⁹ Weitzmann's argument that Christian art was based upon Jewish prototypes found at Dura places an inordinate burden on the evidence of Dura. For a general treatment of the art of the catacombs, Wilpert and James Stevenson are helpful, but more for their plates of the images than their analysis.⁶⁰ Ferrua provides the most extensive analysis of the Via Latina catacomb, evident in his work published by the Vatican and in the later translated volume on Via Latina that contains several helpful color plates of the catacomb.⁶¹ As mentioned earlier in this

⁵⁶ André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁵⁷ Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images before Iconoclasm," in *DOP*, no. 8 (1954), 85-150. See Murray's response in Mary Charles Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art*, (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981). Also foundational is Norman Baynes' essay, "Idolatry and the Early Church," in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: The Athlone Press, 1955), 116-239.

⁵⁸ E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon, 1953-68), and "Catacomb Art," *JBL*, vol. 81, no. 2. (Jun., 1962), 113-142; Joseph Gutmann, "The Second Commandment and the Image in Judaism," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32, (1961), 161-174; "Early Synagogue and Jewish Catacomb Art and Its Relation to Christian Art," *ANRW* II.21.2, (1984), 1313-42.

⁵⁹ Herbert L. Kessler and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990).

⁶⁰ James Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

⁶¹ Antonia Ferrua, *Le Pitture della Nuova Catacombs di Via Latina*, *Monumenti di antichità cristiana*, Ser. 2, Vol. 8, (Città del Vaticano, 1960; Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth-Century Roman*

introduction, Jás Elsner treats the visual art of Late Antiquity with an eye towards the early Christian development of imagery.⁶² In particular, Elsner makes a case that the early Christians were borrowing themes and figures from the Roman art surrounding them, however he does not offer much support that Christian art ever transcends these pagan models.

However, few scholars in the last two decades focus on the miraculous images of Jesus from the third and fourth centuries. Thomas Mathews addresses the stylistic issues of the miracle images as well as the influence of Asclepius in his chapter “The Magician,” in *The Clash of the Gods*, but does not go into much detail or consult the patristic material in much depth.⁶³ Mathews also relies extensively on the work and ideas offered by Morton Smith’s *Jesus the Magician*, particularly Smith’s comparison of Jesus with Apollonius of Tyana. Morton Smith’s work is important to engage as it is one of the few to directly relate Jesus with magicians in antiquity. Smith has also contributed several notable articles regarding the understanding of superstition and magic in antiquity.⁶⁴ Paul Corby Finney’s contribution to the debate includes his foundational work *Invisible God*, as well as a convincing rebuttal of Smith and Mathews.⁶⁵

Painting (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1986). See Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb: A Unique Discovery of Early Christian Art* (Florence: Geddes and Grosset, 1990), 121-123.

⁶² See note 14.

⁶³ Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*, 54-91.

⁶⁴ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*; “Superstitio,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*; vol. 20, (1981), 349-365; “De Superstitione,” in *Plutarch’s Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. by Hans Dieter Betz; Leiden: Brill, 1975).

⁶⁵ Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Paul Corby Finney, “Idols in Second and Third Century Apology,” *Studia Patristica*, vol 17, pt. 2, (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, 1982), 684-687; Paul Corby Finney, “Do You Think God Is a Magician?” in *Akten Des Symposiums Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1999), 99-108.

Robin M. Jensen and Mary Charles Murray provide important responses to certain foundational arguments in the field of early Christian imagery, although none deal exclusively with the images of miracles.⁶⁶ David Knipp's work is the most relevant and the most recent, although he does not pay as close attention to early Christian literature, particularly the apologists.⁶⁷ Graydon Snyder is more concerned with Greco-Roman antecedents of the symbol, and neglects crucial historical evidence such as healing cults in his work.⁶⁸ Erich Dinkler has a brief, but very notable, study on the significance of the image of Christ as it relates to the image of Asclepius.⁶⁹ His conclusions are important, although he focuses mainly on the facial prototypes of his subjects, recalling also the contributions of Paul Zanker and the rich history of the development of the image.⁷⁰

Material treating the cult of Asclepius, or Asclepius imagery, is varied in depth and magnitude. Emma and Ludwig Edelstein's sourcebook remains an indispensable resource whenever delving into the subject of the healing god.⁷¹ The Edelsteins' work does have limitations, namely it focuses exclusively on textual evidence. For the religion scholar, it must be used with an amount of caution. Ludwig Edelstein viewed the Asclepius cult

⁶⁶ See Robin M. Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005); Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Mary Charles Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *JTS*, (1977), vol. 2, 303-345. And the most recent collection of essays in conjunction with the recent exhibition at the Kimbell museum in Fort Worth includes contributions from Jensen, Murray, and Kessler among others, Jeffrey Spier, ed., *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ David Knipp, "*Christus Medicus*" in *der frühchristlichen Sarkophagskulptur: Ikonographische Studien der Sepulkralkunst des späten vierten Jahrhunderts* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

⁶⁸ Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2003), 56-57.

⁶⁹ Erich Dinkler, *Christus und Askepios* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980).

⁷⁰ Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁷¹ Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein. *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies, vols. I and II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945). Also see G.D. Hart, *Asclepius the God of Medicine* (London: Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2000).

through the lens of Christianity, and believed Asclepius should be perceived as a figure quite like Christ.⁷² This is a narrow perspective as it creates a dichotomy solely including Asclepius and Christ, taking account of no other deities in the pantheon that Asclepius resembled. Moreover, the Asclepius cult did not spring *ex nihilo* in Late Antiquity as an opponent to Christianity; it had a history reaching centuries before the dawn of the Common Era. While this dissertation examines the comparison between Asclepius and Christ, it is important to view the historical context of such a comparison. With the emphasis on Christ the Miracle Worker in texts and visual art, it is more appropriate to claim that Christ was understood in Late Antiquity amidst a background of divine healing that included Asclepius as the most prominent.

More recently, Christian Habicht compiled a volume of inscriptions devoted to Asclepius, paying special attention to Pergamum. Lynn LiDonnici has contributed a sourcebook for Epidaurian inscriptions associated with the cult.⁷³ Kerényi's work on Asclepius is slightly dated, however it provides one of the few treatments of Asclepius sculpture translated into English.⁷⁴ Perhaps the most valuable resource for Asclepius imagery remains the section on Asclepius in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.⁷⁵ The images and index provide a very full view of existing Asclepius imagery and sculpture. There are several studies of archaeological finds regarding the cult of Asclepius including the

⁷² Edelstein, *Asclepius*, vol. 2, 132-135.

⁷³ Carl Habicht, *Die Inschriften des Asklepeions*, Vol. 8., Part 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969); L.R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

⁷⁴ Carl Kerényi, *Asklepios: Archetypal Images of the Physician's Existence* (New York: Pantheon, 1959). Also a great contributor to Asclepius in the realm of art history is Ulrich Hausmann in his *Kunst und Heilium: Untersuchungen zu den griechischen Asklepiosreliefs* (Potsdam, 1948).

⁷⁵ *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* (LIMC), (Comité de rédaction: John Boardman, et al; Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1981-1997). See the section by B. Holzmann on "Asklepios," vol. 2, 863-97, pls. 631-68.

American School of Classical Studies at Athens' findings at Corinth by Carl Roebuck.⁷⁶ John Pollini's most recent archeological research on the Christian desecration of polytheistic material culture is distinctly relevant, given that early Christians focused much of their ire towards images and structures of the cult of Asclepius.⁷⁷

Secondary material of pagan-Christian conflict in Late Antiquity is exceedingly vast, especially as it pertains to miracles. Adolf von Harnack provided one of the most foundational to the discussion of the subject in the early twentieth century.⁷⁸ Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, as cited above, build upon Harnack's work, and provided the groundwork for the theological understanding of miracle stories for many years. More general, and still very useful, are the works of Ramsay MacMullen and Robert Wilken.⁷⁹ Wilken's work pays particular interest to the contributions of the physician Galen to early Christian development, and his most recent work, *The Spirit of Early Christianity*, is quite helpful in advancing an alternative to Harnack's thesis. Any work written on the subject has to consider Harnack at some point, as MacMullen reconsiders Harnack's thesis and Wilken re-writes it. More recent contributions have been made by Harold Remus, François Bovon, and Bernd Kollmann.⁸⁰ The most useful materials for the subject of the images of Christ the

⁷⁶ Carl Roebuck, "The Asklepieion and Lerna," *Corinth*, vol. 14 (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1951); Mabel Lang, *Cure and Cult in Ancient Corinth: A Guide to the Asklepieion* (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1977).

⁷⁷ Pollini's research is not yet published but forthcoming, *Christian Destruction and Desecration of Images of Classical Antiquity: A Study in Religious Intolerance in the Ancient World*.

⁷⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *Medizinisches aus der ältesten Kirchengeschichte* (Leipzig: 1892).

⁷⁹ Ramsay MacMullen, "Two Types of Conversion to Early Christianity," in *VChr*, 37 (1983), 174-192. *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D.100-400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); *Paganism and Christianity, 100-425 C.E.: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); Wilken, *The Christians*.

⁸⁰ François Bovon, "Miracles, magie, et guérison dans les Actes apocryphes des apôtres," in *J ECS* 3 (1995), 245-259. Bernd Kollmann, *Jesus und die Christen als Wundertäter: Studien zu Magie, Medizin und Schamanismus in Antike und Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996).

Miracle Worker are works that specifically treat the significance of miracles, ancient medicine, and magic in Late Antiquity. Howard Clark Kee provides two volumes of analysis of miracles in antiquity.⁸¹ Remus ventures into the same material with slightly different results in his work.⁸² Fritz Graf provides a consistently useful treatment of magic in the ancient world that still must be considered.⁸³ More recently, Matthew Dickie has offered a study of magic and magicians in Late Antiquity that spans republican Rome to the time of Augustine.⁸⁴ Wendy Cotter has offered a valuable sourcebook of pagan and New Testament materials regarding miracle in her work.⁸⁵

There are several helpful sources concerning the practice and conception of healing and medicine in Late Antiquity. Beneficial to any study dealing with healing in the ancient world is the work of John Scarborough and Vivian Nutton.⁸⁶ Nutton in particular provides very helpful analysis for the church historian, including relevant texts of the church fathers and their positions on healing and miracle. Barrett-Lennard operates more from a biblical perspective, and does not make any distinction between exorcisms and healings, a move that is problematic, maintaining that both actions are alike.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Kee's *Medicine*, and his *Miracle*.

⁸² Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*.

⁸³ Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (trans. by Franklin Philip; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁸⁴ Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁸⁵ Wendy Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁸⁶ John Scarborough, *Roman Medicine* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969); Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 2004); "From Galen to Alexander, Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity," in *DOP* 38, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985); Nutton, "Murders and Miracles: Lay Attitudes Towards Medicine in Classical Antiquity," in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society* (ed. by Roy Porter; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁸⁷ R.J.S. Barrett-Lennard, *Christian Healing after the New Testament: Some Approaches to Illness in the Second, Third, and Fourth Centuries* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994).

This dissertation falls into the category of scholarship that incorporates patristic and classical literature in its analysis of visual art of Late Antiquity. Wilpert, Deichmann, Grabar, and Kitzinger were extremely influential in the academic study of art of Late Antiquity. However, to a large extent the visual art was not examined through the lens of historical study and placed in its proper historical context. Granted, this discrepancy may never have been their primary goal. I argue that by examining the visual evidence of Christ the Miracle Worker with a keen eye towards the cognate texts, a fuller picture can be painted of Late Antiquity, particularly of Christians in Late Antiquity. For the most part, I follow Thomas Mathews and Paul Corby Finney in their argument that Christian art of Late Antiquity exhibits a competition between Christians and non-Christians. I diverge from Mathews, particularly in how he interprets the healing and miracle working images, that is evident in the seventh chapter on the staff of Christ. Although this work treats relevant images from Late Antiquity, it employs similar methods as Mathews, Finney, and Jensen, and maintains a similar goal: that visual art resonates and illuminates the religious study of Late Antiquity. This present work, observing a particular theme in visual imagery through the lens of textual history, is relevant to religionists, classicists, and art historians.

It should be noted that this dissertation focuses primarily upon art works from Rome and Gaul. This may appear limiting for the subject of Christ performing healings and miracles in imagery of Late Antiquity. However, as manifested in earlier catalogues of Wilpert and Deichmann, the bounty of evidence concerning the image of Christ the Miracle Worker occurs in these locales. In performing primary research, the author studied the evidence at the Vatican Museums and in Arles. As a result this dissertation does not consider evidence of Christ the Miracle Worker from Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine, or North Africa, however the conclusions drawn from this study concern the two major areas this

image appeared in Late Antiquity and can certainly affect the interpretation of outside examples from these groups.

IV. Outline

This dissertation includes six primary chapters dealing with ancient texts and the image of Christ the Miracle Worker in the catacombs and relief sculpture, followed by a brief conclusion. The first two chapters of the dissertation focus on textual evidence of healings and miracles in Late Antiquity and early Christianity. Chapter Two examines pagan evidence of healings and miracles, allowing space to discuss pertinent issues and themes. The chapter discusses the role of magic in antiquity, and its relationship with the figure of Christ, as well as Christ's opponent, Apollonius of Tyana. The final heading treats the role of the cult of Asclepius. The evidence from Aelius Aristides and Julian the Apostate exhibit the keen devotion Asclepius engendered in the Late Antique population. Moreover, Julian displayed an awareness of the similarities between Asclepius and Christ. This chapter demonstrates the burgeoning rivalry between Asclepius and Christ within the framework of healing.

Chapter Three focuses on the Christian evidence that highlights the use of the title "physician" to describe the exploits of Christ. Christian texts emphasize the significance of the image of Christ the Physician and the growing importance of miracles. The chapter introduces New Testament evidence of Christ's healings and miracles that demonstrate a possible competition with Asclepius. This is followed by Greek and Latin patristic evidence that reveals an elevated competition with Christ as well as an interest in the image of Christ the Physician. The writings and sermons of Ambrose and Augustine bear witness to the burgeoning image of Christ the Physician as well as an interest in miracles. The textual

references of Christ as a great healer and miracle worker are an important component to understand before considering the visual images. The patristic references illustrated the popular reception Christ the Miracle Worker had in Late Antiquity. The church fathers were motivated to highlight the abilities of Christ in order to secure his primacy. This chapter argues that the church fathers continually emphasized the healing and miracle working abilities of Christ in order to assert Christ as the dominant religious figure.

As the previous chapter treats the textual image of Christ the Miracle Worker, this chapter discusses the specific art works of Christ performing healings and miracles. Chapter Four identifies the catacomb images of Christ in the act of healing that are relevant to the dissertation. The catacomb images of Christ healing include representations of the healing of the paralytic and the woman with the issue of blood. Images of Christ in the act of healing recall the healing god Asclepius. After examining the style of depiction of Asclepius and Jesus, this chapter includes a treatment of the Anatomy Lesson image at the catacomb of Via Latina. This chapter shows the intent Christian desire to portray Jesus as an unrivaled healer in Late Antiquity.

Chapter Five initially treats the miracle of resurrection as it appears in the catacomb art. The raising of the dead, most notably the raising of Lazarus, exhibits the power and authority of Christ. This chapter also treats the nature miracles that appear in catacomb art, including the Cana miracle and the division of the loaves, as well as the appearance of Moses and the portrayal of his miracles. This chapter concludes with an assessment of the catacomb images, explaining their significance.

Chapter Six discusses the miracles of Christ as they appear in Christian relief sculpture. The images on relief sculpture display the melding of supercessionism with pagan and non-pagan influences. The chapter begins by introducing the chronology of examples

and images, especially as they relate to the catacomb examples. The healing scenes, including the healing of the paralytic, the healing of the blind man, and the woman with the issue of blood, are discussed. The scenes of Christ raising the dead, a theme that occurs with a wider degree of frequency and variance than in the catacomb images, are also treated. In the relief sculpture, the raising of the dead and the nature miracle scenes demonstrate an attention to the Gospel of John. The influence of the Gospel of John is apparent in the relief sculpture, as is a continued attention to the healing abilities of Christ.

While the previous three chapters treat the images of Christ's healings and miracles within the respective mediums of catacomb wall paintings and relief sculpture, Chapter Seven narrowly focuses on a precise stylistic element that appears in both arenas. This chapter considers the staff of Jesus that is present in both the catacomb images and on relief sculpture. The staff of Jesus is a peculiar inclusion that has never been satisfactorily addressed in the secondary literature. This chapter discusses the terminology, heritage and appearance of the staff in text and art. After initially treating the arguments whether Jesus was intentionally portrayed as a magician proffered by Smith, Mathews, and rebutted by Finney, this chapter analyzes the category of theurgy and its relationship to philosophy. The appearance of the staff portrays Christ, Moses, or Peter as a theurgist, not as a magician, and certainly not as any ordinary philosopher. While the staff of Christ is not evocative of the staff of Asclepius, the image of Christ the Miracle Worker does recall the healing god in the physical action of Christ's miracles. This chapter ultimately shows that the staff of Jesus directly reflects the staff of Moses. Just as Moses is relevant to the image of Christ the Miracle Worker, so is Peter. This chapter concludes by discussing the inclusion of Peter in the iconography of Christ's miracle scenes. In these later examples, Peter becomes the

“New Moses,” just as in the earlier catacomb paintings Christ was visually emphasized as Moses.

A discussion of the development of the image of Christ the Miracle Worker after the fourth century principally introduces the concluding Chapter Eight. After the fourth century, the miraculous nature of Christ in imagery diminishes but does not entirely fade away. Examples of Christ healing, occasionally with the staff, appear on Byzantine ivories, mosaics, illuminated manuscripts, and on the throne of Maximian in Ravenna. However, the healing power of Christ and the relationship between religion and healing was just as important after the fourth century as before with the rise of reliquary trade and pilgrimage routes. In treatises and sermons, the image of Christ as the exceptional physician or as the preeminent miracle worker not only persists, but proliferates. The designation appears in homilies of Asterius of Amasea and Peter Chrysologus of the fifth century, indicating the continued desire to project the image of Christ the Miracle Worker to the laity, and revealing the laity’s proclivity to focus on the miraculous.⁸⁸

Finally, this concluding chapter assesses the analysis made in the previous chapters. The study provided in this dissertation on the image of Christ the Miracle Worker demonstrates that the visual and textual examples of the image were designed to allow Christianity to be widely accepted in the Late Antique world as well as understood by its own members. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker reveals the desire to focus on the miraculous in several mediums of Late Antique culture, defining the personhood of Christ in terms of healing and miracle working. By utilizing various approaches and methods that

⁸⁸ Asterius of Amasea, *Homily I: On the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus*, collected in *Homilies I-XIV* (trans. by C. Datema; Leiden: Brill, 1970). Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 38*: “Men could not be healed save by arming themselves with all the long-suffering goodness of the heavenly Physician”; cf. *Sermon 44*: “This is the reason why the Holy Prophet, about to bring forth his heaven-sent medicine for body and soul, uncovers the deep recesses of impiety. He exposes the hidden diseases—sin,” see *FC*, vol. 17 (trans. by George E. Ganss; New York: FC, 1953); and *Sermon 50.61*.

highlight Christ as the decisive healer and miracle worker, early Christian texts and imagery provided an epistemology for the members of the early church, detailing what Christians believed, what Christians were, and what they were not.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF HEALING AND MIRACLES IN PAGAN SOURCES

In Late Antiquity, not unlike today, individuals focused a great deal of attention on their health and well-being. The line between health and illness was precarious. An injured or ill person could not support his or her family. When illness or injury struck, the fragile nature of existence in Late Antiquity was brought to the forefront. Remedies were sought with the utmost enthusiasm that bordered on fanaticism. With limited options and chance for success the belief in miraculous cures was very pervasive. Medicine and miracle were linked together since healing was so closely associated with religion. The belief in ineffable cures naturally rose from belief in the ineffable.

Health care in Late Antiquity was imperfect, not always effective, and occasionally expensive. In general, there were four options for a sick person to seek treatment in antiquity. One could 1) go to a physician, 2) use homeopathic self-administered remedies, 3) seek the aid of a magician or utilize magical incantations, or 4) visit a temple of the local healing cult. Arguably, all the health care options with the exception of homeopathic remedies required some type of payment. While all four options never lacked practitioners, it can be argued that the healing cult was the most popular in the first four centuries. Moreover, the healing cult was accepted by physicians since the cult treated chronic illnesses such as paralysis or blindness. The divine healing option often provided more individual attention to such chronic ailments, even if the effect was “care” more than actual “cure” the

treatment of the healing cult was touted as successful more often than not.¹ Magic was widely practiced, even though received with the severest ridicule. The realm of magic and the excessive expression of devotion, *superstitio*, were viewed as improper, manipulative, and abhorrent. As the competition between pagans and Christians elevated in the second and third centuries, the arena of magic provided many terms of slander for each party to use against each other.

The images of Christ the Miracle Worker were possibly influenced by all four options, but were particularly affected by the practices of magic and the healing cult. Healing and miracle working was inextricably tied to religion in Late Antiquity, and often the line separating the categories was porous. The realm of healing and miracle working was competitive. Figures such as Asclepius and Apollonius of Tyana were parallels as well as potent adversaries for the emerging Christian religion and their chosen deity of Jesus Christ.

Late Antique religion had certain rubrics of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Excessive frivolity or superstition was maligned as well as non-belief or atheism. Healing and miracle working often skirted the border line between true *religio* and *superstitio*. Cicero affirmed that true *religio* was a positive expression of the preservation of ritual and tradition in relation to the gods, while *superstitio* is branded as excessive, antiquated, and decidedly negative.² A healing or a miracle may fall somewhere in between these polarities. However, pagans and Christians appear to be in concert in their thoughts on superstition and their opposition to magic. Albeit similar, their difference in chosen deities set the groups apart, forcing each to lob epithets against the other.

¹ See Vivian Nutton, "Healers in the Medical Market Place: Towards a Social History of Greco-Roman Medicine," in *Medicine in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33.

² Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.28.

This chapter will discuss the historical context of Late Antiquity that is so critical to understanding the later images of Christ performing healings and miracles. First, the pagan conception of superstition and opposition to magic will be introduced. By considering how non-Christian groups viewed superstition and magic, one can witness the similarities with the Christian understanding of these elements. Second, the practice of magic in Late Antiquity will be examined. The understanding of magic is relevant to any study of healing and miracle working since they all share some significant overlap. Finally, the popularity and tradition of the healing cult, specifically the cult of Asclepius will be detailed, showing the impact Asclepius had on Late Antiquity and on Christianity in Late Antiquity. By the third century, the Late Antique culture was a receptive atmosphere for the images of Christ the Miracle Worker.

I. Superstition and Magic as Terms of Slander

The pagan-Christian polemic of Late Antiquity often resembled a schoolyard fight. In order to understand the gravity of the labels used in these altercations, it is important to unpack their significance on both sides. No rebuttal was precisely *sui generis*; the attack and response employed analogous methods. After any accusation, the accused quickly became the accuser, lofting similar epithets against the opposing party. This was exactly the tactic the church father Tertullian employed in late second-century Carthage. Tertullian rebuked the pagans for their insipid superstition, attempting to turn the tables against his opponents.³ Tertullian asserted that the Romans were not always steeped in *superstitio*, and the most learned of their society attack such practices. Prior to Romulus' heir the Roman king Numa

³ See Introduction note 25, and also Tertullian's *Apology* 12.7; 21.30; 24.7; 25.12; 38.4; 46.4, using the term *superstitio*.

Pompilius, he claimed “not yet among the Romans did service of the gods rest on images or temples. It was a frugal religion.” Even the philosophers, he said, “openly destroy your gods, they attack your superstitions in their treatises.”⁴ *Superstitio* was obviously not the only dirty word used against the Christians by their pagan opponents. “Magicians, soothsayers, too, diviners, and astrologers,” terms portraying any association with magic were employed as well.⁵

Plutarch, who lived from 50-120 CE, described the divergent roles of superstition and atheism in his essay, “On Superstition.”⁶ Plutarch was not against religion. He believed that for a citizen, “the pleasantest things that men enjoy are festal days and banquets at the temples, initiations and mystic rites, and prayer and adoration of the gods.”⁷ Plutarch made it quite clear that the gods are not evil in any way, are not involved with divine punishment, and while prone to manipulation are benevolent in every facet. The superstitious person induced the gods with spurious rites and rituals. For Plutarch, *deisidaimonia* included magic and incantations.⁸ His descriptions of the erroneous rituals of the superstitious person depicted the workings of a magician in antiquity. Plutarch described the strict attention to detail and correctness of the superstitious sacrifice, for example paying attention to the tongue of the sacrificial animal.⁹ Superstition made demands of the gods instead of

⁴ Tertullian, *Apol.* 25.12; 46.4 (Rendall, LCL).

⁵ Tertullian, *Apol.* 43.1 (Rendall, LCL): “tum sicarii, venenarii, magi, item aruspices...”

⁶ Plutarch, *On Superstition* 170A. While the essay has usually been ascribed to Plutarch, it is questionable whether he is its true author or not. For further reading see Smith, “De Superstitione,” in *Plutarch’s Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. by Hans Dieter Betz; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 6-7.

⁷ Plutarch, *Superst.* 169D (Babbitt, LCL).

⁸ See Introduction, 7-10 for a treatment of the terms *superstitio* and *deisidaimonia*. While the terms are better described as cousins than siblings, in Plutarch’s treatise it synonymous with *superstitio*.

⁹ Plutarch, *Superst.*, 166B.

supplicating to the gods.¹⁰ In his depiction of people plagued with superstitious fear, Plutarch claimed their fatal flaw was their susceptibility to magic. While atheism was the polar opposite of superstition, Plutarch understood why one would choose ignorance over depraved magic.¹¹ His task was not to equally condemn superstition and atheism, but to show how both ways of thinking avoided the waters of “true religion” that lay between the opposing realms.¹²

True religion for Plutarch was the tradition of Roman cultic practice ingrained in Roman life. Moreover, true religion was the mean between the extremes of *deisidaimonia* and atheism. The problem with Plutarch’s description of a gulf separating superstition and atheism is that it leaves many things open to interpretation. Supernatural elements were part of cultic practice. In Plutarch’s case, anything that did not involve excessive fear of the gods or pure ignorance was safely in the comfortable middle. In Plutarch’s other works, he attempted to provide rational explanations for seemingly miraculous events while revealing his belief in the efficacy of physicians’ cures.¹³ However, he ultimately left room for the transcendent. Miracles can happen in the worship of the gods, just as visions occur during sleep. In his life of Camillus, following the sack of Veii, the statue of Juno was disassembled and readied for transport to Rome. Camillus prayed to the statue, asking Juno to get along with the other deities of Rome, and observers claimed the statue answered she was ready and

¹⁰ See H. Armin Moellering, *Plutarch on Superstition* (Boston, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1962), 78.

¹¹ Plutarch was more concerned that those that are superstitious are not similarly condemned as the atheists. See *Superst.* 169F. Also see Wilken, *The Christians*, 61. Plutarch wondered why atheists then are accused of impiety while superstitious people are not. He cited the case of Anaxagoras from *The Odyssey* who called the sun a stone and was brought to trial, while the Cimmerians who never believed in the sun were never accused of impiety. See Moellering, *Plutarch on Superstition*, 78-79.

¹² Plutarch, *Superst.* 171F.

¹³ Plutarch, *Cato Major*, 23.3-4. He explained Cato’s assertion that all Greek physicians were murderers by claiming he had mixed up his versions of the Hippocratic Oath. Also see *Table Talk* 8, 9: 731B-734D for a discussion for the origins of disease. Plutarch believed diseases were not divine punishment but were individual cases.

willing.¹⁴ Plutarch realized that many may question such an event, and others claim to witness statues sweating or bleeding. In his view, it was best to accept the miracle without excessive credulity or incredulity and go to no extremes.¹⁵

Outside of Plutarch's mean of religion dwells atheism and despicable magic. Within the mean of true religion, there was indeed room for miracles and dramatic events to occur. Whether intentional or unintentional, Plutarch did not make his position regarding miracles and ineffable healings very clear. For Plutarch, any event that steers into realms of superstition should be avoided, and if it involves healing, even efficacious healings, it was best to credit the gods and go no further.

Plutarch's view was echoed by Marcus Aurelius in 170 CE and Plotinus in 250 CE, as they similarly ridiculed magical or superstitious thinking. Marcus Aurelius credited Diognetus for advising him "not to busy myself about trifling things, and not to give credit to what was said by miracle-workers and jugglers about incantations and the driving away of demons and such things..."¹⁶ For Marcus Aurelius, the practice of magic was a distracting nuisance, as one should always consider the source of anything said by or about magicians.

Plotinus criticized any believer in exorcisms or magicians who attempt to "make themselves more impressive in the eyes of the masses, who wonder at the powers of magicians," when the riddle to their power has a much more logical and mundane answer.¹⁷ Plotinus was clearly speaking not only about exorcisms but healings as well. He claimed that healers attempt to explain their cures as the scaring away of demons in the body. Plotinus

¹⁴ See Plutarch, *Camillus* 6; 5.22.

¹⁵ Plutarch *Camillus* 6. He also wrote treatments of the oracles of Apollo in *On the E at Delphi*, as well as a treatment *On Isis and Osiris*, and was a priest at Delphi late in his life.

¹⁶ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 1.6 (Long). See Marcus' praise of divine healing at 1.17, and see 12-13 in the Introduction.

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.14 (Armstrong, LCL).

argued that the actual cure was more grounded in science and reality, such as “a vigorous movement of the bowels,” or “blood-letting.”¹⁸ Plotinus also provided a glimpse into the true religion that Plutarch mentions; the desired way of piety according to the philosophers. True religion, for Plotinus, was a philosophy that “displays simplicity and straightforwardness of character along with clear thinking, and aims at dignity, not rash arrogance, and combines its confident boldness with reason and much safeguarding and caution and a great deal of circumspection.”¹⁹ Superstition was not the path to true religion, and any element of Christianity would bear the stain of superstition if it persisted in outwardly displaying signs of a magical or otherworldly nature. The pagan philosopher Celsus attacked Christianity with a similar understanding of superstition. His attack, however, focused on the person and work of Christ as he chose to malign the representative of Christianity with the term “magician.”

II. The Role of Magic in Antiquity

II. 1. Celsus on Magic and Miracles

Celsus was a pagan philosopher who wrote an influential work against the Christians around 177 CE, entitled *The Great Doctrine*.²⁰ Much of what we know about Celsus is

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The date of Celsus' work is dependent on the identity of the “Celsus” in question (Origen, *Against Celsus*, pref. 4, and 1.8; PG 11, 669B). For example, this is not the same Celsus as the author responsible for the books *On Medicine*. The Celsus from Nero's time was likely the author of *On Medicine*, Aulus Cornelius Celsus. The latter Celsus from Hadrian's time was probably the philosopher in question, but his identity as an Epicurean is problematic, for if anything, the Celsus portrayed in Origen's response is a Middle Platonist. For further reading see, Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet*, 25, 47, 61); Chadwick in his introduction to his

reconstructed in Origen's response written about eighty years later and in a statement in Eusebius' history. Eusebius wrote that when Origen was over sixty years old, he wrote the eight treatises in reply to the work of "Celsus the Epicurean," branding Celsus with a questionable label handily provided by Origen.²¹ Origen's response to Celsus illuminated the fact that Celsus' work was fairly well-known, prompting Origen to construct a rebuttal. Origen was obviously worried that Christians "may be shaken and disturbed by the writings of Celsus," indicating that this was a serious matter indeed.²²

Celsus decried Christianity as a superstition from the outset citing their secret rites: "Christians perform their rites and teach their doctrines in secret." He was careful to place Christianity on the same plane as philosophy, claiming that "Christianity is commonplace and in comparison with the other philosophers contains no teaching that is impressive or new."²³ Celsus was more vicious in tearing down any association between Christianity and philosophy.²⁴ Celsus attempted to devalue Christianity by insisting that it reeks of insipid superstition. He described Christians as "begging priests of Cybele and soothsayers, and to

translation of *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), xxv; Michael Frede, "Origen's Treatise *Against Celsus*," in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (ed. by Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 148; Theodor Keim, *Celsus Wabres Wort* (Zurich, 1873), 276; R. Joseph Hoffman *On True Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 30-33.

²¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.36.2 (PG 20, 596C).

²² Origen, *Cels.* pref. 4 (PG 11, 647A). For a more recent Greek text see M. Borret, *Contre Celse*, SC 4 vols. 132, 136, 147, 150 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967-76). The English translations cited of *Against Celsus* derives from Henry Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

²³ Origen, *Cels.* 1.3-4 (PG 11, 657-664; Chadwick).

²⁴ Galen's role in this discussion is worthy of note, see Richard Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949) and Robert Wilken, "Collegia, Philosophical Schools, and Theology," in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity* (ed. by Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke; Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1971), 277; and Wilken, *The Christians*, 74. Galen aligned Judaism and Christianity under the subject heading of philosophy. He further ridiculed both groups' system of inquiry: "If I had in mind people who taught their pupils in the same way as the followers of Moses and Christ teach theirs – for they order them to accept everything on faith – I should not have given you a definition" (Walzer, 15).

worshippers of Mithras and Sabazius, and whatever else one might meet, apparitions of Hecates or of some other daemon or daemons. For just as among them scoundrels frequently take advantage of the lack of education of gullible people and lead them wherever they wish...this happens among the Christians.”²⁵ The Christians are thus guilty of duping people into belief by preying upon their irrational fear; the same fear Plutarch identified in his laments *On Superstition*. According to Celsus, Christianity bears the ineradicable and undesirable mark of superstition. The philosopher spoke of Christianity as a precarious foreign cult, and therefore Christianity was an invalid road to true piety.

One of Celsus’ primary tactics was to accuse Christianity of magical practice. Celsus claimed that “Christians get the power which they seem to possess by pronouncing the names of certain daemons and incantations,” insinuating that Christians use magical chants and charms to garner power.²⁶ Magic is not the mark of a true philosophy.²⁷ By placing Christianity in the realm of magic, Celsus was pulling the philosophical rug out from under it. The practice of magic was wholly outside the realm of philosophy. Magicians cannot and can never be philosophers.²⁸ Celsus was not disputing that Christians have power; he is criticizing the source and method of that power. Celsus accomplished this by focusing on the person of Jesus. The miracles of Jesus are the true calling card of a magician. Celsus attempted to prove that Jesus used magic by asserting that there was no divine hand

²⁵ Origen, *Cels.* 1.9 (PG 11,676B; Chadwick).

²⁶ Origen, *Cels.* 1.6 (PG 11, 665^a; Chadwick). Also see Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1988), 136-139.

²⁷ Origen, *Cels.* 1.69 (PG 11, 789). Origen questioned whether this Celsus is the same Celsus as Lucian’s who wrote several books against magic, indicating that his opponent is possibly amenable to magic.

²⁸ Eugene Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician?: Celsus and Origen on Jesus* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 46; also see Wilken, *The Christians*, 94.

involved in the miracles. Jesus may have worked miracles, but Celsus was disputing the Christian claim that he was the Son of God.

Origen took Celsus' slander against Christianity quite seriously. Much of Celsus' attack stemmed from his characterization of the miracles of Jesus as the marks of a magician. Celsus claimed that "it was by magic that he was able to do the miracles which he appeared to have done; and because he foresaw that others too would get to know the same formulas and do the same thing, and boast that they did so by God's power, Jesus expelled them from his society."²⁹ Celsus was arguing that the miracles performed by Jesus were the work of a magician since he used magical incantations. Jesus naturally had to protect his status as a magician. He had to prevent anyone from learning his spells, the secrets of his tradecraft; thus, he was forced to expel some people from his circle. Celsus claimed that Jesus derived his power to work miracles from magic, a very negative connotation in antiquity. Jesus' miracles have no divine origin, and are couched in the realm of magician's trickery. Therefore, Celsus did not doubt the occurrence of Christ's miracles, just the claim that they were authored by the divine. By associating Christ's miracles with the practice of magic, he was able to besmirch Christ's divine reputation. Christ's miracles could have been just magic tricks:

let us believe that these miracles were really done by you...the works of sorcerers who profess to do wonderful miracles, and the accomplishments of those who are taught by Egyptians, who for a few obols make known their sacred lore in the middle of the market-place and drive daemons out of men and blow away diseases and invoke the souls of heroes, displaying expensive banquets and dining-tables and cakes and dishes which are non-existent, and who make things move as though they were alive although they are not really so, but only appear as such in the imagination...Since these men do these wonders, ought we to think them sons of God? Or ought we to say that they are the practices of wicked men possessed by an evil daemon?³⁰

²⁹ Origen, *Cels.* 1.6 (Chadwick).

³⁰ Origen, *Cels.* 1.68 (Chadwick).

In his response to Celsus, Origen refuted any characterization of Jesus as a magician. Origen agreed that the miracles of Jesus cannot be explained, but calling them magical spells was erroneous. He pointed out that Christians make no use of spells. The disciples performed miracles only in the name of Jesus, not by using incantations.³¹ Origen defended Jesus by citing that Christ did not resemble the market-place magician Celsus described. Jesus did not perform tricks to show off his own powers; he used his power to call observers to moral reformation.³² Furthermore, Origen claimed he knew of no sorcerers who use tricks to educate people of God, or persuade people to live a life as men of God. Magicians were more in the habit of securing love charms or health remedies, not transforming the lives of humanity. Jesus was unique in the fact that his strong moral life served as an example for his followers, a quality that no sorcerer exhibits since sorcerers are swallowed up by their own greed.

Given the force of Origen's defense, Celsus' accusations of Jesus as a sorcerer obviously were considered serious. Celsus' Jesus performed his miracles with magic, and thus the works of Jesus were without any divine agency. Jesus was merely a manipulator of the population. Celsus' accusation of magic and manipulation stripped any divine power from Christ's miracles.³³ Origen countered by focusing on Jesus' results, not his methods. For Origen, the source of Jesus' power was indubitably divine for it was for human good. Instead of sidestepping the charge of manipulation, Origen focused on the end results, namely, the moral transformation and the call to live a life under God. The label of "magic"

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ See Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 58.

was a powerful one in Late Antiquity. Origen and other church fathers often had to maneuver around such a charge instead of combating it head-on. In their polemic, Celsus and Origen both maintained that magic was disreputable. In order to measure the weight of their disdain, the negative conception of magic in Late Antiquity needs to be examined.

II. 2. The Practice of Magic in Late Antiquity and the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM)

The use and practice of magic was fairly widespread from the sixth century BCE through Late Antiquity. The practice never gained a positive reputation and instead generated many critics. Just as the terms *deisidaimonia* and *superstitio* may have been positive at one point but slowly became considered negative, the same can be said for the terms *goes* or *magos*.³⁴ Plato connected the term *goes* with *magos*, associating figures that deviate from the official civic religion as corrupt seers.³⁵ Plato believed the magician threatened the relationship between humans and the gods, and the use of magical practices aimed at manipulating the gods, corrupting the ideal relationship of human submission to the gods' will.

Just as Alexandria was noted as a center for medicine in the ancient world, its sister Egyptian city of Memphis was noted as the center for magic. Jerome and Lucian, among others, cited Memphis as the capital of magic.³⁶ In Jerome's *Life of Hilarion*, a boy engraved a spell upon a copper sheet and buried it beneath the house of the object of his desire.

Hilarion restored the girl to health, and ordered the copper sheet bearing the incantation to

³⁴ See Introduction, 15-17.

³⁵ *Goes* or *goeteia* were terms associated with ritual mourning, the practice of healing and divination. After Plato, *magos* and *goes* were similarly defined and understood. See Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (trans. by Franklin Philip; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 24-25.

³⁶ Jerome, *Life of Hilarion*, 21; Lucian, *Lover of Lies*, 34-36. See Graf, "How to Cope with a Difficult Life: A View of Ancient Magic," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium* (ed. by Peter Schäfer, Hans G. Kippenberg; Leiden /New York: Brill, 1997), 93-94.

be removed. Jerome's story offered several insights into the use of magic in the ancient world. First, magic is obviously a learned art and cannot be wielded fruitfully by just any one. The boy from Gaza had to go to Memphis and prepare his charm. Jerome also illustrated a customary use of magic: love spells. It was fairly common for men in the ancient world to utilize magic in order to gain the affection of a woman. Love spells and incantations were not used for wanton sexual gratification, they were used to obtain a wife, usually as a last resort. This should not give magic a veneer of nobility; love spells in pursuit of an unwilling wife were precisely what led to legal restrictions against magic in the empire.³⁷ A wife was often an economic asset; through marriage, a man could gain access to a family's fortune.³⁸

The Greek Magical Papyri (PGM), a collection of spells and formulae from Egypt spanning the second century BCE to the fifth century CE, records hundreds of magical incantations.³⁹ The PGM provides insight into the use of magic for divination. Many recorded spells are for oracles and encounters with the gods, usually by dreams.⁴⁰ Vocalizing the spell in the correct manner and never deviating from its prescription was critical for its efficacy. The PGM indicates such an emphasis by insisting on the proper saying of the formula. Speaking the name of the deity and the name of the supplicant was essential in a proper magical rite: "Wherefore, O Lady (Aphrodite) act, I beg, attract (name) whom (name)

³⁷ Magic used to falsely marry a widow and accrue at least a portion of her property (or at the very least higher status) is precisely what Apuleius is accused of nearly two hundred years later, see Apuleius, *Apologia* 90.

³⁸ Graf, "How to Cope..." 104. In Rome, akin to the propagation of Greek medicine, magic's foreign nature likely did not engender it favorably to the elite. Cicero is ambivalent, as he associates the magi with Persia, saying they interpreted the dreams of Cyrus and are a group of "wise men and scholars among the Persians, see Cicero, *On Divination* 1.46.91. The poet Catullus, a contemporary of Cicero's also associated the magi with Persia, noting that the magi are a product of incest, and thus impious, see Catullus, *Carmen* 90.

³⁹ *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (ed. and trans. by Hans Dieter Betz; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ PGM VII 664-85 (Betz).

bore, to come with rapid step to my door...”⁴¹ If one wants to quench fire, kill a snake, send dreams, or ensure your wife’s fidelity, the spell must be said properly to the letter.⁴² Many spells are love charms while others are for healings and remedies. The large volume of spells indicates that magic was utilized by a great many people for the purposes of healing.

The PGM describes many similar rites and incantations for the purposes of healing. Saying “the wrath of Apollo, far-darting Lord,” will cure bloody flux, and carrying around the inscription “would that you be fated to be unborn and to die unmarried,” serves as a contraceptive.⁴³ There are numerous spells for restoring sight and for sleep aids. The focus in the spells is on the spoken or written word and on repetition. Spells must be carried out by rote, “Wrap a naked boy in linen from head to toe then clap your hands,” or it would be ineffective.⁴⁴ Whether for divination or for healing, the spells attempt to force the gods to perform actions for human benefit. They were popular because humans wished to take actions into their own hands to obtain divine or miraculous aid. Magic only involved careful attention and repetition, and of course, a fee or sacrifice to the magician or source who provided the formula. Maintaining secrecy was required by many spells contained in the PGM. Commands to secrecy are essential to secure the magic from disseminating, and also to protect the interests of the magician.⁴⁵ If everyone knew the spell, the magician would be useless and unimportant.

⁴¹ PGM IV 2907 (Betz).

⁴² PGM XIII 264-325.

⁴³ PGM XXIIa 2-14 (Betz).

⁴⁴ PGM IV 88-93 (Betz).

⁴⁵ Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (trans. by Francis McDonagh; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 68.

Late Antique authors often followed the precedent of earlier authors such as Catullus or Pliny in casting magicians as disreputable creatures. Lucian of Samosota criticized the life and death of the Cynic philosopher Peregrinus, once a Christian, who manipulated crowds into believing his magical ability. Lucian argued that “he manufactures myths and repeats certain oracles...to the purport that he is to become a guardian spirit of the night; it is plain, too, that he already covets altars and expects to be imaged in gold...it would be nothing unnatural if, among all the dolts that there are, some should be found to assert that they were relieved of quartan fevers by him, and that in the dark they had encountered the guardian spirit of the night!”⁴⁶ Lucian criticized Peregrinus as vain-glorious, all the way up to his self-immolation. But even after his death, his followers still believed in his resurrection, and reported witnessing his resurrected body dressed in white raiment.⁴⁷ Lucian’s story mirrors the Christians and also indicated the need and desire of people to believe in the ineffable, even when the circumstances of the story are quite ridiculous and beyond logic. The magical man such as Peregrinus fulfills such a desire. Lucian provided an insight into the ability of magicians to amass a vast following in Late Antiquity. This was a pattern that Apollonius of Tyana certainly followed.

II. 3. Apollonius of Tyana

According to his hagiographer Flavius Philostratus, Apollonius of Tyana would be misplaced in any discussion of magic. Even while delineating the wondrous acts of Apollonius, Philostratus never called him a magician and appeared to hold a similar distaste for magic as Celsus and the early Christians. Philostratus’ work, published around 217 CE,

⁴⁶ Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 27-28 (Harmon, LCL).

⁴⁷ Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus*, 40.

was an apology for Apollonius, not as a magician but as a miracle worker with a divine nature. Apollonius performed healings, exorcisms, and even resurrections, but according to Philostratus he was not a magician since he never accepted remuneration and performed his miracles without any spells or sacrifices, but accomplished them through his divine nature.⁴⁸ Thus, Philostratus' distinction between magic and miracle and what constituted a magician was perilously thin, and his task of defending Apollonius was admittedly difficult. Philostratus pointed out that Apollonius purportedly lived with magi in Persia and India, had the ability of foresight and exorcized demons, all marks of a magician.⁴⁹ His primary defense against these charges was to characterize Apollonius as a wonder working figure, not like any ordinary magician.

As a neo-Pythagorean himself, Philostratus was motivated to defend Apollonius on charges of magic, however his motivations to write such a revisionist biography were also political in nature. The philosopher embarked on his *vita* at the behest of the empress Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus, at the beginning of the third century. The empress convinced Philostratus to defend Apollonius and refute any slanderous accusations that he was merely a magician. Apollonius had been dead at least a hundred years and the empress coaxed Philostratus to write a book describing the life and work of this landmark neo-Pythagorean figure. It is possible that Philostratus had Christ firmly in mind while he was constructing the *vita* of Apollonius. The empress commissioned Philostratus not only to defend Apollonius but to construct a pagan response to the Christians and to author a pagan gospel, highlighting a Christ-like figure.⁵⁰ Like the gospel passion narratives, Philostratus

⁴⁸ Philostratus, *Life*. 7.38. When Apollonius removes his fetters in prison.

⁴⁹ Philostratus, *Life*. 1.2.

⁵⁰ Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 260.

asserted that Apollonius, like Christ, was arrested, imprisoned, and awaited execution. But unlike Christ, Apollonius escaped from his fetters, overcoming his penalty, and proving that he was the superior miracle worker.⁵¹ Thus, Philostratus' work was a pagan appropriation of the figure of Jesus.

In his text, Philostratus claimed that Julia was approached by a relative of Damis, providing the memoirs of Apollonius.⁵² Philostratus apparently possessed some written recollections of the life of Apollonius by some of Apollonius' disciples. Philostratus claimed to have based much of his findings on the memoirs of Apollonius' disciple Damis; however, it is questionable how much, if any, he borrowed from a supposed memoir of Damis.

Damis was not purely a straw man for Philostratus, some of the author's stories may have had a basis in the actual writings of Damis.⁵³ Philostratus likely credited Damis to give his biography a sense of legitimacy, providing eyewitness testimony to the life of the man from Tyana. Regardless of whether Damis was fictitious or not, the miracle stories Philostratus recorded did have some basis in reality; it was not all pure fiction. Philostratus could not invent every story involving the man from Tyana.

In Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, Apollonius was a neo-Pythagorean holy man and miracle worker who lived from 69-98 CE. He purportedly learned his trade from groups of magi in Persia and Brahmin priests in India.⁵⁴ Philostratus emphasized that Apollonius was, in fact, divine and was conversant with gods and goddesses such as Apollo and Athena.⁵⁵

⁵¹ See Philostratus, *Life*. 7.38 and below.

⁵² Philostratus, *Life*. 1.3.

⁵³ See Conybeare's introduction to the LCL edition of the *Life*, ix.

⁵⁴ Philostratus, *Life*. 1.18.

Apollonius resided at one of the Asclepieia in Aegae and gained a reputation as a healer. Philostratus credited Apollonius as performing at least 107 works of miracles.⁵⁶

In Philostratus' work, Apollonius treated everyone without discrimination or any requirement of faith. Apollonius did not make any demands of his supplicants, thus setting him apart from healing gods like Asclepius.⁵⁷ Though distinct, Philostratus found it beneficial to associate Apollonius with Asclepius. In his work, he asserted that Apollonius lived at the temple at Aegae as a child. During this time, Apollonius learned the traits of a healer, leading the god to tell a priest that he was glad to have Apollonius there as a witness.⁵⁸ At one point, a man dying of dropsy who took comfort in drink came to the temple seeking a cure, and the god refused. The man went to Apollonius who berated him for his foolishness but provided a diagnosis.⁵⁹ Philostratus mentioned this incident to associate Apollonius with Asclepius and to exhibit Apollonius providing wisdom to the ignorant.

Some of the healing accounts Philostratus preserved were rather mundane, such as a story of Apollonius healing a man with a paralyzed hand: "Another man had his hand

⁵⁵ Philostratus, *Life*. 1.11. Christopher P. Jones has contributed a recent LCL translation of the *Life*, however F.C. Conybeare's translation has been the standard for just under a century (and has a still very useful introduction) and it is his work that has been cited in this dissertation.

⁵⁶ Most of these miracles, by Morton Smith's admission, were not healings but exorcisms, see Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1978), 109. Also see Simon Swain, "Defending Hellenism: Philostratus, In Honour of Apollonius," in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (ed. by Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 157.

⁵⁷ Cleimenes of Argus related how he dreamed that Asclepius ordered him to take a cold bath to cure his affliction. When he refused, the god proclaimed he would not treat the cowardly. See *Inscriptiones Graecae*, 4.1.121-122; Stele 2.37 (Edelstein T. 423); and Johannes Wolmarans, "Asclepius of Epidaurus and Jesus of Nazareth," in *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 7 (1996), 122.

⁵⁸ Philostratus, *Life*. 1.9.

⁵⁹ Philostratus, *Life*. 1.10.

paralyzed, but left their presence in full possession of his limb.”⁶⁰ These accounts have little to do with magic, and in Philostratus’ opinion, were more evidence of Apollonius’ attunement to nature, as the author went on to describe Apollonius’ special insight into the flight of sparrows.⁶¹ It was Apollonius’ unique discipline that allowed him to have special insight into the divine and effect cures. Philostratus had Apollonius describe his own theology, claiming that some may worship him as a god, although he never ordered them to; his only concern is the betterment of man.⁶² Other miracles of Apollonius were more embellished and more magical, as in the healing of a boy bitten by a mad dog

Apollonius reflected a moment and said, ‘O Damis, the dog is a white shaggy sheep-dog, as big as an Amphiloichian hound, and he is standing at a certain fountain trembling all over, for he is longing to drink the water, but at the same time is afraid of it. Bring him to me to the bank of the river, where there are the wrestling grounds, merely telling him that it is I who call him.’ So Damis dragged the dog along, and it crouched at the feet of Apollonius...he bade the dog lick the wound all round where he had bitten the boy, so that the agent of the wound might in turn be its physician and healer.⁶³

Philostratus also emphasized the great similarity between Apollonius and Christ. He claimed that Apollonius was chaste like Christ and never fell prey to sexual passion.⁶⁴ Both figures were unjustly imprisoned by the authorities. Apollonius refused to eat meat, wear shoes, shave, or cut his hair, all in accordance with followers of the Pythagorean cult and similar to Christ. Magicians such as Apollonius were not normally considered healers; rather, they were revered for their ascetic lifestyle and not their specific actions of theurgy.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Philostratus, *Life*. 3.39.

⁶¹ Philostratus, *Life*. 4.3.

⁶² Philostratus, *Life*. 8.7.

⁶³ Philostratus, *Life*. 6.43 (Conybeare, LCL).

⁶⁴ Philostratus, *Life*. 1.13.

Apollonius was not primarily esteemed for his miracles, but in the manner he lived his life. He embodied the ideal of perfection, and the legends surrounding his life were effectively mined by Philostratus to portray Apollonius as a miracle worker similar to Christ.

In Philostratus' text, Apollonius was not like an ordinary human.⁶⁶ He describes Apollonius' release from his shackles in prison as a moment when an onlooker realized that "Apollonius' nature (was) godlike and more than human. Without sacrifice, or prayer, or a single word, he made light of his chains, and then put his leg back into them and acted like a prisoner."⁶⁷ Philostratus portrayed Apollonius as a Christ-like figure who did not need to rely on action or incantation to produce divine works. Upon his death, he appeared to his disciples proving his own immortal nature and the immortality of the soul. A doubter much like the apostle Thomas in John 20:24 disbelieved Apollonius' immortality. In his sleep, the holy man approached him in a dream convincing him of his divine status and the truthfulness of his teachings.⁶⁸ Thus, with the doubting Thomas figure and the dream revelation, Philostratus' Apollonius resembled Christ and Asclepius, appearing superior to both.

Philostratus' depiction was often fantastical, and the author took great care to describe Apollonius' abilities as a healer and miracle worker. His characterization of Apollonius as a miracle worker bore a strong resemblance to Christ, and it was no accident. Apollonius was depicted as performing successful resurrections that are akin to Christ, one

⁶⁵ Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 123 and see René Josef Rüttimann, *Asclepius and Jesus: The Form, Character and Status of the Asclepius Cult in the Second Century CE and its Influence on Early Christianity* Harvard University, 1987 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1987), 191. For an examination of the term "theurgy" and its distinction from magic, see Chapter Seven, 235.

⁶⁶ Philostratus, *Life*. 1.28.

⁶⁷ Philostratus, *Life*. 7.38 (Conybeare, LCL); also see 1.31-32.

⁶⁸ Philostratus, *Life*. 8.31.

even including a person on a bier recalling Luke 7:11-17: “A girl had died just in the hour of her marriage, and the bridegroom was following her bier lamenting... Apollonius then witnessing their grief, said ‘Put down the bier, for I will stay the tears that you are shedding for this maiden’... but merely touching her and whispering in secret some spell over her, at once woke up the maiden from her seeming death; and the girl spoke out loud, and returned to her father’s house, just as Alcestis did when she was brought back to life by Hercules.”⁶⁹ Philostratus could not resist solidifying the pagan claim to miracle working by inserting a reference to the Hercules myth of resurrecting Alcestis. By rooting Apollonius’ miracle in the pagan tradition, Philostratus emphasized superiority to any Christian ownership of resurrection miracles.

It is possible that Philostratus’ association of Apollonius and Christ was intentional. Scholars have been resistant to adopt the view that Philostratus intended his work to counter the gospels. Their restraint is in part due to the common feature of exorcists and magicians performing feats in a Late Antique context.⁷⁰ However, Philostratus’ Apollonius was not depicted as a common magician, but as a divine miracle man like Christ.

Morton Smith made the connection between Apollonius and Jesus by claiming that both were miracle workers, were persecuted for their use of magic, and taught an inner circle of disciples.⁷¹ Both figures ascended to heaven upon their death and continued to appear to their followers. Both figures were believed to be descendents of gods and were impugned as magicians by their enemies. Smith believed Philostratus intended to create an Apollonian

⁶⁹ Philostratus, *Life*. 4.45 (Conybeare, LCL).

⁷⁰ Conybeare laments this trend in his introduction. See the LCL edition of the *Life*, xv.

⁷¹ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 85.

gospel to circumvent any association between Apollonius and magic.⁷² Smith claimed that Philostratus and the gospel writers' defense of their clients implicate them as magicians. Even in light of his defense, by including miracles and exorcisms, Philostratus leaves his hero open to suspicion as a magician. Smith, however, is a problematic source to consider. Smith did not provide the most persuasive argument as he has been accused of manipulating gospel citations to his advantage, and disregarding the rather large issue that magic was universally maligned by pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity.⁷³

Similarly, the gospel writers needed to downplay any magical traits in Christ. Smith argued that the gospel writers attempted to minimize Jesus' magical attributes; however the miracles were the marks of the magician.⁷⁴ He claimed the importance of magic in the first century is found in the gospel of Matthew in the infancy narrative with the appearance of the magi. Smith contended that the visit of the three magi to honor Jesus' birth identifies Jesus as possibly the supreme magus.⁷⁵ This particular argument is unlikely given the symbolism attached in later centuries to the magi as foreign representatives of the known world identifying the sacrificial role the infant Christ would play.

Smith's identification of Jesus as a magician is also problematic, and has been rebutted on the grounds that the Christians would never intentionally characterize their savior as a type of figure that was much maligned in Late Antiquity. Origen's response to

⁷² Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 87.

⁷³ Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 153. Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 114. Bernd Kollmann catalogues the various viewpoints on Jesus the Magician in his, *Jesus und die Christen als Wundertäter: Studien zu Magie, Medizin und Schamanismus in Antike und Christentum*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 36-38.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 87-93.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 86 and also *Life*. 1.31, Philostratus depicts an interesting scene where Apollonius sacrifices using the element of frankincense. If the magi were understood as magicians, the notion that they were paying homage to the supreme magus of Christ is dubious, implying that there was a hierarchy amongst Late Antique magicians.

Celsus, reminding him that Jesus did not use incantations, could work just as well against Smith.⁷⁶ While words are important in magic and they are endowed with power, Graham Twelftree notes that Jesus' formulae are unquestionably different than those used by magicians.⁷⁷ Paul Corby Finney argues that surely by the fourth century Christians had been programmed to reject all comparisons of Christ to a "smarmy magician."⁷⁸ Identifying Jesus as a magician is far from assured.

Still, Philostratus attempted to defend Apollonius on any charge of magic. He claimed that magic relies upon proper technique while Apollonius relied upon divine wisdom and monastic discipline to effect miracles.⁷⁹ Philostratus argued that magic results in success or failure based upon method. He denounced magic as a fraudulent art that is used primarily for love charms.⁸⁰ Apollonius' power was beyond magical technique, and Philostratus asserted Apollonius as an utmost philosopher. Philostratus' main goal in his work was to rehabilitate Apollonius' reputation. Associating Apollonius with Christ was perhaps one stated aim; another was to label Apollonius a philosopher. Calling Apollonius a "philosopher" accomplished this desire, as the distinction between philosopher and theurgy is very fine and will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

⁷⁶ Origen, *Cels.* 1.68.

⁷⁷ Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 153. Kee points out the inconsistent use of the gospel accounts by Smith, such as leaving out the eschatological implications, and ridicules his argument as based upon his "eclectic personal preferences," in *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*, 114. Spells were usually spoken softly and guarded securely in order to prevent theft, see Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 64.

⁷⁸ Paul Corby Finney, "Do You Think God is a Magician?" in *Akten des Symposiums frühchristliche Sarkophage*, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, (1999), 106.

⁷⁹ Philostratus, *Life*. 8.7. Apollonius credited his light diet for enabling him to foresee the plague of Ephesus: "This diet, my king, guards my senses in a kind of indescribable ether or clear air, and forbids them to contract any foul or turbid matter, and allows me to discern, as in the sheen of a looking-glass, everything that is happening or is to be" (Conybeare, LCL).

⁸⁰ Philostratus, *Life*. 7.39.

Philostratus attached the label of philosopher to Apollonius by reporting that emperor Vespasian sought his advice on a trip to Egypt: “If all men, Apollonius, were disposed to be philosophers in the same spirit as yourself, then the lot not less of philosophy than of poverty would be an extremely happy one; for your philosophy is pure and disinterested, and your poverty is voluntary. Farewell.”⁸¹ Philostratus not only provided an imperial endorsement, he distinguished Apollonius as a philosopher and not a purveyor of depraved superstition, granting him even more legitimacy. He depicted Vespasian’s visit with Apollonius taking place in a temple, a venue that is not the realm of sorcerers, further distancing Apollonius from charges of magic. Noting that his poverty was voluntary also cast Apollonius in a favorable light. He was characterized as a man of the people who paid attention to the poor.

The response Apollonius evoked from Lucian and Dio Cassius indicated that Apollonius’ notoriety was fairly widespread. Just as Philostratus characterized Apollonius as a divine miracle worker, other writers such as Lucian and Dio Cassius characterized him as a *magus* in the full negative sense the word may imply, and insinuated that he had a stained reputation.⁸² Accordingly, Lucian ridiculed Alexander of Abonoteichus as a follower of Asclepius, and moreover as a follower of Apollonius:

Among others, he had an admirer who was a quack, one of those who advertise ‘enchantments, miraculous incantations, charms for your love-affairs, ‘sendings’ for your enemies, disclosures of buried treasure, and successions to estates. As this man saw that he was an apt lad, more than ready to assist him in his affairs, and that the boy was quite as much enamored with his roguery as he with the boy’s beauty, he gave him a thorough education and constantly made use of him as helper, servant, and acolyte. He himself was professedly a public physician...this teacher and admirer of his was a man of Tyana by birth, one of those who had been followers of

⁸¹ Philostratus, *Life*, 8.7 (Conybeare, LCL).

⁸² Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 88.

the notorious Apollonius, and who knew his whole bag of tricks. You see what sort of school the man that I am describing comes from!⁸³

In such few sentences, Lucian succeeded in depicting Apollonius as a medical quack, a prescriber of love-charms, and a nefarious sorcerer who used spells on people to transfer estates (for Romans, the most dismal result of magical use). He also managed to depict Apollonius as a boy-lover, a false physician, and hinted at Apollonius' poor reputation by reminding Celsus of his most profane school of followers. Dio Cassius in the third century recalled the emperor Caracalla, who “was so fond of magicians and *goetes* that he even praised and honored Apollonius the Cappadocian, who flourished in Domitian's time and was a *goes* and *magos* in the strict sense of the words. Yet Caracalla built a temple for (those who worshipped him) as a hero.”⁸⁴ Regardless of Philostratus' efforts, many recognized Apollonius as a magician. Similarly, despite the gospel writers' efforts to portray Jesus as a unique divine figure, many considered Jesus a magician as well.

Following Philostratus' great effort in resurrecting his name, people may have paid closer attention to the man from Tyana. Hierocles, a governor under emperor Diocletian noted that Apollonius was as famous a miracle worker as Christ.⁸⁵ The emperor Alexander Severus who ruled from 205-235 CE was devoted to the image of Apollonius. In a biography of his life preserved in the *Historia Augusta*, the author described Alexander's morning routine: “If he had not lain with his wife in the early morning hours, he would worship in the sanctuary of his lares, in which he kept statues of the deified emperors – of

⁸³ Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet*, 5 (Harmon, LCL).

⁸⁴ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 78.18. (Carey, LCL; See Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 88. Carey interestingly translates *goes* as “juggler.” Apollonius was never considered a performer or court jester, so this translation is perplexing.) See Smith, note on *Jesus the Magician*, 189, that □□□□□□□□ can be, and has been, translated as “thorough” (as Carey does), but Smith is right to endorse a more negative connotation with “in the strict sense of the words.” Dio's discussion of Caracalla's enjoyment of magicians is not a positive reflection, rather, *goes* and *magos* is a dirty word here and elsewhere in antiquity.

⁸⁵ Reconstructed from Eusebius' response in his treatise against Philostratus' work and Hierocles, see below.

whom, however, only the best had been selected – and also of certain holy souls, among them Apollonius, and...Christ, Abraham, Orpheus, and others of this same character, and besides the portraits of his ancestors.”⁸⁶ Alexander was not a Christian, although his mother, Julia Mamaea (niece of Philostratus’ patroness Julia Domna) was a devoted Christian taught by Origen.⁸⁷ He undoubtedly was well-versed in Christianity, making the elevation of Apollonius to the same level of Christ all the more intriguing. Apollonius was included in the emperor’s inner sanctum, alongside the images of Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus, since he exhibited the same characteristics. Apollonius’ status was equal to the prominent deities of the Jews, Christians, and pagans.

Philostratus’ work unsurprisingly received a Christian response. Eusebius provided the strongest rebuttal to any of Philostratus’ characterizations of Apollonius as anything other than an insipid magician. Eusebius was motivated to respond to Philostratus’ work in no large part due to Hierocles’ drawn parallel between Apollonius and Christ. Hierocles was as guilty as Philostratus of attempting to draw comparisons between the Christian savior and the man from Tyana. Eusebius argued that Apollonius was a charlatan, if a magician at all, and if he had any magical powers it was due to the evil demons within him. He refuted any claim that he was a philosopher, and said that he hid behind the “mask of Pythagorean discipline.”⁸⁸ If Apollonius was divine, then Eusebius asked, why did he need training at the

⁸⁶ *Historia Augusta, Life of Severus Alexander* 29 (Magie, LCL). The work is often attributed to Lampridius, but its authorship remains in doubt. It should be noted that the *Historia Augusta* is a very problematic source and perhaps not very accurate concerning the actual life of Severus. See Thomas A. J. McGinn’s discussion of its reliability in *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 272-273. However in spite of its problems, the mere mention of an image of Apollonius in proximity to an image of Jesus warrants a mention.

⁸⁷ *Life of Severus Alexander* 22. As emperor, Alexander was very favorable to the Christians. He allowed Jews and Christians to practice their faith unmolested.

⁸⁸ Eusebius, *Against Hierocles* 5 (Conybeare, LCL). The title alone alludes to the content, “The Treatise of Eusebius, the Son of Pamphilus, against the Life of Tyana Written by Philostratus, Occasioned by the Parallel

Asclepieion or in Persia and India, as Philostratus reported?⁸⁹ Eusebius believed his actions were magical for they were a learned technique. On the other hand, Christ did not require any training or extensive travel to various lands to acquire his power as a miracle worker. Eusebius claimed that Apollonius performed exorcisms and healings due to his association with demons. He discredited the resurrection story of Apollonius, claiming “Anyhow (Philostratus) hesitates, and doubts, whether after all a spark of life might have not lingered on in the girl unnoticed by her attendants.”⁹⁰ If the event occurred in Rome, as Philostratus reported, then it would have been noticed by the philosopher Euphrates who later directly accused Apollonius of wizardry.⁹¹ Eusebius argued on a similar basis as Origen in his response to Celsus. He did not dispute that Apollonius performed miracles, but he pointed to the source of the power. For Christ, the source of his power was divine; Apollonius was in league with demons and thus a fraud.⁹² It is noteworthy that Eusebius was attacking Philostratus’ work directly. If Philostratus intended to create a pagan gospel rivaling the Christian gospels, then Eusebius took notice.

II. 4. Apuleius of Madauros

Apuleius of Madauros offered a description of different levels of magic that are based partly on class. Apuleius’ description contributed greatly to Morton Smith’s identification of Jesus as a magician, namely that Jesus embodied a similar scholarly-type

Drawn by Hierocles Between Him and Christ.” This text is preserved in the works of Philostratus edited by C. L. Kayser, *Flavii Philostrati Opera* 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1870) and in Migne (PG 22, 796-868).

⁸⁹ See Philostratus, *Life*. 1.1, where Philostratus established the Pythagorean notion of divinity, also see 1.9; 1.18; Eusebius, *Against Hierocles* 9.

⁹⁰ Eusebius, *Against Hierocles* 26 (Conybeare, LCL).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Kee, *Miracle*, 273.

magician and not the lowest-common denominator magician that is often ridiculed.⁹³ While condemned, magic was practiced widely in antiquity, and while we have noted several well-known texts that attack magical practice, magic did have an enduring defense in the work of Apuleius.

Apuleius was born in North Africa in 125 CE, and is most often recognized as the author of his *Metamorphoses*, or the *Golden Ass*. His tale described the character Lucian's adventures in magic and sorcery, and his bewitchment and eventual recovery from a donkey into a man. Apuleius ended his tale with Lucius praising the salvific work of the god Isis who successfully transformed him back into human form. Accused of practicing black magic in his own life, Apuleius authored a non-fiction *Apologia* of the use of magic. The text was certainly edited for circulation, but there is good evidence to suppose that Apuleius' defense was authentic.⁹⁴

It is unclear what the specific charges against Apuleius were. Apuleius was accused of marrying a wealthy widow, the mother of one of his friends and fifteen years older, causing a minor scandal.⁹⁵ The wealth of the widow was likely the motivation to charge Apuleius with practicing magic. Competitors for her hand who eyed her dowry as a considerable prize, bitter with defeat, probably found it quite easy to slander the victor with charges of magic. Apuleius was charged under the similar rubric against *maleficia magica* as Sulla's law of 81 BCE, especially given that Apuleius defended himself upon charges of using

⁹³ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 84.

⁹⁴ See Apuleius of Madauros, *Pro se de magia (Apologia)*, vols. I and II (ed. by Vincent Hunik; Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1997). And Ian H. Henderson's, "Apuleius of Madauros" in *The Historical Jesus in Context* (ed. by Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison, Jr., and John Dominic Crossan; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 193-205.

⁹⁵ See Graf, "How to Cope..." 104.

sorcery to marry a widow.⁹⁶ As Ian Henderson points out, under Roman law it was not necessary to even have evidence of specific harm due to magic; the ability to use magic to cause harm was evidence enough to prosecute.⁹⁷

Apuleius first defended himself on charges of magic by asking what exactly the definition of magician is. He queried “what is a magician? If we follow the Persian definition, as Plato does, it is a priest and educator of princes.”⁹⁸ He cited Plato as evidence that the birthplace of magic proves that it is noble rather than harmful: “and who could object to this noble sort of ‘magic?’... Many famous philosophers have also been called magicians by the ignorant and I gladly share their fate. All the magical issues brought forward against me are ridiculous and amount to nothing.”⁹⁹ Apuleius also defended himself of the aforementioned charge of marrying a widow for her money, claiming “If there were one reason discovered, even a tiny one, why I would have wanted to get married with Pudentilla for the sake of my own advantage, if you could prove any profit at all, then let me be Carmendas of Damiegeron, or that Moses or John.”¹⁰⁰ Notable in his defense was his mention of Moses as a magician, although the name “John” is unclear and may or may not be referring to a Christian.¹⁰¹ Apuleius’ mention of Moses exhibited that Moses was a magician well-known in a pagan context.

⁹⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 90.

⁹⁷ Henderson, 195.

⁹⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 25, (Hunink). His indication that Plato may have been positive or respectful towards magic is unfounded, see Plato’s negative position against the practice in *Laws*, 10.909B.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 90 (see Henderson, 204).

¹⁰¹ Hunink thinks not, and that this refers to Jannes, an Egyptian magician who possibly was Moses’ opponent. See Hunink, vol. II, 223.

While Apuleius provided a defense of magic, his tactics were rather specious. In his apology he shifted from citing Plato to rattling off spells and curses to his accusers, invoking Mercury to bring the faces of the dead before the eyes of one of his accusers, Aemilianus, including specters, ghosts, goblins, and all of the terrors of the tombs (*omnia sepulchrorum terriculamente*).¹⁰² It is possible he was joking with his audience, but the use of a magical curse was fairly serious; he was flinging elements of magic back to his opponents. Apuleius based his defense on a distinction between levels of magic, between “good” magic and “black” magic. If he was using magic, his magic was good since he learned from the scholarly and refined resources Plato described. He did not embody the “vulgar distinction” of ordinary, common magicians that he describes as shamans.¹⁰³ The fact that Apuleius was prosecuted at all is telling of a simple fact: levels of distinction in magic only profit magicians themselves. To all outsiders and observers, magic was equally condemned. Apuleius’ defense allows one to witness a discrepancy between “good” magic and “black” magic. This discrepancy is particularly important in discussing the differences between theurgy and magic, a difference that is tackled in Chapter Seven. For now, it is beneficial to realize that Apuleius was not calling his “good” magic theurgy but claimed it came from a learned source, and that for all intents and purposes, magic was maligned. Opponents may accuse Apollonius or Jesus as a magician, but their core of believers saw them as unique miracle men and universally treated magic with disdain and suspicion.

¹⁰² Apuleius, *Apologia* 64, see Hunink’s note in vol. II, 169.

¹⁰³ See Apuleius, *Apologia* 26.

III. The Cult of Asclepius in Antiquity

Asclepius has a typical genesis akin to other heroic pagan gods. He was first recorded by Homer in the eighth century BCE in the *Iliad*, briefly mentioned as the mortal father of two heroes, but there is no indication of Asclepius worship until around the sixth century BCE.¹⁰⁴ The Homeric references indicated Asclepius as a physician without peers, and his son Machaon was referenced as the son of Asclepius, “the blameless physician.”¹⁰⁵ Other heroes such as Achilles typically dressed wounds on the field of battle, but Machaon was summoned specifically to treat Menelaus; his actions are those of a physician, not a warrior.

The poet Pindar was the first to introduce the notion that Asclepius was the product of a divine father, Apollo, and a human mother.¹⁰⁶ Apollo came down from Olympus and had an affair with a mortal woman, Coronis, who was married. At the moment of her death Apollo came down and rescued the child that was the fruit of their illicit union. Apollo gave the child, Asclepius, to the centaur Chiron for safekeeping, and Chiron taught Asclepius the art of healing. There were variations of the genesis myth of Asclepius, but the mention of the city of Epidauros was one common feature in most versions. It was told that Coronis gave birth to the child in the vicinity of Epidauros, a city known as a healing center.¹⁰⁷ Epidauros was considered the city of Apollo, a god also known for his healing power; thus Asclepius became a healer due to his lineage and his geographical environment. The myth

¹⁰⁴ Homer, *The Iliad* 11.518; also see Carl Roebuck, “The Asklepieion and Lerna” *Corinth* vol. 14, (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1951), 25.

¹⁰⁵ Homer, *The Iliad* 4.194.

¹⁰⁶ Pindar, *Pythian Odes* III.59 (See Edelstein, T. 1).

¹⁰⁷ Johannes Wolmarans, “Asclepius of Epidauros and Jesus of Nazareth,” in *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 7 (1996), 118.

presented an interesting pattern. Asclepius replaced a popular deity known and worshipped for his fame as a healer.

Asclepius, like Christ, has a popular history attached to him. Testimonies recorded that Asclepius lived and worked as a healer in Epidauros and raised a family. His most notable family member was his daughter Hygieia (occasionally referred as his wife), who represented Health and overshadowed all the other siblings. Asclepius was a preeminent physician that cared for the healthy and cured the sick. According to mythology, Asclepius drew the ire of Zeus when he raised a person from the dead. Zeus threw down a thunderbolt, killing Asclepius and the patient. After his death, Asclepius was raised to Olympus, achieving full divinity.¹⁰⁸

There are several different accounts of Asclepius' transgression that resulted in his death at the hands of Zeus. Diodorus Siculus reported around 60-50 BCE that Asclepius resurrected "many," upsetting Hades since the number of dead were diminishing.¹⁰⁹ In the first century, Apollodorus claimed that Asclepius raised six people from the dead, prompting Zeus to respond.¹¹⁰ Pliny and Lucian both stated that Asclepius was killed for bringing Tyndareus back to life.¹¹¹ Sextus Empiricus recorded the multiple references to Asclepius' heretical act, noting the popularity of the legend and the different ways it has been

¹⁰⁸ It is fairly common for the product of an immortal father and mortal mother to be raised to divine status after death. Along with Asclepius, Hercules is a primary example, as their myths speak of their dual nature. They are "heroes" during their mortal life, then gods upon their deaths. Still, Asclepius holds rank over Hercules. In a constructed dialogue, Lucian makes this distinction clear, as Zeus settles the dispute, claiming that Asclepius is superior due to the fact that he died earlier; Lucian, *Dialogues of the Gods* 15(13).

¹⁰⁹ Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4.71.1-3.

¹¹⁰ Apollodorus, *The Library* 3.10.3-4.

¹¹¹ Pliny, *Natural History* 29.1.3; Lucian, *The Dance* 45.

transmitted.¹¹² Sextus made an important point; whether in any shape or form, Asclepius' legend continued to resonate from Hellenic times into antiquity.

Asclepius healed through incubation, attending to his patients in dreams. The typical visitor would first bathe in the waters of the temple, make an offering at the altar, and then was led to a room called the *abaton*. Here the visitor slept, and as Aristophanes recounted the healing of Plutus, was told by the priests not to wake up if he hears strange noises.¹¹³ Asclepius provided the prescription for treatment in the form of a dream. Immediately upon healing, the patient must make an offering to the temple, the obligatory "payment" for the medical cure. The offering often occurred in the immediate area surrounding the image of Asclepius, and may be in the spiritual form of prayer, an animal sacrifice, or the physical form of a votive offering. Votive offerings were left outside the Asclepieion at Corinth, dating from the fourth century BCE, depicting the afflicted body parts that were healed including legs, arms, ears, feet, fingers, and representations of breasts and genitals.¹¹⁴

Recovered from the Asclepieion in Epidauros were numerous *stelai*, slabs of stone or wood that bear inscriptions, that rest outside the temple and are carved with curative accounts from patients at the Asclepieion. The testimonies of Asclepius' cures range from the mundane, such as the healing of a hand, to the obscure. Among the most vivid is the case of the man complaining of a blockage in his urinary tract who dreamed of "lying with a

¹¹² Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 260-262.

¹¹³ Aristophanes, *Plutus*, 633-747 (In Edelstein, T. 421).

¹¹⁴ Carl Roebuck in his analysis of Corinth concludes that the Corinthian Asclepieion is similar to the Asclepieia at Troizen and Athens that contain two main structural parts with one serving a cultic function while the other is reserved for social use. The fountain in Corinth is separate from the cultic area of the Asclepieion, a conclusion also based upon the ancient description of the area by Pausanias. See Roebuck, "The Asklepieion and Lerna," 25; and Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.4.5. Andrew Hill has written on Paul's "body language" in "The Temple of Asclepius: An Alternative Source for Paul's Body Theology," in *JBL*, 99, (Spring 1980), 437-439. F.T. van Straten treats the practice of votive offerings extensively in his article, "Gifts for the Gods," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 65-151.

fair boy” in the *abaton*. The patient woke up feeling refreshed, holding the kidney stone in his hands.¹¹⁵ The *stelai* were surely encouraged by the priests at Epidauros in order to advertise to the community and beyond of its status as the preeminent Asclepieion.

Early on its development, practitioners of ancient medicine understood that there were limits to what they could treat, and it was not shameful to turn any patients away as incurable. The cult of Asclepius was a natural candidate to fill the void of untreatable patients. With Asclepius, patients could seek treatment in a far more centralized and reputable healing center. Furthermore, while physicians were adamant in their disapproval of charlatans and magicians, they were hardly critical of Asclepius or other healing cults.¹¹⁶ Such an endorsement certainly helped the public embrace healing gods like Asclepius, and it also created a sort of partnership between physicians and healing cults rather than a competition. Physicians were not always effusive in their praise for divine healing, but they did not have a problem with healing cults administering to chronically ill patients.¹¹⁷

Cases such as paralysis or blindness would be deemed untreatable by physicians, and these constituted a good portion of documented cures by Asclepius. Infertility, kidney stones, and gout were among other illnesses that the Asclepieia would treat, and doctors

¹¹⁵ *Inscriptiones Graecae*, 4.1.121-124 (Edelstein, T. 423). Another collection more recent than Edelstein that includes a translation of the inscriptions is Lynn R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 85-131.

¹¹⁶ In a commentary ascribed to the second-century physician Galen, the author argued that cures derived from dreams of Sarapis, Asclepius, or Isis are just as effective as any treatment existing. It should be noted that the fragments of this commentary were preserved in Arabic, and may not have been penned by Galen, see Galen, *Commentary on the Hippocratic Oath*, fr. 1; also see Franz Rosenthal, “An Ancient Commentary on the Hippocratic Oath,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 30 (1956), 52-87.

¹¹⁷ Epilepsy was seen to have a point beyond the capabilities of a physician, see Hippocrates, *The Sacred Disease* 2.1-7. At Pergamum, Asclepius was praised as a healer of epilepsy, see Oribasius, *Medical Collections* 45, 30, 10-14 (Edelstein, T. 425) reported by Rufus of Ephesus in the first century. See Bronwen Wickkiser, *The Appeal of Asclepius and the Politics of Healing in the Greco-Roman World*. University of Texas at Austin, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 2003), 53. Doctors often sacrificed to Asclepius as a patron deity. Ancient medicine and the healing cult were not diametrically opposed as “rational” and “irrational” entities. See Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 409, n. 63.

would refuse. Gout was mentioned in the Hippocratic corpus specifically as an ailment a doctor should refuse to treat, “As for patients with gout... (they) are all incurable by the human art, as far as I know.”¹¹⁸ The ability to manage ailments that doctors refused contributed to the popularity of the cult of Asclepius, but it is not the only factor. It was rather the style of healing that ultimately won the populace over. The healing cult would administer important personal attention to a patient that served as a comforting treatment. The somnolent cures of the cult washed away anxiety, and it is no surprise that the cult of Asclepius’ popularity grew in the wake of widespread plagues even though Asclepius was never known as a god that cured plagues; Asclepius cured individuals. However, this did not stop the Romans from bringing Asclepius to Rome from Epidaurus in the event of a plague, dating around 295-292 BCE.¹¹⁹ Civic leaders apparently found some value to Asclepius’ presence in a plagued-stricken city as the arrival of the cult may have calmed a heightened level of anxiety, even though the Romans surely knew Asclepius was not a god that cured plagues.¹²⁰ The accounts that recorded the cult’s effective treatments exhibited its successful

¹¹⁸ Stele 2.43 from Epidaurus mentions the healing of gout (*Inscriptiones Graecae*, 4.1.21-22, Edelstein, T. 423) while Hippocrates, *Prorrhetic* 2.2.8.1-4 lists gout as something physicians should avoid treating. *Prorrhetic*, treatises dealing with prognoses, is divided into two books; the first is possibly genuinely Hippocratic, while the second is considered spurious, although Galen mined the work for useful information. Wickkiser notes this in her *The Appeal of Asklepios*, 109.

¹¹⁹ Livy, *History of Rome* 7.27; 4.20-25. Livy was actually the first to record this, and dates the plague around 295 BCE. Also mentioned in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.621-752 and Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 1.8.2. Also see Wickkiser, *The Appeal of Asklepios*, 193, since these sources are late the “plague” in the case of Rome may have been conflated with other threats to the city.

¹²⁰ The Roman importation of the Epidaurian Asclepius is notable for several reasons as mentioned above. One result of the importation of the God is the Latinized spelling of his name from “Asklepios” to “Aesculapius” or as some scholars have utilized (and what this dissertation follows) “Asclepius.” However, there is a slight difference between Greek Asklepios and Roman Asclepius that is more complicated than this space allows. Roman Asclepius followed the pattern of the Roman adoption of their gods; the arrival of a foreign god shows favor towards mother Rome. And as the importation stories such as Ovid’s illustrate, Asclepius willingly came to Rome to be a citizen. Therefore Roman Asclepius shows favor towards Rome and not towards any enemies of Rome. For a brief history of the Latinized spelling of the god see Wickkiser, *The Appeal of Asklepios*, 206-207.

ability in treating the untreatable.¹²¹ Simply, a healing cult provided what a physician could not. A doctor could not cure blindness, but a god certainly could.

Medical care was as expensive in antiquity as it is today, only the rich could afford the private care physicians could offer. Treatments at the Asclepieia were less expensive. Before the Common Era, Aristophanes noted that “there are no fees.”¹²² Accounts testify to the philanthropic nature of the God, and the offerings in lieu of a monetary fee: “...accept the aftercourse of this cock whom I sacrifice, heard of the walls of my house. For we draw no bounteous nor ready spring; else might we, perchance, with an ox or stuffed pig of much fatness and no humble cock, be paying the price of cure from diseases thou didst wipe away, Lord, by laying on of gentle hands.”¹²³ As a result of being a viable and widely accessible medical alternative, Asclepius became praised as a god who took care of the poor: “Asclepius may heal Pauson and Iros and any other of the poor people.”¹²⁴ As a terrestrial god, Asclepius was thought to pay greater attention to the poor than Olympian gods such as Zeus: “the Olympians are helpful to the great...when appearing to them, the celestials to the middle classes, the terrestrials to the poor.”¹²⁵ The cult of Asclepius was still not exactly free. Healings usually required an offering; however, its attention to the poor should not go unnoticed as it was occasionally manipulated. In Rome, Suetonius reported that under emperor Claudius during an outbreak of sickness, slave owners were dumping their slaves at

¹²¹ As in Stele 2.43; Oribasius, *Medical Collections* 45, 30, 10-14 (Edelstein, T. 425); Aelianus, *Fragment*, 100 (Edelstein, T.405). Pausanias noted the *stelai* recording the names of cured patients in *Description of Greece* 2.27.3.

¹²² Aristophanes, *Plutus* 407.

¹²³ Herondas, *Mimiambi* IV, 1-95 (Edelstein, T. 482).

¹²⁴ Aelianus, *Fragmenta* 100 (Edelstein, T. 405).

¹²⁵ Artemidorus, *Onirocritica* II, 34 (Edelstein, T. 259).

the temple on Tiber Island.¹²⁶ Masters in Rome were manipulating the munificence of the temple, as the emperor rebuked the owners' behavior and freed any slave that successfully recovered.

The cult of Asclepius was thus not a free clinic, although it did have a strong reputation of treating the poor. The temples of Asclepius made up for any monetary loss by treating the poor through generous offerings given by the rich. The charitable benefactors of the cult can be witnessed in the second-century writings of Aelius Aristides, who was visited by the god imploring him to offer animals and distribute money to pilgrims: "And I believe he gave some other instructions in addition to these. Afterwards, I should go to the holy shrine and offer perfect sacrificial animals to Asclepius and set up holy craters and distribute holy portions to all the fellow pilgrims."¹²⁷ The spirit of benevolence and care of the poor did exist in pagan religion in antiquity, although it was dwarfed in scale to the attention paid by the Christians. Still, the evidence maintains that Asclepius was regarded as the most "man-loving" of the gods and the most interested in the well-being of all humankind, including the poor.¹²⁸

III. 1. Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales*

The center of gravity for Asclepius worship would eventually shift from Epidaurus. The Asclepieion at Pergamum distanced itself from other temple locales and enjoyed a renaissance in Hadrian's reign. After several reported healings, Hadrian capitalized on an

¹²⁶ Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 25.2. Ludwig Edelstein claimed that Asclepieia resembled Christian charitable hospitals (*Asclepius*, vol. 2, 176). That is not really the case. While Asclepius was obviously beloved and the cult moderately cared for the poor, it was not free for everyone. See the section on Julian below. If Julian believed the pagans were doing such a good job attending to the poor, he would not rebuke them for allowing the Christians to do a better job.

¹²⁷ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.27 (Behr).

¹²⁸ Aristides, *Oratio* 39.5.

ever-growing resurgence in the Asclepieion and began to rebuild the temple.¹²⁹ Antoninus Pius continued the work of his predecessor, completing the “greatest” Asclepieion in the empire.¹³⁰ Pergamum was the city of Galen, and the physician practiced in the city before his arrival in Rome. The cult and temple of Asclepius in Pergamum became the preeminent cultic center for healing in Late Antiquity. Its fame was aided by the first person accounts of the healing power of the god in the *Sacred Tales* of Aelius Aristides, written around 149 CE.

Aristides was a prominent rhetorician from Smyrna who became incapacitated due to chronic illness. Galen examined him in Pergamum and commented that he had never seen such a strong mind in such a frail body.¹³¹ Aristides encountered a plague at one point. His symptoms included fever, a “bilious mixture,” headaches, coughing, and difficulty in eating or walking.¹³² Many of the divine treatments Aristides described are not out of line with what a physician would prescribe. The use of water and restoring balance to the humors were textbook methods for Late Antique physicians. Although similar, Aristides championed the unique effectiveness of divine cures. Aristides recorded several instances where the divine prescription was blood-letting. He claimed that the god “commanded that I have blood drawn from my elbow, and he added, as far as I remember, sixty pints... two days later, he commanded me again to draw blood from my forehead.”¹³³ Mostly Aristides described the curative properties of water, and how it is a primary remedy for Asclepius due

¹²⁹ Adolf Hoffmann, “The Roman Remodeling of the Asklepieion,” in *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 42.

¹³⁰ Otfried Deubner reports this in *Das Asklepeion von Pergamon* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1938), 19. Also see Kollmann, 80-82.

¹³¹ Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 277.

¹³² Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.37-45.

¹³³ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.47-48 (Behr).

to its proximity to the god's temple.¹³⁴ Aristides' vivid details of his ailments and subsequent healings depicted him as a Late Antique hypochondriac. However, Aristides provided some telling detail on the cult of Asclepius as well as the relationship between healing and religion. Aristides described the visitation of Asclepius in his dreams, of his prescriptions, including one ordering him to bathe in an icy river during winter. Aristides rose:

When the divine manifestation was announced, friends escorted us and various doctors, some of them acquaintances, and others who came either out of concern or even for the purposes of investigation... There was a certain Heracleon, a doctor, a companion of ours, who confessed to me on the day after that he had gone having persuaded himself that if I should fare as well as possible, I should be afflicted with *opisthotonos* (muscle spasm), or some other thing. When we reached the river, there was no need for anyone to encourage us. But being still full of warmth from the vision of the god, I cast off my clothes, and not wanting a massage, flung myself where the river was deepest. Then as in a pool of very gentle and tempered water, I passed time swimming all about and splashing myself all over. When I came out, all my skin had a rosy hue and there was a lightness throughout my body. There was also much shouting from those present and those coming up, shouting that celebrated phrase "Great is Asclepius!"¹³⁵

Aristides was not against medicine or physicians. In fact, he consulted physicians as well as the cult of Asclepius. Galen's teacher, Satyrus was summoned to examine Aristides, and the patient heeded his advice, as long as it did not conflict with the divine prescription. Satyrus advised to cease the blood-letting and apply a plaster to treat his abdomen. Aristides replied, "that I did not have the authority to do one thing or the other, but that while the god commanded the letting of my blood, I would obey whether willing or not, or rather never unwilling. Still I did not ignore Satyrus' prescription, but took and kept it. It was no cornucopia."¹³⁶ Aristides did not refuse the advice of his physician, only as far as it did not conflict with Asclepius' treatment. With his dissatisfaction with Satyrus' treatment, Aristides

¹³⁴ Aristides, *Oratio* 39.12.

¹³⁵ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.21 (Behr).

¹³⁶ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 49.8-10 (Behr)

implied that the divine treatment is always preferable, and one that he heavily endorses. It also did not appear that Aristides was untreatable. He was possibly afflicted with some chronic illnesses, but doctors such as Satyrus, Heracleon, and his foster-father Zosimus who was “skilled in medicine,” were ready and willing to treat him.¹³⁷ Aristides found more value in divine healing, and while he primarily describes the cult of Asclepius, he also described appearances by the familiar healing deities from Egypt, Sarapis and Isis.¹³⁸ The second-century orator recounted his personal experience with the healing power of Asclepius in almost embarrassing detail, calling the god a “great magician.”¹³⁹ This moniker is not an attack; it is a title describing the miraculous actions effected by the god. Asclepius was the “gentlest and most generous of gods,” for Aristides.¹⁴⁰

Aristides’ praise of Asclepius was certainly effusive, however it delved deeper than mere praise due for services rendered. Asclepius healed Aristides when human doctors could not. Aristides’ fierce devotion stemmed not only from the incidents of divine healing, but from the conviction that Asclepius was ingrained into his daily life. Aristides called Asclepius as a beacon of light in his daily affairs. The god was praised for revealing a shipwreck to Aristides on the day of his journey, thus saving him from certain death.¹⁴¹ Even following his healing bath, Aristides described an otherworldly feeling: “For there was neither, as it were, conspicuous pleasure, nor would you say that it was like human joy. But there was a certain inexplicable contentment, which regarded everything as less than the

¹³⁷ See Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.21; 47.75.

¹³⁸ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.45.

¹³⁹ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 39.14.

¹⁴⁰ Aristides, *Oratio* 39.5 (Behr).

¹⁴¹ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.13.

present moment, so that even when I saw other things, I seemed not to see them. Thus I was wholly with the god.”¹⁴²

Aristides was describing a connection with Asclepius due to his healings. The god was more than a healer for Aristides; he has become part of his life. These were not the qualities of an unbiased physician treating a patient. They were the qualities of a benevolent god caring for one of his supplicants. Asclepius was not only a healer of the body in this sense, but a savior. Aristides’ accounts reflected the sincere devotion that the act of healing can instill. For Aristides, Asclepius was akin to a patron saint or guardian angel on his shoulder, constantly protecting him.¹⁴³ This notion of Asclepius as a savior to all continues following the time of Aristides. Beginning in 160 CE with Julius Apellas’ report of his healing at Epidauros, Asclepius was seen as more than just a divine friend and helper. Similar to Aristides, Apellas’ treatment altered the course of his life, and he sincerely believed his life was now under the care and protection of the god.¹⁴⁴ The compassion of Asclepius due to the restoration of health compelled many to feel such sentiments. These accounts exhibit the nature of Asclepius devotion and demonstrate how considerations of Asclepius as savior were quite similar to the early Christian conception of Christ. In Late Antiquity, pagans and Christians lived and mingled together. In Corinth, the Christians were comfortable enough with their pagan neighbors to eat idol food in several different venues, drawing the consternation of Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians.¹⁴⁵ Christian apologists

¹⁴² Aristides, *Sacred Tales*, 48.23 (Behr).

¹⁴³ See Steven C. Muir, “Touched By a God: Aelius Aristides, Religious Healings, and Asclepius Cults,” in *SBLSP*, vol. 34 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 362-379.

¹⁴⁴ See Edelstein, T. 432; Kee, *Miracle*, 88.

¹⁴⁵ See G.D.R. Sanders’ piece “Archeological Evidence for Early Christianity and the End of Hellenic Religion in Corinth,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 419-442. Sanders notes that observance at the Asclepieion in Corinth continued until the end of the fourth century, it

paint Asclepius as an adversary of Christ in order to protect the community against idolatry. However, it was rare for a purported Asclepius devotee to raise Christ as a competing threat. While unique, the brief reign of Julian offered an opportunity to witness a pagan understanding of Christianity and of Christ.

III. 2. Julian the Apostate: Pagan Appropriation, Christian Appropriation

Asclepius devotion continued to sustain popularity in Late Antiquity from the second century well into the third and fourth centuries. The popularity and influence of the cult was evident in the mid fourth century as emperor Julian's significant attention to Asclepius. Known as "the apostate," Julian was raised a Christian. Upon his ascendancy to power, Julian viewed Christianity as a betrayal of the Greco-Roman tradition, and desired a return to traditional forms of worship. Julian's attention to the cult of Asclepius must be understood in the context of his own apostasy. Julian was not alone in returning to the fold. A recovered poem from third-century North Africa addressed a senator who was once a Christian ridiculing his transgression, "Yet, since you have crossed the threshold of the true Law and come to know God for a few years, why do you cling to what should be abandoned or why do you give up what should be retained?"¹⁴⁶ For Julian and others, the traditional observance of the gods was not to be discarded by Christianity.

Julian claimed in a letter to have left the faith at age twenty. His attraction to pagan religion was combined with his renewed interest in Neoplatonism.¹⁴⁷ It is unclear when his

was likely low-key and difficult to demonstrate continued use archaeologically. Also see my "The Pagan Feast and the Sacramental Feast: The Implication of Idol Food Consumption in Paul's Corinth," in *Sewanee Theological Review* (Christmas 2007), 22-47

¹⁴⁶ Pseudo-Cyprian, *Carmen ad Senatorem*, 35-46.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Wilson, *Leaving the Fold: Apostates and Defectors in Late Antiquity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 96.

change actually occurred. Julian's brief reign (361-363 CE) gave him the opportunity to report his switch in allegiance. There were possibly political motivations for Julian's change as he struggled against a Christian court during his reign. The allure of the ancient rites of pagan religion was overwhelming for Julian from a young age. Julian was trained in rhetoric and philosophy by the famous pagan orator Libanius.¹⁴⁸ Later during his reign, Libanius celebrated Julian's decision, exclaiming "you quickly cast off your error and, lionlike, burst your bonds, released yourself from darkness and grasped truth instead of ignorance, the real instead of the false, our old gods instead of this recent intruder and his baneful rites."¹⁴⁹ The "recent intruder" Libanius cited is, of course, Christ. Julian apparently viewed the pagan religion as an essential component of the philosophical quest.¹⁵⁰

A.D. Nock believed that Julian's conversion was less of a political or intellectual move, and more of an emotional one: "Julian's conversion is due to a cultural ideal, quickened by the sense of a personal and at the same time hereditary experience; this feeling came as a result of religious experience."¹⁵¹ From an early age, dreams and visions were extremely important to Julian, and he recounted several instances that occurred at prescient moments in his life.¹⁵² He was entranced with the mysteries and initiation rites of the pagan cult as he traveled in Ephesus and Pergamum. As a young man, Julian was fascinated with the revived interest in theurgy combined with Platonism, espoused by Iamblichus and his disciple Aedisius who taught Julian in Pergamum. These men introduced Julian to rituals

¹⁴⁸ See Wilken's background of Julian in his *The Christians*, 164.

¹⁴⁹ Libanius, *Orations* 13.11-12 (Norman, LCL).

¹⁵⁰ Wilson, *Leaving the Fold*, 99.

¹⁵¹ A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 158.

¹⁵² G.W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 17.

where the use of herbs, salves, and other elements were employed to animate statues and extract oracles from the gods.¹⁵³ At Ephesus, Julian encountered the philosopher Maximus who advocated such theurgic methods. Soon, he initiated Julian into the cult of Cybele and later into the cult of Mithras. Both events made a considerable impact upon the future emperor. He may have continued to act as a Christian but as he recalled later, his time spent with Maximus was the start date of his new conversion. After a brief conflict with his cousin Constantius, Julian entered Constantinople in 361 and publicly affirmed his new faith:

Know that I worship the gods, I worship the gods publicly, and all the soldiers returning with me do the same. I sacrifice oxen in view of all; I offer tons of thanks offerings. And why? Because the gods have revealed that it is their will that I should restore their worship in its original purity. I obey them, with absolutely no reservations.¹⁵⁴

Julian believed his ascendancy to the throne was due to his silent devotion to paganism, the true faith.¹⁵⁵ He immediately restored public sacrifices, an aspect of pagan religion that Julian always enjoyed and Constantius thwarted: “It was this that shook him to the core, as he saw their temples in ruins, their ritual banned, their altars overturned, their sacrifices suppressed, their priests sent packing and their property divided up between a crew of rascals.”¹⁵⁶ He initially established a “pagan church” with Helios as its prime deity, influenced no doubt by Aurelian and possibly Constantine’s interest in *Sol Invictus*.¹⁵⁷ Julian also believed the Christians were appropriating Greek literature at the expense of pagan

¹⁵³ Wilken, *The Christians*, 167.

¹⁵⁴ Julian, *Letter to Maximus* 8.415C (More recently, R. Joseph Hoffmann has offered a collection and translation, *Julian’s Against the Galileans*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004. The above derives from Hoffmann’s translation, and unless otherwise noted, the LCL edition is cited).

¹⁵⁵ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 61.

¹⁵⁶ Libanius, *Orations* 18.23 (Norman, LCL).

¹⁵⁷ Jeffrey Hargis, *Against the Christians: The Rise of Early Anti-Christian Polemic* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 100.

religion. He instituted boundaries for Christians, insisting that they could not teach anything from the Greek literary tradition. As a schoolmate of the Cappadocian Basil the Great and friend of Gregory Nazianzus, this cherry-picking was something Julian witnessed first-hand and it obviously festered.¹⁵⁸ He ordered that all teachers would be trained, advocate and represent Greco-Roman religious values. If Christians were so disdainful of pagan religion, then Julian believed they should not partake in an educational system that is grounded in traditional values that were in part constructed by adherents of pagan religion.

Julian viewed the *paideia* as the foundation of a philosophic life and found that it was hypocritical to include the Christians. It was normal for Christians to obtain a classical education in philosophy and rhetoric. Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus were classically educated and John Chrysostom was a pupil of Libanius' as well. During his rule, Julian made it more difficult for Christians to obtain that education as he made religion part of the equation.¹⁵⁹ His actions incurred the protest of Christian leaders such as Gregory but Julian was very aware of what he was doing. As Bowersock notes, Julian expected that all of the educated elite in the empire would be pagan within a generation.¹⁶⁰

Julian echoed a general antagonism of imperial traditionalists against Christianity. The concept that a religion demanded uncompromising, uniform faith was abhorrent to traditional pagan religionists. The pagan religionists of Late Antiquity loved local and naturalized traditions. Nock claimed that most pagans found great value in the worship of the household and of the state, as well as the reverence of the dead. Moreover, they deeply feared the loss of these benefits. Worship for pagan religionists was different than

¹⁵⁸ Hargis, *Against the Christians*, 101.

¹⁵⁹ Wilken, *The Christians*, 175.

¹⁶⁰ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 84.

philosophy; “it rested on emotion and not on conscious theory and thinking; it had deeper roots in their natures, and was not easily refuted by reason.”¹⁶¹

Julian, however, advocated for change among his pagan brethren. Julian identified several traits of the Christians that he believed pagan religion must adopt, or die. Julian was aggressively championing Hellenic reform; he desired a return to the virtuous ways of Greco-Roman religion. He wrote Arsacius, the high priest of Galatia that “the Hellenic religion does not yet prosper as I desire.”¹⁶² Julian understood that there must be change, and rather than fighting the Christians, there were elements that they should appropriate: “Why, then do we think that this is enough, why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism?”¹⁶³ It was too easy to argue as Plutarch did in *On Superstition* that the baseless superstitions of the Christians are responsible for turning people into atheists. Rather, Jewish and Christian funerary practices and their attention to charity were worthy of emulation. Julian found it unconscionable that Jews and Christians took better care of the poor than the pagans. He encouraged his fellow religionists to mimic the Christians and the Jews in their devotion to charity and active consideration of pervasive social problems. In his letter to Arsacius, Julian ordered one-fifth of the money he sent to be distributed to the poor, for “it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans (Christians) support not only their own poor but

¹⁶¹ Nock, *Conversion*, 163.

¹⁶² Julian, *Letter to Arsacius* 429C (Wright, LCL).

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 430A (Wright, LCL)

ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”¹⁶⁴ It was embarrassing for Julian that Christians provided better care for pagans than the pagan cults do.

Julian’s task was made evident by Libanius, who urged Julian to “refute those writings which make a god and a son of a god of the man from Palestine.”¹⁶⁵ Julian discovered that the only way to compete with the Christians was to emulate some of their practices. In order to successfully battle the rising Christian threat, Julian needed to raise a singular figure to oppose Jesus. To attack the Christians with similar effectiveness in a war of words, Julian needed a singular persona to pour his energy and vitriol; polytheistic components of pagan religion would not do. Helios, or *Sol Invictus*, could not mount a fierce campaign against the paramount figure of Jesus for the Christians, although Julian made an unconvincing attempt in a letter to the Alexandrians:

Are you blind to the rays that pour forth from the great god Helios? Are you simply insensible to the fact that winter and summer are his doing? Or that plant and animal life take their refreshment from him? What then do you think of the blessings showered on your city by that great goddess who is generated by him and comes through him – that very Selene who is creator of the universe. Oh, but you persist in refusing to adore any of our gods, preferring to think that a man whom you have never seen (nor those before you) ought to be worshiped as God the Word – I mean Jesus. What of the god to whom the whole of humanity has looked from the very beginning, the god worshiped and acclaimed by all of us, the god who causes our devotion to prosper? I mean Helios, the living and intelligible image of the invisible god.¹⁶⁶

In this letter, Julian argued that the Christians did not even acknowledge the present good that the gods provide. Instead the Christians were wasting their time on the memory of a dead man and living in the past. Julian needed to find a suitable opponent to Christ, and in

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 430D (Wright, LCL). Julian belittled the Christians with the term “Galileans” consistently. To identify them as Christians would grant credence and recognition to their religion. Also see Vivian Nutton, “From Galen to Alexander...,” 7.

¹⁶⁵ Libanius, *Orations* 18.178 (Harmon, LCL).

¹⁶⁶ Julian, *Ep.* 47.434B-D (Hoffmann).

his hymn, he attempted to offer Helios. Julian countered the apologetic argument that Christ was existent before creation by citing Helios as existing from time immemorial. However, Helios was not a figure that could win hearts and minds for Julian. In his campaign against Christ, Helios would not do. In his paean to Constantius written during his campaign in Gaul around 359, Julian likened the role of emperor to “savior,” and “like a good physician” that makes every effort to cure his people’s ills.¹⁶⁷ Likening himself to a physician may not intentionally recall Asclepius, however in his invective against the Christians Julian is more specific in his praise of the god. Julian’s low popularity could not effectively drive a message of the emperor as a healing savior to rival Christ.¹⁶⁸ Asclepius, a benevolent, universally loved healing figure in the pagan pantheon, fit this description like a glove. In Asclepius, Julian found a favorable opponent to Christ; a physician who Julian would trumpet as “savior.”

Just as Asclepius provided Celsus with a figure to maintain Greco-Roman tradition, the healing god would serve a similar role for Julian. Julian’s polemic against the Christians was anticipated by Celsus. Like Celsus, he believed the Christian religion destroys the foundation of Greco-Roman tradition and culture. Julian argued against the Christians on similar philosophical grounds that Christ’s miracles were inferior and the work of a low-class magician. Julian ridiculed Christians that he believed were duped into a false faith by charlatan healer. However, Julian placed even more emphasis on the inferiority of Christ

¹⁶⁷ Julian, *The Heroic Deeds of Constantius* 89B.

¹⁶⁸ See Rowland Smith, *Julian’s Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London: Routledge, 1995), 6, 169. Julian was largely ridiculed in Antioch by Christians and pagans alike. His attempts at restoration of the gods around 362 was attacked by Christians and tepidly noticed by pagans. Julian’s results in Antioch arguably established his reputation, however his experience there did have a deep effect on him.

and superiority of Asclepius that went beyond any philosophical element.¹⁶⁹ Julian appeared to believe in the impact if not the reality of the superiority of Asclepius.

Julian called Christians “Galileans,” refusing to acknowledge them or empower them by name, and emphasizing that Christianity is merely a localized, regional cult. Much of his *Against the Galileans* was reconstructed through Cyril of Alexandria, who, akin to Origen, felt it was necessary to rebuke the views of the apostate emperor years later in his *Against Julian* of the fifth century.¹⁷⁰ Cyril believed that Julian’s work was disturbing and filled with many unsubstantiated attacks upon Christianity.¹⁷¹ Due to Julian’s insider knowledge of scripture and Christian tradition, his books were particularly dangerous in the eyes of the early church fathers. Julian argued that Jesus was less worthy than the gods since he was known for merely three hundred years, “and during his lifetime he accomplished nothing worth hearing of, unless anyone thinks that to heal crooked and blind men and to exorcise those who were possessed by evil demons in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany can be classed as a mighty achievement.”¹⁷² The Christians were hypocrites, and moreover, power-hungry according to Julian, for “these are rather your own doings; for nowhere did either Jesus or Paul hand down to you such commands.”¹⁷³ Echoing Porphyry, Julian claimed that the Christians were guilty of misrepresenting the meager words of Jesus who never desired them to attain such

¹⁶⁹ Smith, *Julian’s Gods*, 203. See notes 172 and 173 below for evidence.

¹⁷⁰ See William J. Malley, *Hellenism and Christianity: The Conflict Between Hellenic and Christian Wisdom in the Contra Galileos of Julian the Apostate and the Contra Julianum of St. Cyril of Alexandria* (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1978).

¹⁷¹ Cyril, *Against Julian* Book 1.3. See the French translation by Paul Burguierè and Pierre Évieux in *Contre Julien*, SC (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985).

¹⁷² Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1.191E (Wright, LCL).

¹⁷³ Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1.206A. (Wright, LCL).

power.¹⁷⁴ Julian intended to paint Jesus as a minor village healer who spawned an aberrant faith that threatens the traditional religion and values of the imperial realm.

The similarities between Asclepius and Christ allowed Julian to profitably uphold Asclepius at Christ's expense. After absorbing the foundation myths of Asclepius, it is easy to recognize the similarities between Asclepius and Christ. Asclepius was the product of a divine father and mortal mother, as is Jesus.¹⁷⁵ Both figures walked the earth as mortals. Both figures gained a reputation as preeminent healers. Furthermore, both Jesus and Asclepius were killed and resurrected to divine status, although Asclepius' death was directly inflicted by a divine hand not by a group of humans. Jesus and Asclepius were similarly proclaimed by their followers as "savior of the world." Julian had to combat the strongest attraction Christianity held in the personification of Christ. In Christ, the Christians had a very personal deity who lived and walked on earth, performing miracles, and exuding care and concern for the poor. Asclepius was the perfect doppelganger of Christ, even by Christian writers such as Tertullian's own admission.

Tertullian derided the pagan worship of Asclepius, saying that he was deserving of his death at the hands of Jupiter.¹⁷⁶ Asclepius was as intimidating to Christians as Christ was to the pagans. Thus, Julian emphasized the god Asclepius as the heart of all pagan worship at moments during his reign to elicit a comparison with Christ, as he claimed, "Asclepius is savior of the whole world." Julian went on to proclaim "I mean to say that Zeus engendered Asclepius from himself among the intelligible gods, and through the life of generative Helios he revealed him to earth. Asclepius, having made his visitation to earth from the sky ... is

¹⁷⁴ Porphyry notably points out hypocrisy concerning Jesus' sayings and Paul's hypocrisy concerning idol food in *Apocriticus* 3.7-18 and 3.30-36. Also see Wilken, *The Christians*, 126.

¹⁷⁵ The poet Pindar is the first to introduce the notion that Asclepius is the product of a divine father, Apollo, and a human mother, Coronis in *Pythian Odes* III.59.

¹⁷⁶ Tertullian, *To the Heathen* 2.14.42 (CSEL 20.127; ANF 3.144).

present everywhere on land and sea. He visits no one of us separately, and yet he raises souls up that are sinful and bodies that are sick.”¹⁷⁷ In a hymn to King Helios, Julian asked, “Shall I now go on to tell you how Helios took thought for the health and safety of all men by begetting Asclepius to be the savior of the whole world?”¹⁷⁸ This characterization of Asclepius as begotten by Zeus and engendered by Helios is no accident, and may have been a direct juxtaposition with Christ. Just as Jesus was begotten by God to be savior of the world, so was Asclepius as he was by Helios’ side even before creation.

Julian’s ridicule of the inferiority of Christ’s miracles followed the typical playbook of pagan-Christian polemical debates. However, as Morton Smith pointed out, such claims held great currency for Julian.¹⁷⁹ In the reflections of Apellas or Aristides, the work of the god indicated a present reality and interaction in the here and now.¹⁸⁰ Julian emphasized the role of Asclepius and the gods as omnipresent helpers as indicated in his own experience. Christians were faulted by Julian as rendering any divine interaction irrelevant due to the salvific work of Christ. In Julian’s eyes, this was the great failure of the Christians. They refused to acknowledge the active blessings of the gods in daily life. This failure was all the more manifest in their particular abhorrence to pagan images and temples: “it is our duty to adore not only the images of the gods but also their temples and sacred precincts and altars.”¹⁸¹ In turn, Julian acknowledged his deep disgust to Christian veneration of sacred spaces in their persistent devotion to the tombs and sepulchers of local martyrs. He

¹⁷⁷ Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1.200B (Wright, LCL). Also see *Oration* 4.144B where Julian juxtaposes Asclepius to Christ; and 153B for his claim of Asclepius as “the savior.”

¹⁷⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios*, 153B (Wright, LCL).

¹⁷⁹ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 203.

¹⁸⁰ Kee, *Miracle*, 88.

¹⁸¹ Julian, *Fragment of a Letter to a Priest* 296B-C (Wright, LCL).

denigrated the Christians' ritual observance as abominable while ridiculing their lack of proper ritual observance to the pagan cult. Julian found the funerary practices of the Christians as "the work of sorcery and foulness."¹⁸² Julian's repugnance related to his belief in the present reality of the gods.

Julian's choice of Asclepius had political implications as well.¹⁸³ The emperor attempted to associate his name with Asclepius at a time when his popularity was rather low.¹⁸⁴ Libanius cited Julian's motivations in one of his orations, claiming that Julian's actions to restore pagan religion embodied the resurrecting power of Asclepius.¹⁸⁵ Julian emphasized the deeds of the god and his subsequent divinity as a result of Asclepius' training in a type of *paideia*, his education under Chiron. Julian was manipulating the Asclepius legend by asserting that Asclepius was not a mortal hero raised up to divinity upon his death. He was sent down, "engendered by Zeus," and was fully divine upon his arrival to creation. The emperor attributed powers to Asclepius that arise from the understanding of Christ as "savior of the world" as he stated that Asclepius "raises souls up that are sinful."¹⁸⁶ With this phrasing, Asclepius was a healer of the soul as well as a healer of the body. Julian also proclaimed a personal relationship with Asclepius: "At any rate, when I have been sick, Asclepius has often cured me by prescribing remedies."¹⁸⁷ The emperor advanced his

¹⁸² Julian, *Against the Galileans* 335B (Wright, LCL; See Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 204 as he noted this may be the first charge specifically against the cult of the saints).

¹⁸³ Polymnia Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 165-169.

¹⁸⁴ See note 168.

¹⁸⁵ Libanius, *Orations* 13.42.

¹⁸⁶ Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1.200B (Wright, LCL). Also see *Oration* 4.144B.

¹⁸⁷ Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1.235D (Wright, LCL).

agenda of excluding Christians from classical education by emphasizing the role it played in the existence of the true “savior of the world.”

Julian’s descriptions of Asclepius’ attributes were not unique. Aristides recalled his personal relationship with Asclepius and Julius Apellas’ depicted Asclepius as a healer of the soul.¹⁸⁸ Julian’s descriptions of Asclepius were significant for they have Christianity firmly in mind. Aristides may have been familiar with Christianity, but Julian was a former Christian. Competition with Christ was foremost on his mind when he is constructing his polemic, and detailing characteristics of Asclepius as savior of the world. “Savior” assumed a new meaning in Julian. In Aristides’ works, the term was fairly innocent, in Julian’s writings it was a mark of war with Christianity. Julian understood the growing pluralism of the religious landscape and the hurdles traditional pagan religion faced. The Asclepius cult may be philanthropic by Roman standards, but it did not compare to the attention Jews and Christians gave to the poor. The emperor was seeking a unifying face for his pagan re-establishment and he found it in Asclepius. Just as Philostratus appropriated Christ by focusing attention on Apollonius, Julian accomplished the same result with Asclepius. Asclepius became the “savior” in response to claims of Christ as “savior.” The words and actions of Julian reflected the intense competition for cultic survival, and perhaps for Julian, the survival of Roman identity.

Julian offered an obscure and unique characterization of Asclepius in the fourth century. Whenever the word “appropriation” is employed in reference to pagan-Christian contact, it most often refers to Christian appropriation of non-Christian elements. As we will see in Christian art, Christians appropriated elements of the Asclepius cult to enlarge and heighten the qualities of Jesus. In Julian, we find a rare case of a reverse appropriation: the

¹⁸⁸ See Edelstein, T. 432; Kee, *Miracle*, 88; and Aristides, *Oratio* 39.5

pagan appropriation of Christianity. Julian desired pagans to mimic certain traits of the Christians; their attention to the poor, their charity, and their care of the dead. He also needed Asclepius to fulfill all of the qualities the Christians touted in Jesus.

In Asclepius, Julian had already won the battle of longevity, as Asclepius worship reaches back in the sixth century BCE. Julian's reign was very short, mitigating any lasting influence. However, Julian's writings were read well into the fifth century, and Cyril believed them dangerous enough to require a rebuttal. Julian's threat to Christianity was unique. He knew their scriptures, rites and traditions, and could use them against Christianity.¹⁸⁹ His juxtaposition of Asclepius to Christ was all the more revealing due to his insider knowledge. Any outsider could witness similarities between Asclepius and Christ, but Julian amplified them to directly counter any claims of the Christian Jesus. His descriptions of Asclepius had a strong tradition in Late Antiquity and the cult already enjoyed prominence. Julian modeled Asclepius after Christ and made Asclepius into a greater opponent. Julian's writings furthered the clash between the gods and his writings and policies did not help dissuade Christian desecration of pagan temples and images.

Within this context we can begin to realize the importance of healing and miracle as it relates to religion. Asclepius and his cult held a strong currency in Late Antiquity. Pagan opponents to Christianity utilized the god's popularity to situate him as the principal challenger to Christ. Christian authors recognized Asclepius' threat and similarly appropriated traits of the god to advertise the peerless nature of their paragon in Christ. The textual appropriation of Asclepius can be witnessed in the visual art of Christ the Miracle

¹⁸⁹ See note 174. Porphyry was a similar threat since he was so knowledgeable in Christian scripture. However, Porphyry was never a Christian, Julian was. The fact that Porphyry wrote against the Christians is undisputed given the numerous refutations directed against Porphyry. Fragments of his lost work *Against the Christians* indicate that Porphyry directed his polemic against Jewish and Christian scriptures. See R. Joseph Hoffmann's *Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1994) for a good collection of these fragments in translation.

Worker. The favorable sentiment behind such figures as Apollonius and Asclepius realized in the writings of Philostratus, Aristides, and Julian help explain the Christian motivation to appropriate visual features of competitors of Christ.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF HEALING AND MIRACLES IN THE CHURCH FATHERS

While Christians diverged from pagans regarding the cause of their bodily afflictions, they were united in the belief that religion can provide an answer to their physical maladies. Adolf von Harnack claimed in his foundational work on the expansion of Christianity that in order to realize physical cure and comfort, pagans and Christians walked through the doorway of religion.¹ The notion that a singular figure in Asclepius or Christ could restore one's health was desirable. In pagan healing cults and in Christianity, the image of the divine physician became a comfort for people in need. Medical imagery was commonly intertwined with theology.² In Ignatius of Antioch's letter to the Ephesians, he reminds his listeners that "there is only one Physician" and that the Eucharist is the true medicine of immortality.³ In Late Antiquity, the Asclepius cult was a popular source of religious healing. According to Harnack, "a further testimony of much greater weight is afforded by the revival which attended the cult of Asclepius during the Imperial age."⁴ For many pagans, the divine physician of choice was Asclepius. The previous chapter noted the tendency in pagan culture to devote attention to the cult of Asclepius. This chapter will focus on Christian sources that exhibit the emphasis of Christ as an unrivaled physician and reveal the influence of the healing god Asclepius. The manifold textual references to Christ's superiority as a

¹ Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion*, 105.

² See Gerhard Fichtner, "Christus als Arzt: Ursprünge und Wirkungen eines Motivs," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 16 (1982), 7. Fichtner asserts that in the first centuries, "Christus als Erlöser ist Christus der Arzt." Fichtner notes Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians, as well as Tatian, Athenagoras, and Lactantius on his 8-9.

³ Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 7.2; 20.2 (Staniforth).

⁴ Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 105.

healer and miracle worker, especially during a time of Christian peace in the fourth century, are mirrored in visual art in the persistent image of Christ the Miracle Worker.

As opposed to the cult of Asclepius, what exactly did “Christian” healing look like in Late Antiquity? If the church fathers were so vehemently opposed to the cult of Asclepius, could their alternative in Christ really be a viable figure since he was an earthly healer for about three years? By espousing Christ as the Physician rivaling Asclepius, the church fathers did not have the backing of a centuries-long support structure as the healing cult. A Late Antique Christian could not walk into a church and expect to be cured of any chronic illness. As the fourth century ended, Christian churches began to replace the temples of Asclepius, often constructed upon the foundations of the razed temples. A Christian basilica was built at the Asclepieion at Epidauros. The Asclepieion at Rome on the Tiber Island is now the Church of San Bartolomeo, as tourists can hear the tale of Asclepius’ arrival to Rome narrated at the church. The Asclepieion at Pergamum was virtually whitewashed of its pagan imagery by the Christians. The builders of the Christian church at Pergamum appropriated the healing spring of the Asclepieion as its baptismal font.⁵

The church fathers in Late Antiquity could not offer a Christian hospital as an alternative to those that traveled to the temples of Asclepius, as a structural system of hospitals did not yet exist. Instead, they touted the notion of the Christ as the unrivaled Physician, healer of soul and body, and provider of the final resurrection. A Christian viewer may glance upon an image of Christ healing and be reminded of their own “healing” effected by Christ; the ritual washing of baptism that healed them of sin and marked them as Christ’s own. In Late Antiquity, Christ the Miracle Worker could not effectively rival the cult of

⁵ Nutton, “From Galen to Alexander, Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity,” in *DOP* 38, 7. Baptism and the curative powers of water are certainly related, and the use of a healing spring for the “spiritual healing” of baptism is indicative of an early understanding of the rite as an action of purity, and healing.

Asclepius as a viable healing alternative. Christians in congregations could easily call upon the cult if they so desired. Instead, the church fathers capitalized on the image of Christ healing and working miracles in the gospels to remind viewers of the perils of idolatry, the salvation of Christ, and their participation as baptized members in Christ the Physician's community.

I. Christian Impressions of Asclepius

I. 1. Scriptural Material

Jesus' healing miracles are prolific in the four gospels. Such stories as the healing of Peter's mother-in-law or the healing of the woman with the issue of blood appear in all three of the synoptic gospels.⁶ Other healing accounts, such as Jesus healing the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19) or Jesus healing the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26) are unique to a specific gospel. Several of the healings in the fourth gospel lack cognate stories in the synoptic texts although they do bear some similarities to the synoptic accounts.⁷

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus introduced himself as a physician: "Those who are well have no need of a physician (*iatros*), but those who are sick."⁸ This term, *iatros*, would be repeated throughout patristic literature when referring to Christ, granting him the

⁶ For Peter's mother-in-law, see Mark 1:29-31; Matthew 8:14; and Luke 4:1-13. For the woman with the issue of blood, Mark 5:21-34; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-48.

⁷ Jesus heals a son of a royal official in John 4:46-54, heals a man by the pool, akin to the synoptic Paralytic accounts in 5:1-18, heals a man born blind in 9:1-41, and raises Lazarus from the dead in 11:1-46.

⁸ Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31; Matthew 9:9-13. See Augustine, *Sermons*, 88.7-8 (PL 38, 543) quoting this passage in referring to Christ the Physician: "Non opus est, inquit, sanis medicus, sed aegrotantibus."

moniker of “Christ the Physician.”⁹ He was not a typical physician that treated his “patients” for a fee. He was, as Harnack noted in his work:

...the physician of soul and body, as the Savior and healer of men. Jesus says very little about sickness, but cures it. He does not explain that sickness is health; he calls it by its proper name, and is sorry for the sick person. There is nothing sentimental or subtle about Jesus; he draws no fine distinctions, he utters no sophistries...he attracts them, and his one impulse is to help them. Jesus does not distinguish rigidly between sicknesses of the body and of the soul; he takes them both as different expressions of the one supreme ailment in humanity.¹⁰

Harnack was not making a comparison, but he stated that Jesus’ healings were different than the cures of a physician; his cures took immediate effect and cured both body and soul. He also rightly notes that the gospel writers were not explicit but implicit about this difference.

The story of the woman with the issue of blood illuminates the difference. Mark and Luke included some minor details of the woman’s suffering: “She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had...”(Mark 5:26; Luke 8:43). The woman was not cured by physicians and may have been deemed untreatable. Thus, seeking the help from a physician did not always result in a cure.¹¹ Physicians’ methods were not always efficacious. The tale of the woman with the issue of blood distinguishes worldly physicians from Christ the divine physician. Christ was unlike the Late Antique physicians; his healings were always efficacious and without cost. No person would expect a worldly physician to be as effective as a god, however Late Antique people likely expected their god to be like

⁹ For example, Ignatius, *Eph.* 7.2; *Acts of John* 22-4 and 108; Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 10; Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.2.6. See 91 below for more expansive evidence.

¹⁰ Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 101.

¹¹ There can also be a semantic debate concerning the difference between “cure” and “healing.” “Cure” can be defined as eradicating a disease, something that hardly ever happened in antiquity. “Healing” can be understood as treatment; indicating that even if the condition is not cured, it can be cared for, and patients can extract a value from the treatment. This perhaps muddies the water of the late antique health care system, but it does demonstrate that patients of divine healing can extract value from attending the temple, making the “healing” efficacious. Psycho-somatic treatments are thus healings. See John J. Pilch, “Sickness and Healing in Luke-Acts,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (ed. by Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 181-210.

physicians but greater than physicians. A healing god was uniformly effective while a human physician was fallible.

Admittedly, there are accounts where Christ healed through word or conversational interaction, as in the healing of ten lepers in Luke 17:13 or the healing of blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:51. The physical presence of Christ is intentionally stressed in the healing accounts. In Matthew 8:3, Christ healed a leper immediately with the power of touch: “And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying ‘I will, be clean.’” A chapter later in Matthew 9:1-7, he encountered a paralytic and ordered him to “Rise and walk.” It is this physical interaction that possibly set Christ’s healings apart from pagan healing cults, particularly their tactile nature. The somnolent remedies that took place in the Asclepieion were not as physical as the healings of Christ as captured in the gospels. That is not to say that Asclepius never physically touched his supplicants. In an account from Epidauros, Asclepius touches the hand and chest of a worshiper and the following day the hand was made well.¹² In Marinus’ biography of Proclus, the god visited Proclus in a dream and kissed his feet, healing his ailment.¹³ The dream-like nature of Asclepius’ healings are just as efficacious as Christ’s healings in the gospels, and Asclepius did have an ongoing presence as a healer in antiquity while Christ is fairly new on the scene.¹⁴ However, the gospels (and the iconography) suggest Christ as a different type of healer, a healer that directly encounters his “patients,” charges no fees, and always heals effectively and instantaneously. While there are

¹² See *Inscriptiones Graecae*, 4.1.126 (Edelstein T. 432).

¹³ See *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (trans. by Mark Edwards; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 106.

¹⁴ Arguments centering on whether dreams are “real” or whether dreams in the healing temple were authentic have been treated by E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 113, and rebutted. Dreams were real enough for pagans and Christians to find them convincing. See Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), and Jeffrey Pettis’ dissertation *The Sleeper’s Dream: Asclepius Ritual and Early Christian Discourse* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 2004).

some accounts of Asclepius encountering his patients through dreams, the accounts of Christ the Physician uniformly depict a direct interaction between healer and patient. As will be discussed in the remaining chapters, these properties of Christ's healings are displayed in Christian art.

The gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are the source of the portrayal of Christ as the divine physician. In Christ's commission in Mark 16:17, he says "These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." That Jesus passed along his healing power of touch to his disciples illustrated that divine healing power could be transmitted. Evidence of this action can be found in Acts 5:12-16: "Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles." Throughout Acts, the continuity of Christ as the agent of healing is intact, as the apostles emphasize that the name of Christ heals; without the name a healing would not be efficacious.¹⁵ The author of Luke/Acts was sure to specify that the "hands of the apostles" wrought miracles. Notably, their power does go beyond mere hands: "...they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them."

Peter was not the only apostle specified with this ability. Not only those designated could heal in Christ's name, but objects that came into contact with the healer could also transmit healing power. In Acts 19:11, objects that came into contact with Paul also effected healings: "And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs

¹⁵ Acts 4:7, Peter is asked "By what power or name do you do this," answering, "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth this man is standing before you well." Also consider Matthew 16:19 and John 20:23, when Jesus gives the disciples the agency to forgive sins.

or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.” In the second through the fourth centuries, the physical nature of Christ’s and the apostles’ healings were emphasized. The fourth-century discovery of the “true cross” and the relics of Stephen stimulated the healing power of objects that had come into contact with the saints or holy places.¹⁶

In the passage of Mark 16:17 cited above, the disciples were able to “pick up serpents” along with the ability to heal. It is unclear what the gospel writer meant by this action. It could be interpreted that the disciples could pick up a dangerous viper with no fear of harm. The serpent could be a symbol representing the serpent in the Garden of Eden from Genesis, Christian opponents, or possibly the serpent symbol of the cult of Asclepius. When read in light of other scriptural episodes involving serpents and healing in Acts 28:1-9 and Numbers 21, it is possible that the inclusion of the serpent was far from accidental.

Snakes are fairly ubiquitous in Late Antique pagan traditions. Pliny noted in his *Natural History* the tendency to believe poisonous snakes as agents of divine power, such as the mythical Basilisk.¹⁷ Hercules memorably strangled two serpents sent by Hera to kill him as a child.¹⁸ Dionysius was conceived when Zeus approached Persephone as a serpent. Serpents are omnipresent; however the association with Asclepius is notable. Not only was Asclepius recognizable as the god bearing a serpent-entwined staff, occasionally he was

¹⁶ From 347, Cyril of Jerusalem attested to the discovery and proliferation of the true cross relic in his lectures at the holy sites: “and the whole world has since been filled with pieces of the wood of the Cross,” (*Catechetical Lectures* 4.10; 13.4). In 415, a priest named Lucian discovered the remains of Stephen through a revelation in a dream. For further reading see Gary Vikan, “Byzantine Pilgrims’ Art” in *Sacred Images and Sacred Power in Byzantium* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 235. See Chapter Eight.

¹⁷ Pliny, *Natural History* 8.21

¹⁸ This is represented in a wall painting depicting Hercules strangling the snakes in front of Amphitryon and Alcmene from the exedra of House of the Vettii in Pompeii, 60-79 CE.

characterized as a serpent.¹⁹ In his treatise *Alexander the False Prophet*, Lucian attacked a fraudulent magician, Alexander of Abonoteichus, or Alexander the False Prophet, who was supposedly a priest of Asclepius. Lucian argued that Alexander discovered a goose-egg containing a baby snake. Alexander used this as evidence that he held the “new born Asclepius.”²⁰ With Asclepius appearing with a snake or as a snake, it is compelling to investigate whether the serpent passage in Acts 28 recalls the healing god. Even with the serpent excluded, Acts 28 is a passage depicting a Christian healing. Although far from conclusive evidence that the author of Luke/Acts was recalling Asclepius with the inclusion of serpent in Acts 28, it is useful to explore if there was any connection between Acts 28 and Asclepius’ arrival to Rome, and to recognize its place in the larger context of healing narratives.

In Acts 28, Paul and his crew reached the island of Malta where they began to kindle a fire. Paul searched for firewood and in the brush, “a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘This man must be a murderer; though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were expecting him to swell up or drop dead, but after they had waited a long time and saw nothing unusual had happened to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god” (Acts 28:3-6).

Immediately after this incident occurs, Paul is pressed into another task: “It so happened that the father of Publius lay sick in bed with fever and dysentery. Paul visited

¹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.650ff, “Only be sure to note this snake that twines about my staff, and mark it well to fix it in your mind!” (Melville).

²⁰ Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 13-14. Much earlier than Late Antiquity, in the work of Aristophanes from 380 BCE, two snakes purportedly licked the eyes of the patient Plutus, and his vision was subsequently healed.

him and cured him by praying and putting his hands on him. After this happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They bestowed many honors on us, and when we were about to sail, they put on board all the provisions we needed” (Acts 28:8-10). Paul was obviously not affected by his snakebite, and once the natives realized he was unhurt, their first reaction is to proclaim him a god. Paul does little to dissuade their initial perception for the very next action he performed was a healing of Publius’ father, and then widespread healings of the natives. Paul’s bit of snake-handling in Acts 28 may recall Mark’s edict in 16:17; however, the image of the snake coinciding with Paul’s landfall on his way to Rome recalls an earlier *adventus* to Rome: the arrival of the god Asclepius.

When Paul’s story is read in light of Asclepius’ advent to Rome, the connection between the two narratives is noticeable.²¹ Following a prolonged plague in Rome in 293 BCE, emissaries of the city convinced the cult of Asclepius at Epidaurus to come to its aid. Legendarily, Asclepius traveled to Rome in the form of a snake, exiting the boat and taking refuge at Tiber Island. It is helpful to recall Ovid’s account as he described Asclepius’ arrival:

Now it (the ship) had reached the world’s great capital, Rome, and the serpent raised his length to lean against the masthead, looking all around to find a fit and worthy residence. The river here divides and forms two streams (the place is called the Island), flowing round on either side, and stretching equal arms to hold in their embrace the land between. Here from the Roman ship the serpent-son of Pheobus (Apollo) disembarked and took again his heavenly form – the god who gives relief and health – and ended so the city’s grief.²²

²¹ See James Hanges, “The Greek Foundation Legend: Its Form and Relation to History,” in *SBLSP* 34, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 494-519. Hanges mentions the importation of Asclepius (not necessarily in relation to Acts 28) to Rome as it pertains to the validation of the Delphic oracle (497).

²² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.724-52 (Melville).

The Tiber Island story appears to have a connection to Acts 28: Both involved a journey to Rome by ship under rough conditions, included a vivid description of a snake, both main characters were recognized as deities, and began to heal the afflicted.²³ There are differences between the narratives. Asclepius was in the form of a snake while Paul was bitten by a snake, and Asclepius arrives in Rome while Paul is merely on his way to Rome.

The story of Asclepius' advent to Rome was well-known in the first centuries. Livy, Valerius Maximus, as well as an anonymous author described the serpent's arrival to Rome in similar versions as Ovid's.²⁴ In his fourth-century polemic, Arnobius of Sicca referred to the story to portray the ridiculousness of the pagans in extolling the arrival of a mere serpent, "Asclepius, you say, from Epidaurus, the god who supervises good health, and who is established on Tiber Island... From Epidaurus, however, what was brought except an enormous serpent?"²⁵ It seems likely that both Christians and pagans were aware of Asclepius' legendary arrival to Rome in the form of a serpent. It is possible to see the snake at Malta as a characterization of the serpent-savior Asclepius, attempting to attack Christ's apostle Paul. Paul resists the attack, destroys the snake/Asclepius and heals Publius' father with the power of touch; a healing method that exhibits direct interaction between patient and healer, and conceivably supplants the dream prescriptions of Asclepius.

While there are tempting similarities between Acts 28 and Asclepius' advent, one should resist interpreting the snake in Acts with Asclepius in mind. The burgeoning corpus of exegetical criticism on Acts 28 allows only a brief summary here. Most biblical scholars

²³ See Annette Weissenrieder, "He Is a God": Acts 28:1-9 in the Light of Iconographical and Textual Sources Related to Medicine," in *Picturing the New Testament*, (ed. by Annette Weissenrieder, Friederike Wendt and Petra von Gemünden; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 144. She believes Acts is intentionally recalling Asclepius, however her discussion of some of the Asclepius material is flawed especially her juxtaposition of Hippocrates and Asclepius on 138.

²⁴ Livy, *History of Rome* 7.27; 4.20-25; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 1.8.2; Edelstein, T. 849.

²⁵ Arnobius of Sicca, *Against the Pagans* 7.44-48 (CSEL 4.278; McCracken).

attempt to interpret this passage in light of other narratives, specifically Luke 10:19 where Jesus gives the seventy-two disciples the authority to walk on snakes and scorpions.²⁶ Paul's failing to die of the snake bite in Acts is related to Jesus' edict in Luke to tread upon snakes without harm; it indicates God's plan and protection.²⁷ While bearing a similarity to Asclepius' advent to Rome, the snake at Malta may in the least be just a snake, or at the most may represent pagan religion in general. Serpents appear quite often in biblical stories, most notably the serpent in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. The association with Asclepius is not clear. However, the author of Luke/Acts displays a clever ability to associate healing, serpents, and the destruction of serpents. It is safer to conclude that Paul's viper represents idolatrous pagan religion.

The inclusion of Paul's viper may have another biblical connection in Exodus when Moses' staff becomes a snake. In Numbers 21, the Israelites were depicted as a group of complainers, grumbling about the lack of food.

The LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

²⁶ As in Beverly Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 358; Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 261-262, "So with this story Luke shows that nothing – not even a lethal snakebite – can prevent the protagonist from reaching the goal that has been appointed by God"; also see Howard Clark Kee, *Good News to the Ends of the Earth: The Theology of Acts* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 68; Biblical scholars also invoke Pliny's notation that all snakes were thought to be vipers (*Nat.* 8.35.85).

²⁷ For an example, see Ben Witherington, "The Journey to Rome," *The Acts of the Apostles, vol. III* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 779, see 777. The appearance of the snake is strange since Malta reportedly had no poisonous vipers at this time in history. Witherington believes Luke may be referring to a type of constrictor, not a viper; however this places much too much attention on the historical veracity of the snake itself, instead of what it represents.

The snake is indubitably connected to pain and punishment in this story, as the Lord sends the serpents to teach the Israelites a lesson. The snake is turned into a symbol of healing by Moses following the Lord's command. Once the snake transformed into a type of symbol, it became a healing-type of talisman.²⁸ In John's gospel, the author referred directly to the text in Numbers connecting the serpent of Moses to the Passion of Jesus: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14).²⁹ As Moses' serpent symbol healed, the cross of Christ provides the greatest healing in eternal life. The gospel writer was proclaiming that Moses' serpent foreshadows the cross of Christ; however the text in John advanced Christ as greater than any healing a serpent-standard could provide. Justin Martyr reflected such a reading in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, as he rebuked anyone that may misinterpret the text in Numbers as crediting "the serpent" in any way: "Shall it be thought, then, that the serpent saved the people at that time; the serpent which, as I pointed out, God cursed at the beginning and slew with the great sword...?"³⁰

²⁸ Justin Martyr introduced the staff as a cross by citing Numbers 21:8 in his *First apology*, 60 (PG 6, 418A-420B). Also see *Dialogue with Trypho*, 94.2-3 (PG 6, 699B), where he stated that those who believe in Christ will receive "salvation from the fangs of the serpent," referring likely to Eden. Also see Erwin Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968), 251 and Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1988), 62. Minucius Felix mentions the veneration of crosses in his *Octavius*, 29, but healings performed by crosses generate from the discovery of the true cross in Jerusalem, perpetuated in the fourth century. John of Damascus writes of the true cross (*Orthodox Faith*, 4.11; Chase): "that honorable and most truly venerable tree upon which Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for us is itself to be adored, because it has been sanctified by contact with the sacred body and blood. So also are the nails, the lance, the garments, and the sacred resting places of his." Also see Gary Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," *DOP*, vol. 38, (1984), 65-86.

²⁹ John's text provided the moniker "the brazen serpent" to Moses' story. As seen in the following chapters, the serpent of Moses appears in some instances of early Christian art, and even becomes a popular theme in Renaissance painting, including a depiction in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel.

³⁰ Justin, *Dial.* 112.2. Justin mentioned the brazen serpent at other points in his *Dial.* 91.4; 94.1; 131.4. Tertullian associated the Cainite woman with a viper in *On Baptism* 1. Also see the fifth century poet Prudentius' response to Symmachus. In his preface, he characterized the viper that attacks Paul to the pagan viper Symmachus (*Against Symmachus*, Pref. 45-77). While not Asclepius, the serpent was a useful metaphor for pagan opponents.

Is it warranted to read Asclepius into these scriptural narratives? Asclepius, called the serpent-son of Apollo by Ovid, healed the body while Christ's standard of the cross, formulated out of a serpent, provided the ultimate restoration of eternal life.³¹ Still, the differences between Asclepius and the serpents in Acts 28 and Numbers 21 present a wide chasm that characterizations of Asclepius as a serpent or his Roman *adventus* could not possibly bridge. Moreover, it is quite a perilous leap to consider that ancient Israelites were that cognizant of the symbol of Asclepius. In Numbers, the brazen serpent represents competing threats that lead the Israelites out of their covenantal relationship with God, and in the hands of authors such as Justin, symbolizes the ultimate victory of the cross over any competitor. In Acts 28, it is more important to witness how the author of Luke/Acts was recalling the healing ways of Christ the Physician. Following the destruction of the snake in Acts, Paul healed Publius' father immediately with the touch of his hand, by "putting his hands on him." His healing power was palpable and physical, like Christ's. Acts 28 was an effort to remind its audience of the superiority of Christ the Physician as passed on to the apostles. While it recalls the commission from Luke 10:19, it is unlikely that Asclepius is evoked. The motivation for this scene in Acts was likely to eradicate the notion that any opponent, Asclepius or otherwise, was a physician on an equal level with Christ. Paul's arrival to Malta is reproduced in art and imagery, but not until the fifth century. However, the serpent episode from Numbers is important to bear in mind when approaching the art of Christ the Miracle Worker.³² In visual imagery of the fourth and fifth centuries, Moses'

³¹ See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.724-52.

³² See Chapter Seven for the treatment of the staff. Paul's viper was rarely depicted, for an image see the Carrand diptych (c. 400) now in Florence, in Herbert Kessler, "Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles on Some Early Christian Ivories," in *Gesta*, vol. 18, no. 1 (November 1977-February 1978), fig. 10.

episode with the serpent involves the use of his staff and directly relates to the staff of Christ as we will see in Chapter Seven.

I. 2. Second and Third Century Evidence

Second-century Christian documents contain numerous depictions of Jesus as a physician. They also indicate a rivalry between Jesus and Asclepius. Latin and Greek patristic writers consistently attacked Asclepius as they did the other gods of the pagan pantheon by insisting that Asclepius was not a god at all. They insisted that Asclepius was merely a man or a demon but definitely not a god. However, they treated Asclepius slightly differently than other pagan gods since he was firmly entrenched as a healer and boasted a large number of devotees. Asclepieia throughout the Mediterranean healed the rich and poor alike. Healing was a tangible benefit for supplicants of the cult.

Debunking Asclepius' divinity on the basis that he was only an apotheosized man was not a strong enough argument for the church fathers. Christian writers offered an alternative to the healing power of Asclepius by depicting Christ as a viable competitor and practitioner with superior methods. For the patristic authors, Christ was greater than Asclepius in every way. They made Christ as the supreme physician that heals the soul as well as the body. The church fathers emphasized the cleansing of the soul and the future life, and associated physical healing with communal interaction in a Christian setting.

Apocryphal Texts

The apocryphal texts generally depicted miracles of healing, exorcism or punishment. The frequent appearance of healing miracles was meant to highlight Christ as the preeminent

healer.³³ In the *Acts of John*, John prays to Christ the “physician who heals freely.”³⁴ The *Acts of John*, a late second-century text, appeared to understand that Christ’s competitor Asclepius also healed the poor. The author of the *Acts of John* stressed Christ as a physician that healed for free.³⁵ François Bovon notes the numerous instances of the image of the physician in the *Acts of Philip*, as the apocryphal author insisted that Christ was the physician of soul and body: “le guérisseur du caché et du visible.”³⁶ Even in the instances of the apostles performing healings, their goal was the deeper cure of the soul: “L’apôtre est guérisseur, mais ce sont les âmes qu’il entend surtout soigner et sauver.”³⁷ The early third-century, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* recorded Jesus ordering his disciples to go out into the world and heal. John questioned Jesus, asking how they could possibly act as true physicians. Jesus answered that the physicians of the world heal only the body, while the disciples have the power to act as physicians of the soul, healing the heart.³⁸ The third-century *Acts of Thomas* repeatedly referred to Christ as the “physician of the souls,” even offering a distinction between earthly physicians and Christ, “Yes, he is the physician, and he is different from all other physicians,

³³ See François Bovon, “Miracles, magie, et guérison dans les Actes apocryphes des apôtres,” in *J ECS* 3 (1995), 245-259. Bovon agrees on 248, “...des miracles sont les signes visibles d’une guérison supérieure.”

³⁴ *Acts of John*, 22-4 and 108; Also see 69 where he compares miraculous works to a physician. French and Greek text in *Acta Iohannis*, CCSA 1-2, E. Junod and J.D. Kaestli (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983). Later apocryphal texts use the term □□□□□□ such as the *Gospel of Thomas* (10; 37; 95; 143) from the third century, and the *Acts of Philip* from the fourth-fifth century (40). See *Acta Philippi*, CCSA 11, François Bovon, Bertrand Bouvier, and Frédéric Amsler (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).

³⁵ Gervais Dumeige, “Le Christ Médecin,” in *RAC*, no. 1-4, (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1972), 123-124. Dumeige thinks that Asclepius can be witnessed in the *Acts of John*, and the author of *Acts of John* has Asclepius firmly in mind. While the competition between Asclepius and Christ is explicit in these texts, I find that conclusion likely given that the phrase “physician who heals freely” occurs in the longer version of the *Acts*, read on the saints’ day (108). This designation is not limited to the *Acts of John* in the apocryphal genre, in the *Acts of Thomas*, 156, Christ was the “physician that heals without payment,” another reference to Christ’s competitor in Asclepius.

³⁶ *Acts of Philip*, 40, Nicanora’s husband believed she was healed by magicians, while she rebuked her husband, telling him of the inner cleaning of the Physician; Bovon, “Miracles, magie...,” 251.

³⁷ Bovon, “Miracles, magie...,” 251.

³⁸ *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, 11 (See Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* II, 423).

for all other physicians heal these bodies which shall be dissolved, but this physician heals the bodies with the souls, which shall never more be dissolved.”³⁹ In the *Acts of Euplus*, the martyr’s executioner asked him to relent and adore the gods, “You poor fellow, adore the gods. Worship Mars, Apollo, Asclepius.”⁴⁰ In the third-century *Acts of Pilate*, a spurious account details the Roman governor’s interaction with Jesus. In this text Christ was directly associated with Asclepius, a unique event in apocryphal literature. Pilate claimed Jesus’ healing actions were not the “casting out of demons by an unclean spirit, but by the god Asclepius.”⁴¹ With this association between Jesus and Asclepius, Pilate attempted to subordinate Jesus’ power to the healing power of the god and stated that Asclepius was the higher authority.⁴² While the apocryphal examples were more implicit in their comparison of Christ and Asclepius, the *Acts of Pilate* offered a very direct comparison and juxtaposition, as Pilate reflected a possible position early Christians may have faced in Late Antiquity: Asclepius was considered greater than Christ.

Greek Patristic Texts: Justin and Clement of Alexandria

The patristic texts exhibited quite plainly the general threat the cult of Asclepius posed. Just as the gospel and apocryphal writers made sure to portray Christ and his followers as healing both body and soul, many of the church fathers also emphasized Christ

³⁹ *Acts of Thomas*, 95; also see 143, 156 and 37. See text and commentary in A.F.J. Klijn’s, *The Acts of Thomas* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Thomas was also called “sorcerer” or “wonder worker,” not in a derogatory sense, but intentionally connected him with the wonder works of Jesus.

⁴⁰ From the Latin version. See translation in Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 317.

⁴¹ *Acts of Pilate*, or *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 1.1 (Musurillo).

⁴² Dumeige, “Le Christ Médecin,” 121. Dumeige claims that the text is “affirmation peu surprenante de la part d’un païen, mais qui subordonne le Christ au dieu d’Epidaure.”

as a physician and savior.⁴³ The emphasis on “savior” may recall some characterizations of Christian opponents as “savior,” including but not limited to Asclepius. Whether explicit or implicit, in the Greek and Latin patristic texts Christ was depicted as a physician within a context of uneasy competition with Christian rivals.

In some examples, Jesus was depicted as the great physician without peer; in others the competition with Asclepius and other threats to his superiority as a healer are apparent.⁴⁴ From the early second century, the bishop Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his letter to the Ephesians to stay away from the poisonous words of heretics: “You need to be on your guard against their bites, because they are by no means easy to heal. There is only one Physician.”⁴⁵ For Ignatius, “their bites” referred to outside threats that possibly included the Asclepius cult. In the *Letter to Diognetus*, the author called Jesus “Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counselor, Healer...” among other titles.⁴⁶ In a fragment of Pseudo-Justin the author states, “But if our physician Christ, God, having rescued us from our desires, regulates our flesh with his own wise and temperate rule, it is evident that he guards it from sins because it possesses a hope of salvation, as physicians do not suffer men whom they hope to save to

⁴³ Dumeige, “Le Christ Médecin,” 116: “La guérison est invoquée comme la prévue d’un pouvoir souverain sur les âmes.”

⁴⁴ See Fichtner, “Christus als Arzt,” 8. Fichtner believes the church fathers are addressing the competition with Asclepius. He cites Ignatius, *Eph.* 7.2; 20.2; Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 2.30.1; Justin, *1 Apol.* 22.6; Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 8.7; 21.3; Tertullian, *The Crown* 8.2; *Apology*, 23.6; Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 1.15.3; 1.15.23; Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 1.48-49 as evidence, see the following pages for more. “Ganz allgemein findet nur selten im Schrifttum der Kirchenväter eine direkte Konfrontation Asklepios – Christus statt.” He also notes the influence of Philo as well on 12, “(Philo’s) Einfluß auf die Theologie insbesondere der griechischen Kirchenväter ist nicht leicht zu überschätzen.”

⁴⁵ Ignatius, *Eph.* 7. See Dumeige, “Le Christ Médecin,” 118-119, where he notes the vigorous employment of the invective by Ignatius, as well as introduce Aristides’ understanding of Asclepius as a healer of body and soul, exhibiting the competitive context *Le Christ Médecin* was born.

⁴⁶ *Letter to Diognetus*, 9.6. “□□□□□□, □□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□□□□□, □□□□□□...” (PG 2, 1181A; trans. Author).

indulge in what pleasures they please.”⁴⁷ Occasionally, it is God rather than Jesus who is referred to as the physician, as in the mid second-century homily attributed to Clement, “While we have time to be healed, let us place ourselves in the hands of God the physician, giving him recompense.”⁴⁸ In the majority of cases it is Jesus who is the agent of healing. This designation becomes standard following the second century; it is Jesus who performs the divine action of healing.

Writing in the mid second century, Justin Martyr provided some detailed evidence relating Christ to a physician as well as directly noting a competition with the cult of Asclepius. In his *First Apology*, Justin intentionally cast Jesus in the mold of Asclepius: “And when we say that He (Christ) healed the lame, the paralytic, and those born blind, and raised the dead, we appear to say things similar to those said to have been done by Asclepius.”⁴⁹ Justin was arguing that the myths about Asclepius should allow the pagans to accept the veracity of Christianity. Just as Asclepius healed, so did Christ, and Justin further elaborated on their similarity by pointing out: “we propound nothing new beyond what you believe concerning those whom you call sons of Zeus...Asclepius, who though he was a great healer, after being struck by a thunderbolt ascended to heaven.”⁵⁰ Justin alluded to the similarities between the two healing gods to show that Christianity was not completely dissimilar from the beliefs of their rivals. One might think that Justin was characterizing

⁴⁷ Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection*, 10 (*ANF* 2.299; PG 6, 1591A: □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□). It is debatable whether the original author is Athenagoras or Hippolytus, although Dods in the *ANF* believes this section is genuinely Justin. Most recently, Wheatley argues for Hippolytus in “Pseudo-Justin's *De Resurrectione*: Athenagoras or Hippolytus?” *VChr*, Volume 60, Number 4, (2006), 420-430.

⁴⁸ *Second Clement*, 9.7-10 (Lightfoot; also see *ANF* 9.253).

⁴⁹ Justin, *1 Apol.* 22 (PG 6, 361B; Barnard).

⁵⁰ Justin, *1 Apol.* 21 (PG 6, 360A; Barnard).

Christ as an imitator of Asclepius with these comments.⁵¹ However, Justin was portraying Christ as a physician like Asclepius, and these comments in his *Apology* are balanced with his later argument that the healing cults were the imitators, not Christ.

The crux of Justin's polemic against the pagans (and the Jews) was that Christ predated the gods of pagan myths and was predicted by the Old Testament prophets. Thus, Christ could not be a follower of Asclepius since he was preexistent to Asclepius. The Divine Logos existed before creation and was therefore "older" and superior to any divinity the pagans touted. Justin asserted that "the Father of the Universe has a Son; who being the Logos and first-begotten is also God. And formerly he appeared in the form of fire and in the image of a bodiless being to Moses and to the other prophets; but now in the times of your rule, as we said before, he became man of a virgin according to the will of the Father for the salvation of those who believe in him."⁵² For Justin, the Jews were guilty of not interpreting the prophets correctly in acknowledging the incarnation of Christ, and the pagans have used the prophets to offer alternatives to Christ.

Accordingly, Hercules, Dionysius, Hermes, and others were imitators of Christ. Therefore, Justin can argue that "when they [the pagans] knew what was said, as has been cited before, in the ancient prophecies, 'Strong as a giant to run his course,' they said that Heracles was strong and traveled over all the earth. And, again, when they learned that it had been predicted that He would heal every disease and raise the dead, they brought forward Asclepius."⁵³ Justin claimed that the pagans offered Hercules in response to this prophecy. Justin asserted that the Old Testament prophecies predicted Jesus, explaining the

⁵¹ See Dumeige, "Le Christ Médecin," 120, "Ainsi, l'argument tire des prophéties intègre à la théologie chrétienne l'indéniable activité de guérisseur du dieu médecin."

⁵² Justin, *1 Apol.* 63 (PG 6, 424C; Barnard).

⁵³ Justin, *1 Apol.* 54 (PG 6, 410A; Barnard). Justin believed that power of Christ was prophesied, see Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr*, 245.

similarities between Christ and the gods, and proving the superiority of Christ.⁵⁴ The prediction Justin was connecting to Asclepius, a reference from Psalm 19:5, was ambiguous although it likely followed his previous line of argumentation that pagan gods were instances of invented puppetry in response to prophecies that specifically referred to Christ. Justin continued this thrust throughout his *First Apology*: “From what has been said you can understand how the demons, in imitation of what was said through Moses, contrived also to raise up the image of the so-called Kore.”⁵⁵ The contrivances of the pagans included the ascendancy of the divine Asclepius. Justin repeatedly claimed Jewish prophecy compelled the pagans to offer an alternative deity. Imitation was not the sincerest form of flattery; it was a clever tactic in a war for religious supremacy.

Justin argued that Asclepius was an imitator of Christ more explicitly in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. In chapter 69, Justin recalled the same line of evidence citing the passage from Psalms, “And when it is asserted that Herakles, the son of Zeus and Alcmene, was strong and traversed the whole earth, and that, after death, he, too, ascended into heaven, ought I not conclude that the scriptural prophecy about Christ, ‘strong as a giant to run his course,’ was similarly imitated?”⁵⁶ Justin moved on to Asclepius, arguing, “And when the devil presents Asclepius as raising the dead to life and curing all diseases, has he not, in this regard, also emulated the prophecies about Christ?”⁵⁷ In the *First Apology* and the *Dialogue*, Justin made it clear that Asclepius worship was derivative of the first physician, Christ. Ultimately, no healing cult can claim superiority to Christ the Physician since Christ was the

⁵⁴ See Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 62.

⁵⁵ Justin, *1 Apol* 64 (PG 6, 425C).

⁵⁶ Justin, *Dial.* 69.3 (PG 6, 636C-637B; Thomas B. Falls’ trans., Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2003, 108).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

oldest, and therefore the supreme physician. Justin did not mention Asclepius by name in his *Second Apology*, although he did recall this supercessionist argument: “For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also he became man for our sakes, that, becoming a partaker of our sufferings, he might also bring us healing.”⁵⁸ Jesus, existing before time, became the great Physician in our time to ease the maladies of our existence. The apologists were merely offering Jesus as a viable alternative to the healing cult of Asclepius. They were attempting to raise Christ as a superior healer in the minds of their audience to ultimately dissuade them from associating with any pagan healing cult.

Later Greek writers followed Justin in asserting Christ as a physician without explicitly referring to Asclepius.⁵⁹ Clement of Alexandria, writing later in the second century, paralleled Justin’s argument for the preexistence of the Logos along with his insistence on Christ as a physician. In his *The Instructor*, he called Jesus “Our Instructor, the Word, (who) therefore cures the unnatural passions of the soul by means of exhortations. For with the highest propriety the help of bodily diseases is called the healing art, an art acquired by human skill. The Logos of the Father is the only Paeonian physician for human infirmities.”⁶⁰ And further, “the Logos of the Father, the creator of man, cares for all our nature, healing it in body and soul alike.”⁶¹ Clement was emphasizing that the Physician

⁵⁸ Justin, *Second apology*, 13 (PG 6, 468A; Barnard).

⁵⁹ Athenagoras of Athens mentioned the resurrection myth of Asclepius without providing much detail of the competition with Christ in his *Embassy*, 29 (PG 6, 957B). But he characterized Christ as “the physician” who introduced salvific medicine for his people in his treatise on *The Resurrection of the Dead* 1 (PG 6, 976C). Also see Theophilus of Antioch, *Letters to Autolytus*, 1.7 (PG 6, 1036A; ANF 2.91): “Entrust yourself to the Physician, and He will couch the eyes of your soul and of your heart. Who is the Physician? God, who heals and makes alive through His word and wisdom.”

⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.2.6 (PG 8, 256B; ANF 2.210); see Dumeige, “Le Christ Médecin,” 125-129.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Christ was a healer of the body and of the soul as well. Although Asclepius was not explicitly mentioned in these examples, Clement may be referring to a competition with Asclepius or with other healers. Clement was possibly insisting that Christ is the superior physician since he heals the soul, not just the body, and justly is called “savior”:

Thus, therefore, the Word has been called also the Savior, seeing He has found out for men those rational medicines which produce vigor of the senses and salvation; and devotes Himself to watching for the favorable moment, reproofing evil, exposing the causes of evil affections, and striking at the roots of irrational lusts, pointing out what we ought to abstain from, and supplying all the antidotes of salvation to those who are diseased. For the greatest and most regal work of God is the salvation of humanity.⁶²

The actions of Christ that Clement described resemble the actions that take place at the Asclepieion or that take place under the care of a Late Antique physician. Priests at the temple would prescribe changes in diet as would a physician. The difference was that Christ cleansed the wounds and the soul, justly earning the moniker “savior” since Asclepius has been called “savior” before Clement. Clement most likely knew of the characterization of Asclepius as “savior,” just as Aristides knew of it decades before this text. Clement would not have mentioned the traits of the physician to juxtapose Christ to local physicians, since local physicians were not exactly a dire threat for the Christians.

The juxtaposition between Asclepius and Christ is perhaps more clear in Clement’s *Exhortation to the Greeks* where Clement did mention Asclepius by name, calling him an “invented savior...Asclepius the doctor.”⁶³ Clement argued that Asclepius was no savior. He was merely a man, not a god.⁶⁴ Given the direct citation in Justin’s *Apology*, Asclepius likely posed a severe problem to Christians, allowing Clement to further emphasize Christ’s

⁶² Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.12.100 (PG 8, 369C; ANF 2.235).

⁶³ Clement, *Ex.* 2.23 (PG 8, 97A; ANF 2.178).

⁶⁴ Clement, *Ex.* 2.24.

attributes as a physician and savior like Asclepius.⁶⁵ More importantly, Justin, Clement, and Origen asserted Jesus as the pre-existent Logos, exhibiting a reading of John's gospel. The Johannine Jesus proved to be a powerful figure against his opponents in these texts, and as examined in the following chapters, the Johannine Jesus is also exhibited in a similar capacity in visual art.

Greek Patristic Texts: Origen and Athanasius

In his response to Celsus, Origen inserted the image of Christ the Physician at critical moments, further exhibiting a rivalry between Christ and Asclepius. To counter Celsus' praise of Asclepius as "healing men, and doing good and predicting the future," Origen emphasized Christ as Asclepius' counterpart using the exact phrasing of his opponent.⁶⁶ In the third book of his *Against Celsus*, Origen went on an extended tirade against Asclepius among other gods. Origen first debunked the validity of Asclepius' divinity.⁶⁷ He questioned whether the gods of the pagan pantheon that lived a mortal life were not merely "heroes," as he alluded to Asclepius' death by Zeus' thunderbolt.⁶⁸ Jesus' death on the other hand was caused by mortals not a god and did not resemble Asclepius' death in any way.⁶⁹ Origen defended the veracity of Jesus' work and ministry due to many testimonies of the disciples. Jesus had witnesses to his miraculous work, while Asclepius' miracles had no

⁶⁵ See pages 105-107 above.

⁶⁶ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 3.24 (PG 11, 947A-C; Chadwick). See Chapter Two, note 22. Also see Michael Frede, "Origen's Treatise *Against Celsus*," in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (ed. by Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131-155.

⁶⁷ Origen, *Cels.* 3.22 (PG 11, 944C). Origen also mentioned the Titans throwing down the gods from their heavenly throne.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Origen did not explicitly reference Pindar as the source of his material as Tertullian and Clement do (although he knew Pindar as he quotes in 3.26); rather he cites Homer as a classical tale in his argument against the divinity of the gods.

⁶⁹ Origen, *Cels.* 3.23 (PG 11, 945C).

reliable witnesses; “the great multitude of Greeks and barbarians” that Celsus references are non-existent.⁷⁰ Still, Origen conceded that Asclepius may have worked as a healer (albeit possessed by a “demon” according to Origen). Such a concession did not prove that Asclepius was either a god or a good being. Rather, anyone that claimed to heal or work divination in the world could not be entirely good. The divinity of Asclepius or any other god was not self-evident.⁷¹ Origen believed if a god’s divinity was in question then it was ludicrous that they were even venerated. Only Christ could make the claim of pure goodness, all other healers or miracle workers could not be proven to be good.⁷² In this way, Origen cast doubt upon the ability of Asclepius as well as his divinity, while deepening the divide between Christ and his pagan adversaries.

Origen’s comments detailing the competition between Asclepius and Christ were relegated to his response to Celsus. He was much more verbose in his characterization of Christ the Physician. Although his citations of Christ as the Physician did not specifically identify the competing god of healing, they were not independent of the competition with Asclepius. According to Harnack, Origen had depicted Christ as a physician “more frequently and fully than anyone else.”⁷³ Evident in this bounty of depictions was Origen’s acknowledgment of Asclepius as a threat to Christ. Celsus charged that Jesus was a *magos*, forcing Origen to respond that Jesus was rather a physician (□□□□□□): “And our Lord and Savior came as a good physician among men laden with sins.”⁷⁴ Origen was quick to

⁷⁰ Origen, *Cels.* 3.24 (Chadwick).

⁷¹ Origen, *Cels.* 3.25 (PG 11, 947D).

⁷² Origen, *Cels.* 3.24.

⁷³ Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 110, n. 4.

⁷⁴ Origen, *Cels.* 2.67: □□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ (PG 11, 901C; Chadwick).

emphasize Jesus as a physician and savior in contrast to Asclepius, “The Divine Logos was sent as a physician to sinners.”⁷⁵

Origen stated the efficacy and superiority of the healing power of Christ in his homily on Leviticus:

Now look at Jesus the heavenly physician. Come inside his room of healing, the church. Look at the multitude of impotent folk lying there. Here comes a woman unclean from childbirth, a leper expelled from the camp owing to his unclean disease; they ask the physician for aid, for a cure, for cleansing; and because this Jesus the Physician is also the Word of God, he applies, not the juices of herbs, but the sacraments of the Word to their diseases... But he who ultimately discovers that Christ has a medicine for souls, will find from these books which are read in the churches, as he finds from mountains and fields, that each yields healing herbs, at least strength won from words, so that any weakness of soul is healed not so much by leaf and bark as by an inward virtue and juice.⁷⁶

Origen clearly depicted Christ as the Divine Logos, akin to Justin and Clement. Origen stressed that the remedies of Christ the Physician were superior to the prescriptions of the healing cult, and of any local physician or homeopathic remedy, “Jesus is the only Physician of the body and the soul.”⁷⁷ An herbalist could not heal as Christ the Physician did for it was the word of Christ that provided instant relief. Origen emphasized the healing power of Christ the Physician as embodied in scripture, a healing power that was not necessarily tangible. For Origen, the reading of the Word heals and was infallible evidence of the salvific nature of Christ.

Origen’s fourth-century Alexandrian successor Athanasius also juxtaposed Asclepius with the true Savior Christ. Although separated by a number of years, Athanasius reflected the earlier work of Justin, Clement and Origen in asserting the special nature of Christ in

⁷⁵ Origen, *Cels.* 3.62: □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□ (PG 11, 1002B; Chadwick).

⁷⁶ Origen, *Homily on Leviticus*, 8.1.9 (PG 12, 402D; Barkley).

⁷⁷ Origen, *Homily on Leviticus*, 7.1 (PG 12, 476B; Barkley); also see *Cels.* 1.9; 2.67; *Commentary on John*, 1.20, where Origen also notes the Physician of body and soul.

opposition to Asclepius. In *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius argued that Christ was a superior healer to Asclepius, since he healed body and soul, “Asclepius was deified by the Greeks because he practiced the art of healing and discovered herbs as remedies for bodily diseases, not, of course, forming them himself out of the earth, but finding them out by the study of nature. But what is that in comparison with what the Savior did when, instead of just healing a wound, He both fashioned essential being and restored to health the thing that He had formed?”⁷⁸ Athanasius stated that Asclepius did not provide healings from his own power, while the healings of Christ the Physician were entirely restorative and indicative of his superior power. Athanasius further differentiated Christ since Christ the Physician was in effect creating a “new person” with his healings and discarding the old. Athanasius employed the Physician image effectively: “But once man was in existence, and things that were, not things that were not, demanded to be healed, it followed as a matter of course that the Healer and Savior should align himself with those things that existed already, in order to heal the existing evil.”⁷⁹ Athanasius realized the value of employing the image of Christ as the great Physician that offered new life in addition to health, as it contributed to his explanation of why Christ came at all: “let them know that the Lord came not to make a display, but to heal and teach those who were suffering.”⁸⁰

I. 3. Latin Authors: Tertullian and Arnobius

The early Latin church fathers repeated the depiction of Christ as the supreme physician, often evoking the competition with Asclepius along the way. In his treatise

⁷⁸ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 49 (PG 25, 184C; A Religious).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 44 (PG 25, 173C; A Religious).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43 (PG 25, 172C; A Religious).

against Marcion, Tertullian of Carthage continued along the similar argumentative framework as Justin by referring to Old Testament prophecy as predicting the supreme healer Christ: “How Christ was fore-announced by Isaiah as a preacher, ‘For who is there among you,’ says he, ‘that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his Son?’ And likewise as a healer: ‘For,’ says he, ‘He hath taken away our infirmities, and carried our sorrows.’”⁸¹

Arguably, no early Christian writer expressed more hatred towards idolatry than Tertullian, calling it “the principle crime of the human race” and placing it at the top of his list of primary sins.⁸² Included in Tertullian’s understanding of idolatry was any worship of a deity other than the one true God. Tertullian made his hatred of Asclepius abundantly clear deriding him as a bastard, saying that he “was said to have restored the dead to life by his cures. He was the son of Apollo, half human, although the grandson of Jupiter, and great-grandson of Saturn (or rather of spurious origin, because his parentage was uncertain...”⁸³ Tertullian exhibited a great familiarity with Asclepius and the corpus of writings concerning the foundation of the cult. In *To the Nations* and his *Apology*, he cited the poet Pindar as popularizing certain sentiments about Asclepius: “Pindar, indeed, has not concealed his true desert; according to him, he was punished for his avarice and love of gain, influenced by which he would bring the living to their death, rather than the dead to life, by the perverted use of his medical art which he put up for sale. It is said that his mother was killed by the same stroke, and it was only right that she, who had bestowed so dangerous a beast on the world should escape to heaven by the same ladder. And yet the Athenians will not be at a

⁸¹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.17 (CSEL 47.405; ANF 3.336). Tertullian was also against Hercules in this text.

⁸² Tertullian, *Idolatry* 1.1 (CSEL 20.30; see ANF 3.61): “The principal crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry.” And *Against Marcion* 4.9 (CSEL 47.441-442: “idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false-witness, and fraud”).

⁸³ Tertullian, *To the Nations* 2.14.42 (CSEL 20.127; ANF 3.144).

loss how to sacrifice to gods of such a fashion, for they pay divine honors to Asclepius and his mother amongst their dead.”⁸⁴

In his *Apology*, Tertullian referred to Pindar again, chronicling the avarice of Asclepius who made improper use of his healing skill and was justifiably killed by Jupiter.⁸⁵ The charge of greed was often levied against Asclepius in order to explain his death at the hands of Zeus.⁸⁶ Tertullian did not mince words regarding Asclepius; he was a beast, a bastard, and his cult was a problem for Christians. A follower of Asclepius was in league with the demons, and Tertullian further discredited the efficacy of their healings, saying “First, they injure; then, they teach remedies new or contradictory to the point of miracle; after that they cease to injure and are believed to have healed.”⁸⁷ Anyone that followed such a cult, “your great Asclepius, discoverer of medical arts...if they do not confess they are demons...” would face divine judgment.⁸⁸ Tertullian was struggling against the followers of Asclepius who filled his temples searching for cures. Tertullian devoted attention to slandering the cult of Asclepius among others, and other Latin authors exuded a similar effort to construct the metaphorical and allegorical symbol of Christ the Physician as an alternative.

Arnobius of Sicca, a fellow North African writing a century after Tertullian in the early fourth century, spoke of Asclepius in a similar detrimental way and advanced the image

⁸⁴ Tertullian, *To the Nations* 2.14.45 (CSEL 20.127).

⁸⁵ Tertullian, *Apol.* 14.4-6 (CSEL 69.38): “Est et ille de lyricis, Pindarum dico...”

⁸⁶ The same story from Pindar that Tertullian related twice was also cited by Clement in his *Exhortation to the Greeks*: “You have also a doctor, and not only a brass-worker among the gods. And the doctor was greedy of gold; Asclepius was his name. I shall produce as a witness your own poet, the Boeotian Pindar.” Clement of Alexandria, *Ex.* 2.25-26 (PG 8, 101B).

⁸⁷ Tertullian, *Apol.* 22.11; Rendall, LCL).

⁸⁸ Tertullian, *Apol.* 23.6.

of Christ the Physician. Arnobius was a convert to Christianity and his major treatise, *Against the Pagans*, was possibly an affirmation of his Christian beliefs instead of an apology.⁸⁹ Arnobius was extremely useful in providing a consistent voice against the cult of Asclepius, and defending Christ as the supreme Physician.⁹⁰ Because Arnobius was a fairly new convert at the time of his writings, it was not surprising that he relied heavily on his North African forebears for help. This influence was particularly evident when he attacked Asclepius.⁹¹ Arnobius employed the story from Pindar in order to depict Asclepius as greedy, a text that Tertullian and Clement also used: “That because of his greed and avarice, even as Pindar of Boeotia sings, Asclepius was transfixed by the thunderbolt.”⁹² Asclepius’ death was still useful in Christian polemic for it exhibited a case of a deified human being. Arnobius pointed out this hypocrisy, “And yet, you who laugh at us for worshipping a man who died ignominiously...have you not proclaimed the discoverer of medicines, Asclepius, the guardian and protector of health, well-being, and safety, after he suffered the penalty and

⁸⁹ Arnobius was a difficult figure to interpret. His writings have been noted by scholars for their inconsistent theology, and the picture he painted of persecution-era North Africa was far from lucid. For further reading see Michael B. Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca: Religious Conflict and Competition in the Age of Diocletian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6-7, 236-240; H.A. Drake’s review in *CH* 66, no. 2 (June 1997), 305-307.

⁹⁰ See Jerome, *Chronicon* (trans. by Malcolm Drew-Donalson; Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press, 1996). Jerome writes of Arnobius in *On Illustrious Men* 79, “Arnobius was a most successful teacher of rhetoric at Sicca in Africa during the reign of Diocletian, and wrote volumes *Against the Pagans* which may be found everywhere.” See George E. McCracken’s trans., *ANCW* series, (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1949), who believes Jerome’s story of Arnobius’ motives should not be discounted (1.16). Also see Louis J. Swift, “Arnobius and Lactantius: Two Views of the Pagan Poets,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 96. (1965), 439-448. And Mark Edwards, “The Flowering of Latin Apologetic,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians*, 197-221.

⁹¹ See Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca*, 186. Arnobius did not relegate his vitriol to the god Asclepius; he was an equal opportunity slanderer of pagan gods. Arnobius reserved much space for the Saturn cult that was resurgent in North Africa at the time of the Diocletian persecution. See Fichtner, “Christus als Arzt,” 9: “Bei Arnobius, der der Lehrer des Lactanz gewesen sein soll, kommt es noch einmal zure offenen Gegenüberstellung von Christus und Asklepios.”

⁹² Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 4.24 (CSEL 4.161; McCracken). It is unclear whether Arnobius borrowed this story from Tertullian or from Clement. Arnobius undoubtedly was influenced by Tertullian, however George McCracken in his introduction believes Arnobius utilized Clement in this instance, see his 47-48. After Arnobius’ conversion, the works of Clement, Tertullian, and Minucius Felix’s *Octavius* would have been accessible in North Africa.

punishment of being struck by lightning.”⁹³ Arnobius manipulated the various myths of Asclepius to his advantage, never letting his audience forget that the pagan pantheon includes mortals as well.

Arnobius painted Asclepius as a faulty healer whose temples “are filled with the wretched and the unfortunate,” as he diametrically compares them to the positive healings of Christ.⁹⁴ He capitalized on the theological differences between Christ and Asclepius. Christ healed the sinners and the righteous, while Asclepius healed only the good, not the bad.⁹⁵ Christ restored to health “a hundred or more afflicted with various weaknesses and diseases.”⁹⁶ Arnobius emphasized the method of Christ’s healings as opposed to those procured at the temple or from a physician. He acknowledged that some recognize “other gods, who gave medicines to many sufferers and healed the diseases and sicknesses of many men.”⁹⁷ Arnobius further detailed the difference between Christ the Physician and any other method of healing:

This only I desire to know: whether it was without adding any substance, that is, any medication, by mere touch, he bade the diseases to fly away from men; commanded or brought it about that the cause of the ailment ceased to exist and the bodies of the sick returned to their natural state. For we know that Christ, by applying His hand to the ailing part or by a single command, opened the ears of the deaf, removed blindness from eyes, gave speech to the dumb, loosened the stiffness of joints, gave power to walk to the paralytic, regularly healed with a word and cured by a command skin diseases, agues, dropsical diseases, and all other kinds of ailments...

⁹³ Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 1.41 (CSEL 4.27; McCracken). Here the Latin may be helpful: “nonne Aesculapium medicaminum repertorem post poenas et supplicia fulminis custodem nuncupauistis et praesidem sanitatis valetudinis et salutis?” In this instance, Arnobius may be responding to Porphyry’s accusation that Christians worship a man who died an ignominious death, see Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca*, 257.

⁹⁴ Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 1.49 (CSEL 4.33).

⁹⁵ Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 1.37-46; 3.24 (CSEL 4.24-31; 4.128). Asclepius healed the *boni*, not the *mali*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.46 (McCracken).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.48 (CSEL 4.32; McCracken).

What similar act have all these gods done by whom you say aid was borne to the sick and the critically ill? For if they ever, as the story goes, ordered by some to be given medicine, or certain food to be taken, or a potion of any particular kind to be drunk, or a poultice of plants and grasses to be laid on the places causing distress; or that persons should walk, rest up, or refrain from anything harmful: then it is clear this is no remarkable thing and deserves no respect at all. If you care to give it attentive examination, you will discover that physicians heal in this same way...⁹⁸

Arnobius distinguished the healing action of Christ from any other method of healing, paying close attention to divine prescriptions procured in the healing cult. He was careful to point out that Christ healed with no added method, prescription, or instrument, only with the power of his touch and command. Arnobius added, “But it is agreed that Christ did all He did without any paraphernalia...”⁹⁹ The healing prescriptions that may be procured in the healing cult; including medicine, alterations in diet, or exercise, were analogous to those that Aristides catalogues in his *Sacred Tales*.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, a divine prescription was still a prescription. Christ did not provide prescriptions. He provided relief from suffering immediately. Arnobius was emphasizing that Christ eradicated the need for the prescription; a critical element in the healings at the Asclepieion. Christ healed with the power of touch, while Asclepius healed through the use of prescriptions procured from sleeping in the temple. It seems clear that Arnobius was referring to the healing cult. He followed the list of possible prescriptions with the observation that these cures were not divine or transcendent since they were not that dissimilar from those obtained from a mortal physician. For Arnobius, prescriptions from the Asclepieion or from the local physician were all subservient to the healing power of Christ. Arnobius was emphasizing that true health can only be discovered by turning to Christ. The health of the body was only one

⁹⁸ Ibid, 1.48 (McCracken).

⁹⁹ Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 44 (CSEL 4.29).

¹⁰⁰ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.47-48.

part of the equation, by visiting the healing cult the health of one's soul was in dire peril. The health that Christ provides, and that Arnobius and earlier church fathers advocated, was the health of the soul in the final resurrection. According to Arnobius, healing cults were not only bereft of cures, good health could not be realized outside Christianity since idolatry could not provide salvation. Health could not be found amongst the unbelievers and could only be restored by Christ the Physician. Thus, Christ's healings supplanted any other remedy. As one can discover in examining the visual art of the fourth century, Christ's healing touch is clearly emphasized.

There were still barbs thrown at Asclepius in the fourth century by Christian writers.¹⁰¹ Arnobius' pupil, Lactantius, followed his teacher in calling Asclepius disgraceful and a chief among demons.¹⁰² He credited Asclepius as the founder of medicine, remarking that he found any worship of him as ludicrous as worshiping the inventor of shoemaking.¹⁰³ Lactantius followed his apologetic forebears in arguing that Asclepius deservedly died by the thunderbolt, for "he was a man, not a god."¹⁰⁴ Eusebius saved some poisonous words for Asclepius, saying that Asclepius "sometimes restored the diseased to health, though on the contrary he was a destroyer of souls, who drew his easily deluded worshipers from the true

¹⁰¹ See Arthur Stanley Pease, "Medical Allusions in the Works of St. Jerome," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 25 (1914), 74. According to Pease, Jerome was directly affected by the multiple references of Christ the Physician that appear in Origen. Scholars point to Origen's influence as the reason there are even some scattered references to Asclepius in Jerome. Pease believes even these random citations of Asclepius are the reflection of Origen's writings painting the god as an important opponent, see his 74-75.

¹⁰² Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.10.1; 4.27 (CSEL 19.33; 19.387). Written between 303-310 CE. On the matter of Lactantius' being one of Arnobius' pupils (and the doubts raised) see one of W.H.C. Frend's last essays, "Some North African Turning Points in Christian Apologetics," in *JEH*, vol. 51, no. 1 (January 2006), 1-15.

¹⁰³ Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.18.21 (CSEL 19.70).

¹⁰⁴ Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.19.3 (CSEL 19.71).

Savior to involve them in impious error.”¹⁰⁵ Asclepius was “surely no god, but a deceiver of souls who had practiced fraud for many long years.”¹⁰⁶

For whatever reason, the attacks on Asclepius in the mid to late fourth and fifth centuries were not as severe as in Tertullian and Arnobius.¹⁰⁷ The Asclepius cult continued to have its adherents in the late fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁰⁸ Jerome remarked at the faithful crowds that continue to sleep at the area of the old Asclepieion.¹⁰⁹ Apparently in the late fourth and fifth centuries, even if the temple was destroyed the area was still attended by believers in the healing god.

With a lack of the robust citations inveighing against Asclepius that authors such as Arnobius provided, the image of Christ the Physician, in text and art, steadily increased in the later fourth century. While not an apologist, Cyril of Jerusalem employed the image of the Physician to his catechumens: “Jesus then means according to the Hebrew ‘Savior,’ but in the Greek tongue ‘The Healer,’ since he is physician of souls and bodies...If, therefore,

¹⁰⁵ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.55-56 (PG 20, 1120-1121; NPNF 2.1.535). He went on to record in his hagiography of Constantine how the emperor ordered the Asclepieion in Cilicia to be destroyed so “that not even a vestige of the former madness was left remaining there.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Eusebius also mentioned the Pindar myth that Tertullian, Clement and Arnobius refer to “...when in the myth he was struck by lightning.”

¹⁰⁷ Rudolf Arbesmann, “The Concept of ‘Christus Medicus’ in St. Augustine,” *Traditio* 10 (1954), 4. Rudolph Arbesmann writes, “The chief target of the Christian writers is no longer the worship of Asclepius, but the Oriental cults of Isis, Mithras, and Sarapis, which now fascinate the masses by the magic spell of their gorgeous and mysterious ritual.” Attention to Isis and Sarapis occurred far earlier than the fourth century, and Arbesmann does not take the writings and actions of Julian the Apostate into account. Material evidence of Asclepius lessened, as the last coins depicting Asclepius come from the time of the emperor Valerian (253-260 CE). See Otfried Deubner reports this in *Das Asklepeion von Pergamon*, (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1938), 20.

¹⁰⁸ It is apparent in the writings of Julian that Asclepius worship was still prominent. Julian’s friend and teacher Libanius, credited Asclepius with healing his foot, see Libanius, *Ep.* 1383; *Ep.* 1303.

¹⁰⁹ Jerome, *On Isaiah* 18.65. Rüttimann on 207 cites the philosopher Plutarch sleeping in the temple in 423 CE (Lucian, *Anfänge*, 254).

any one is suffering in soul from sins, there is the Physician for him.”¹¹⁰ Cyril emphasized the healing nature of Christ and the fact that he cures both body and soul.

The Physician was a powerful image, and it appears that the image was in greater demand in post-Constantinian Christianity than ever before. Christianity was more established during this period than during the time of Tertullian or Arnobius. Asclepieia were destroyed or overtaken and rededicated by the Christians.¹¹¹ The persistence and increase of the Physician and Miracle Worker images in text and art indicated an anxiety that the replacement was not actual. With the Asclepius cult less of a problem, Christ still had a significant void to fill. The Christian populace needed to be continually reminded that Christ was the healer *par excellence* that could embrace them body and soul. The effort of church leaders to restrain people from returning to the pagan fold was ongoing. Late fourth-century Christian leaders were in more of a precarious position than before. They could not afford a misstep and allow the public to fall back into old patterns. Christ must be insisted upon repeatedly as the supreme physician. The most obvious stage to purvey this message to the people was the church pulpit.

In order to answer the vexing question as to why mentions of Asclepius declined in authors of the fourth and fifth centuries while mentions of Christ the Physician skyrocket, one must properly consider the writings of Ambrose and Augustine. Both Ambrose and Augustine profitably utilized the image of Christ the Physician in their writings, especially their sermons. Ambrose and Augustine employed a similar use of language when talking of

¹¹⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 10.13 (NPNF 2.7.60).

¹¹¹ The destruction of the Sarapieion in Alexandria at 391 is an oft-cited example of Christian destruction of a pagan temple, but destruction affected the cult of Asclepius as well. For example, the Asclepieion at Corinth was destroyed in the 520s around Alaric's invasion and rededicated as a Christian church and cemetery. The cult enjoyed some longevity at Corinth. Excavations have unearthed Christian epitaphs at the site. See Roebuck, "The Asklepieion and Lerna," in *Corinth* and see the notes in Helen Saradi-Mendelovici's "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," in *DOP*, vol. 44, (1990), 47-61.

miracles, particularly miraculous cures. The next section will consider the specific references of Christ as the Physician in Ambrose and Augustine, followed by an examination of their usage of miracles.

II. Ambrose and Augustine on Christ the Physician

Ambrose made the image of Christ the Physician part of his preached theology. In one sermon he tells his listeners, “We have taken refuge with the physician. He has cured our former wounds, and if any pain remains, a remedy will not be wanting. Although we have done some injury, He will not be mindful of it who has once forgiven. Although we have committed grievous faults, we have found a great physician; we have received the great medicine of His grace; for great medicine removes great sin.”¹¹² It can be argued that the lack of Asclepius mentions diminished the impact of the image of Christ the Physician.¹¹³ This does not appear to be the case, and it is a mistake to make such a determination. The importance of the Physician metaphor is apparent in the multiple mentions by Ambrose and Augustine. The lack of Asclepius mentions does not mean that Asclepius should be read back into the patristic literature. The healings of Christ in the gospels were not stories that Christian bishops could easily overlook in preaching to their congregations, and it did not mean that every sermon had Asclepius in mind. However, the manner in which Ambrose

¹¹² Ambrose, *On Elijah and Fasting* 20.75 (CSEL 32.458; Buck): “magnum medicum inuenimus, magna medicinam gratiae eius accepimus; magna medicina enim tollit peccata magna.” Also see his *Commentary on Luke* 4.67: “Quaerendus est medicus. Sed quis iste tantus est, qui sauciae mentis medeatur ulceribus?” See the French edition *Traité sur L'évangile de S. Luc*, Texte Latin. SC (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1956).

¹¹³ Arbesmann, “The Concept of...” 5; See Fichtner’s characterization of these citations in his “Christus als Arzt,” 8-11. Fichtner notes that while the roots of the designation of Christ the Physician lie in the competition with Asclepius, he offers other alternatives as well, including the Cynic tradition: “So hat sich das Christus medicus Motiv aus der einen Wurzel der zumeist verdeckten, selten offenen Auseinandersetzung zwischen dem Soter Asklepios und dem Heiland Christus heraus entwickelt und verselbständigt. Die andere Wurzel des Motivs aber liegt ebenfalls in der Antike. Auch in der kynisch-stoischen Philosophie...”

and Augustine characterized Christ the Physician does warrant some investigation. In Ambrose's treatise concerning widows, the bishop expanded on the healing account in Luke 4:38 of Peter's mother-in-law:

The Physician is then here asked for. Do not fear, because the Lord is great, that perhaps He will not condescend to come to one who is sick, for He often comes to us from heaven; and is wont to visit not only the rich but also the poor and the servants of the poor. And so now He comes, when called upon, to Peter's mother-in-law... He disdains not to visit widows, and to enter the narrow rooms of a poor cottage. As God He commands, as man He visits.¹¹⁴

Christ attended to the poor, not just the rich as Ambrose made clear. More importantly, Christ visited the sick, even the lowly widows in their modest houses. He was not a healing god that must be visited. He made house calls to his "patients," unlike any other whose adherents must undertake the journey to the temple.

Ambrose's text also reveals a notable difference between the healing action of Asclepius and Christ:

Do you see what kinds of healing are with him? He commands the fever, he commands the unclean spirits, at another place he lays hands on them. He was wont then to heal the sick, not only by word but also by touch. And do you then, who burn with many desires, taken either by the beauty or by the fortune of some one, implore Christ, call in the Physician, stretch forth your right hand to Him, let the hand of God touch your inmost being, and the grace of the heavenly Word enter the veins of your inward desires, let God's right hand strike the secrets of your heart.¹¹⁵

In this passage, Ambrose, like Arnobius, insisted on the physical nature of Christ's healings as an important difference. Christ healed with touch; he placed his hands upon his recipients. Furthermore, Ambrose made it clear that Christ the Physician is healer of body and soul, as the preexistent Word enters the body and cleanses the soul of any impurities.

At other points Ambrose expounded on the remedies Christ provides, differentiating Christ not only with worldly healers but the divine healing of the pagans:

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, *Concerning Widows*, 10.60 (NPNF 2.10.401; PL 16, 266).

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *Concerning Widows*, 10.62.

This medicine Peter beheld, and left His nets, that is to say, the instruments and security of gain, renouncing the lust of the flesh as a leaky ship that receives the bilge, as it were, of multitudinous passions. Truly a mighty remedy, that not only removed the scar of an old wound, but even cut the root and source of passion. O Faith, richer than all treasure-houses; O excellent remedy, healing our wounds and sins.¹¹⁶

Christ the Physician's remedies scoured away scars, provided new flesh, and most importantly, removed sin. The Physician apparently still made an impact upon its audience; otherwise Ambrose would have chosen another metaphor or allegory in his sermons. Ambrose's sermons illustrated that the power of the image of the Physician was genuine and realized in the late fourth century.

Unlike Ambrose, Augustine did mention Asclepius by name in his writings, suggesting that the god was still on Augustine's radar.¹¹⁷ The mentions of the god cannot compare to the sheer volume of citations of Christ the Physician in Augustine. Out of all patristic authors, Augustine employed the terms *medicina* and *medicus* more than any other.¹¹⁸ A large amount of the Augustinian evidence for this is found in his sermons.¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, *Exposition on the Christian Faith* 2.11.92 (CSEL 78.90; NPNF 2.10.236). At other points, Ambrose recounted healings of Jesus as indicative of the present action in healing the sinful, see *On the Mysteries* 4.24 (CSEL 73.98-99).

¹¹⁷ Augustine did mention Asclepius by name in his *City of God*. In these references, he generally listed Asclepius along with other pagan gods deemed as demonic, although he did mention the advent tale to Rome, further indicating the longevity of this legend: "Asclepius left Epidaurus for Rome, that in this foremost city he might have a finer field for the exercise of his great medical skill." Augustine also mentioned the legend at another point, criticizing the story as proof that the god deserves no special attention since they cannot compare to the stories of miracle concerning God's people: "that the Epidaurian serpent attached himself as a companion to Asclepius on his voyage to Rome. See *City of God*.12 (CSEL 40.122-123). Also see 4.21; 4.22; 4.27; 8.5; 10.16 (CSEL 40.189, 190, 198, 362, 474).

¹¹⁸ Arbesmann, "The Concept of..." 2 and 7. Paul Monceaux uncovered an inscription in Timgad that invoked the image of Christ the Physician, in his "Une invocation au *Christus medicus* sur une Pierre de Timgad," in *Comptes rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr.* (1920), 78ff. As this discovery occurred in Timgad, late antique Thamugadi, it is probable that it was a Donatist inscription, proving that the image was not solely popular with Catholic or Donatist audiences, but cut across fractious lines in North African Christianity. For further reading, see W.H.C. Frend's "The *Memoriae Apostolorum* in Roman North Africa" *JRS*, 30.1, 1940 and Jane Merdinger's "Optatus Reconsidered," *Studia Patristica*, 22 (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 294-299.

¹¹⁹ Arbesmann, "The Concept of..." 7. "For the figure, if used expertly by a preacher, is especially well-adapted for explaining to a congregation the nature of the Redemption." Also see Sister Mary Keenan,

Physician was a very serviceable image for Augustine to emphasize a key point in his theology, warning his hearers against the critical sin of pride. The Physician was employed as a humble figure that “cures” humanity of sin, as Augustine emphasized the deadly disease of pride.¹²⁰ The recognition of Augustine’s use of Christ the Physician in his sermons should be tempered with the manifold citations of medical terminology in Augustine. Augustine was not ignorant of surgical methods or actual methods of healing that his congregation would pursue. In his *Confessions*, he called the doctor named Vindicianus a “skilled and renowned physician.”¹²¹ In his sermons, Augustine utilized medical terminology as a vehicle to drive home the danger of pride to his hearers, often characterizing pride as a tumor that could only be cured through the process of Christian humility.¹²² Clearly, Augustine’s use of medical imagery was grounded in his social context and his recognition of the needs of his congregation. The sermons offer the best evidence to reveal what was most vital to Augustine’s congregation, and what was most important for the bishop to convey to his flock.

“Augustine and the Medical Profession,” in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. 67 (1936), 169. While Pease’s work focuses solely on Jerome, Keenan still offers one of the more extensive treatments of medical terminology in Augustine. Keenan has noted that Augustine’s references to medicine usually include mention of the physician, the disease, the patient, and his knowledge of anatomy and physiology. While she argues that most of Augustine’s uses are figurative, in order for them to be effective, they “must have had some connection with actual practice and custom.”

¹²⁰ Arbesmann, “The Concept of...,” 9. Augustine, *City of God* 10.29 (CSEL 40.499). The Latin may be helpful to note Augustine’s usage of *medicus*: “ut parum sit miseris quod aegrotant, nisi se etiam in ipsa aegritudine extollant et de medicina, qua sanari poeterant, erubescant. Non etiam hoc faciunt ut erigantur, sed ut cadendo grauius adfligantur.” Pride and humility were key issues Augustine addresses in *City of God*, occasionally employing a medical metaphor to stress his point. Due to their hubris, the Platonists deprived themselves of the “medicine which could cure them.”

¹²¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.3.5 (CSEL 33.67; Chadwick).

¹²² Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 118.9.2 (CCL 40.1690): “et eius a Iudaeis irrisam crucem totamque humilitatis christianae medicinam, qua sola tumor ille sanatur quo inflate cecidimus et iacentes apius intumuius...”

Quite often in his sermons, Augustine treated Christ as a Physician who prescribes humility to his “patients.” He placed the cause of human ills squarely on the shoulders of pride due to the sin of Adam:

Through the pride of the first parents then have we so fallen as to become subject to this mortality. And because pride has wounded us, humility makes us whole...For a Physician (Christ) does not care what a deranged patient says to him...So too the Lord came to a sick man...by this very attitude he was preaching humility, and it was only by being taught humility that they would be healed of their pride.¹²³

In other sermons, Augustine was even more explicit, preaching that because of the great sin of pride, God came lowly to treat the disease of humanity’s souls, drawing “the Omnipotent Physician down from heaven...”¹²⁴

In Augustine’s sermons on John’s gospel, the bishop repeatedly referenced the image of the Physician, inextricably attaching it to the action of Christ: “Now the sick confess that they are sick; let the physician come to heal the sick. Who is the Physician? Our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is our Lord Jesus Christ?... He is the complete Physician of our wounds.”¹²⁵

While Augustine firmly established the image of the Physician, he also made sure to assert that Christ, “and no other” is the ultimate Physician, reminding his hearers that any adversary of Christ was no equal. It is unclear what rivals Augustine may have had in mind. Augustine possibly was hinting at Asclepius, magicians, or local physicians. Regardless, he painted a portrait of competition in the arena of healing in his local context.

Augustine was fully aware of the methods of healing available in North Africa. He understood the tradecraft of a physician and the suffering a patient often undertook in order

¹²³ Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 35.17 (CCL 38.335).

¹²⁴ Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 18.2.15 (CCL 38.112; trans. Author): “omnipotentum medicum de caelo deduxit...”

¹²⁵ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 3.2 (CCL 36.21; NPNF 1.7.19).

to be cured. At moments in his sermons and his treatises, he vividly characterized the removal of sin as to a painful scouring, cauterization, or surgical cutting that must take place.

A sick person likewise begs many things from the physician which the physicians does not grant; he will not accede to the patient's whims, because he means to satisfy the real will to health...What remedies he (God) will apply to cure you, he knows; what surgery, what cauterizations, he knows. You brought your sickness on yourself by sinning; he has come not merely to coddle you, but to cut and burn.¹²⁶

Salvation did not come without pain. Augustine argued that just as a human physician may hurt the patient to heal, so does Christ the Physician: "Truly, as a faithful Physician, with the healing knife of preaching in his hand, he has cut away our wounded parts."¹²⁷ Augustine employed surgical imagery quite often, for the image could impress upon the crowd the severity of the contagion of sin, akin to the contagion of physical diseases:

He is the doctor, and he knows about cutting off a decaying part, to stop the decay spreading from it to other places. "One finger," he says, "is cut off here; because it is better for one finger to be shorn off smooth, than for the whole body to rot." If a human doctor does this by his medical skill, if the art of medicine can remove one part of the body to save them all from decay, why should God not cut out whatever he knows to be rotten in people, so that they may attain salvation?¹²⁸

While knowledgeable of surgical methods, Augustine did not specifically endorse the practices of physicians. He used the rational nature of scientific inquiry as a convenient foil to the importance of faith.¹²⁹ Augustine appeared to be utilizing his medical knowledge and

¹²⁶ Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 85.9 (CCL 39.1184; Boulding).

¹²⁷ Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.*, 93.7 (CCL 39.1309), and *Sermons* 87.13 (PL 38, 537; Hill): "The human race is sick, not with physical disease, but with sins...To heal this gigantic invalid there came down the all-powerful doctor...Don't let anyone start saying, 'the world used to be better before than it is now; from the moment this doctor began practicing his skills, we've seen many horrible things here.' Do not be surprised. Before anyone was treated and cured, the doctor's surgery and operating theater were clean of blood; well you, then, as you see the blood now, shake yourself free of the empty pursuit of pleasure, come to the doctor." The complaint Augustine listed recalls Pliny the Elder's suspicion and ire of physicians.

¹²⁸ Augustine, *Serm.* 113A.13 (PL 46, 930; Hill). Also see *Serm.* 88.7-8, recalling Matthew 9:12: "We have already begun to get ill, we are feverish, we are lying on a bed of sickness..." and *Serm.* 30.5 of the Physician calling his patients while the sick quarrel.

his audience's proclivity to believe in the ineffable to his advantage.¹³⁰ The image of Christ the Physician was obviously one of worth and importance to Augustine's congregation. Augustine likely understood the value of the image due to his frequent use of the term in his sermons. "Sickness" and "disease" were characterized as maladies of pride and greed affecting the soul that only Christ the Physician could heal.¹³¹ The increase in preaching the superiority of Christ the Physician served to remind the congregation of the healing power of Christ.

Augustine indirectly placed Christ the Physician over any possible opponents. In his homily on Psalm 44, he depicted Christ as attending to Peter: "The Physician had felt his pulse, and knew what was going on within his patient's soul: the patient knew it not."¹³² Only Christ could diagnose problems not just of the body but the soul as well, even without the patient's knowledge. Ambrose and Augustine needed to make their message clear in order to prevent any idolatrous backsliding: the healer of body and of soul was Christ. The homiletic image of Christ the Physician detailed the healing power of Christ, the only healer that provided soul salvation. Ambrose and Augustine similarly detailed the miracle working nature of Christ for a similar end; to remind their congregations of Christ's authority in a landscape that still offered religious alternatives.

¹²⁹ At one point in his *City of God*, he describes a woman's miraculous healing through her faith in Christ while her physician remained skeptical, Augustine, *City of God* 22.8: "Quid grande fecit Christus sanare cancrum, qui quadriduanum mortuum suscitavit?" (CSEL 40.601; Bettenson). Also see *Ep.* 205.3). Augustine referenced Hippocrates by name in *City of God*, and in a letter he cites the doctrine of the four humors. Keenan credits the lack of mention of Galen, while curious due to his prominence, as a result of Augustine preference of reading Latin over Greek, see her 189.

¹³⁰ See Augustine, *Ep.* 38.1 (CSEL 33.64-65). For further reading of Augustine's medical knowledge, see Augustine's *Confessions* where he recalled his critical fever while at Rome (5.9); a digestive attack he endured as a child (1.11); and a toothache he suffered from (9.4). See Anne Elizabeth Merideth, *Illness and Healing in the Early Christian East* (Princeton University, 1999. (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1999), 26.

¹³¹ See Augustine, *Serm.* 46.13 where Augustine relates the paralytic story to allowing the physician to be lowered through the roof by studying the scriptures.

¹³² Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 44.16. (Latin 43; NPNF 1.8.144).

III. Ambrose and Augustine on Miracles

The stress upon healings and miracles in the early Christian texts is quite tangible. Upon reflection, the natural question that arises is why was the image of Christ the healer and miracle worker so omnipresent in early Christian texts? The answer is partly due to the fact that the image of Christ the Physician spoke to the common interest in physical health. The Christian populace was also quite receptive to miracles. The belief in miracles was out of the control of the bishops, as Augustine's wavering stance suggests. Existence in Late Antiquity made the desire to believe in miracles overwhelming. Despite some clerical resistance, miracles became a present reality as church leaders ultimately acquiesced to the people's whims. Eventually, bishops realized how miracles could be manipulated to their advantage, whether for political gain or congregational discipline.

The belief in miracles was not a class issue. It was not a battle of high-brow culture versus low-brow culture, or elitist beliefs set against the commoners. Augustine stated as much in *City of God*, claiming that the "wise" are not saved by their education and rationality, "God knows their thoughts, how futile they are."¹³³ The understanding of the importance of healings and miracles cut across social and educated classes. The reality and efficacy of healing miracles was not as widely disparate between the elite and the commoner. Ambrose sent Paulinus of Nola fragments of the remains of the martyrs Gervase and Protase. Paulinus apologetically refused to send the relics to his good friend Sulpicius Severus (and instead sent him a fragment of the true cross).¹³⁴ With the six degrees' separation of

¹³³ Augustine, *City of God* 22.4 (CSEL 40.587; Bettenson). From Psalm 94.11.

Ambrose and Severus in Paulinus' letter, miracles represent not an issue of divergence but convergence.¹³⁵ William Babcock notes that conversions in antiquity, low-brow or otherwise, demonstrate the tension between "elite" and the "masses" as well as the clever ability to discover a common frame to represent the full religious import of the Christian religion.¹³⁶

Healings and miracles embodied a common frame to display the religious import Babcock states; however, healings and miracles were not relegated to one genre. The instances of healing and miracles preserved in the patristic texts provide a common frame of convergence. A much more tangible common frame is in the realm of material art. The depiction of Christ performing healings and miracles in visual art was another method to speak to Christians. While images of Christ's healings and miracles were popular in the early stages of Christian art, the image was increasingly dominant in the fourth century, especially in a funerary context. The image provided comfort and served as a reminder of the ultimate "healing" Christ the Physician provided in life after death.¹³⁷ After Constantine, at a time when Christ appeared to have won the battle against Asclepius and his other rivals, images of Christ performing healings and miracles were abundant. With such an emphasis of Christ's healings and miracles in material art, it is useful to explore how healings and miracles existed in the life of the Christian congregation. In the late fourth century, healings and miracles were performed by Christian relics and posed another issue that church leaders such as Ambrose and Augustine faced.

¹³⁴ See Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 31.1; 32.17. The fragment Paulinus sent came from Melania the Elder, a gift from John of Jerusalem. He describes the splinter in detail at 32.11.

¹³⁵ Babcock, "MacMullen on Conversion: A Response," *Second Century* 5:2 (1985/1986), 88.

¹³⁶ Babcock, "MacMullen on Conversion: A Response," 89.

¹³⁷ The visual evidenced with be introduced following this chapter.

Ambrose and Augustine's writings indicated a shift in the procurement and efficacy of healings and miracles. The person of Christ is continually insisted as the supreme healer and physician. His healing power could be transferred to the saints and consequently any primary or secondary material attached to the saint can effect healings. The text of Acts 19:11 was strongly in play in this transition: "And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them." Relics of Christ and the saints began to expand in the middle of the fourth century, beginning with the discovery of the true cross, establishing the pilgrimage routes.¹³⁸ Divine healings continued in the Christian guise and the physical proof of Christ the Physician could be offered. Christ the Physician could tangibly act through the material relics, healing those that encountered the relics, drawing visitors to churches that housed the miracle working objects.¹³⁹

As indicated in the writings of Ambrose and Augustine, the reliance upon the saints' relics for healing miracles was omnipresent in Christianity. The reliance was not relegated to the Latin fathers; it was evident in the East as well. Gregory of Nyssa briefly included the healing miracles of Gregory Thaumaturgus in his biography, claiming that Gregory "accomplished the healing types of miracles without any special fuss; but for the deliverance from demons and the cure of bodily ills the breath from his mouth was sufficient, brought

¹³⁸ If the dawn of the reliquary era can be traced, it may point to the discovery of the true cross in Jerusalem. See Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.41-43. Cyril mentioned the sites of Bethlehem and the Ascension in reference to the site of the Resurrection, without mention of Helena (*Catechetical Lectures* 4.10). Interestingly, Ambrose may be the first to widely propagate the attribution of Helena in reference to the true cross as he spoke of this association in his funeral oration to emperor Theodosius (*Oration on the Death of Theodosius* CSEL 73.3923-401): "...Habeat Helena, quod legat, unde crucem domini recognoscat." See Annabel Jane Wharton, "The Baptistry of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and the Politics of Sacred Landscape," in *DOP*, vol. 46, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1992), 323.

¹³⁹ Just as the afflicted traveled to the temple of Asclepius, so did ailing pilgrims travel to churches housing relics. See Katherine Park's piece "Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe, 500-1500," in *Medicine in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 72.

to the sufferer in a linen cloth.”¹⁴⁰ Gregory plainly described how tangible objects that encounter the saint can effect healing miracles. This new understanding of the transference of power was in its early stages in late fourth-century Milan with Ambrose and his catechumen, Augustine. There was still a sense that Ambrose and Augustine were conflicted on the present reality of miracles in community life. Ambrose was perhaps more politically inspired in his authorization of miracles. The bishop realized the immense devotion the relics of the saints could succor, in addition to granting Ambrose political capital in his disputes with the Arians and the empire.¹⁴¹

Ambrose’s letter to his sister detailing the discovery of the relics of Gervase and Protase provides invaluable insight into the bishop’s notion of miracles. He described the discovery that took place after pleadings from his congregation to consecrate his new church in Milan: “At once a kind of prophetic ardor seemed to enter my heart.”¹⁴² Upon the consecration, he immediately found the burial place of the saints, “We found two men of marvelous stature, such as those of ancient days. All the bones were perfect, and there was much blood.”¹⁴³ Following the unearthing of the holy remains, as if legitimating the discovery, a blind man was healed and his sight restored. The discovery and subsequent miracle helped elevate Ambrose in his conflict with the Arians. The finding of the relics was an assiduously orchestrated spectacle intended to boost Ambrose’s standing with the

¹⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Gregory the Wonderworker*, 11.77 (Slusser).

¹⁴¹ Empress Justina and the Arians were in conflict with Ambrose, as Augustine recounts the incident of the “miraculous” discovery of the relics of Gervase and Protase, (see *Conf.* 9.6.16, CSEL 33.208-209; and *City of God*, 22.8, CSEL 40.596-597). Augustine witnessed in Ambrose a bishop that emboldened the church in the political sphere as a body that could criticize empresses and trump the power of Theodosius.

¹⁴² Ambrose, *Ep.* 77 to Marcellina (CSEL 82/3.126ff, in the Benedictine manuscript it is letter 22; *NPNF* 2.10.437).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 77.2.

masses.¹⁴⁴ The nay-sayers Ambrose cited in his sermon reflect the negative Arians who doubted the efficacy of this miracle and the subsequent healings they wrought.

Ambrose equated the healing miracles wrought by the relics to the miracles of Christ:

But many not improperly call this the resurrection of the martyrs; whether they have risen for themselves is another question, for us beyond a doubt they are risen. You have heard, nay, yourselves have seen, many cleansed from evil spirits; many also, after touching with their hands the garments of the saints, delivered from the infirmities under which they suffered: you have seen the miracles of old time renewed, when through the coming of the Lord Jesus, a fuller Grace descended upon the earth; you see many healed by the shadow, as it were, of the holy bodies. How many napkins are passed to and fro? How many garments placed on these holy relics, and endowed by the mere contact with the power of healing are reclaimed by their owners. All think themselves happy in touching even the outer-most thread, and whoever touches them will be made whole.¹⁴⁵

Ambrose claimed that the miracles of old are renewed; the miracles wrought by the saints' relics were not any different than the miracles of Christ and the disciples. The bishop was establishing that the transference of miraculous power is indeed real and efficacious.

Ambrose was also defending the reality of the relics of Gervase and Protase by insisting that the blind man was in fact healed. He told his sister that the man gave his own testimony to the veracity of his healing: "He declares that when he touched the border of the garment with which the martyrs' bodies were clothed, his sight was restored to him."

Ambrose then asks, "Is not this like what we read in the Gospel? For the power which we admire proceeds from one and the same Author."¹⁴⁶ The healing miracles that the relic procured are no different than the healings provided by Christ. Ambrose distinguished between superstitious actions to be avoided, and miraculous actions that should be

¹⁴⁴ See John Moorhead, *Ambrose: Church and Society in the Late Roman World* (London: Longman, 1999), 152-153; and Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 212-214.

¹⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Ep. 77.9* (NPNF 2.10.438).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.17-18. Augustine provides a similar eyewitness endorsement to the miracle's occurrence in *City of God* 22.8 (CSEL 40.596-597).

recognized. Augustine recorded in his *Confessions* the instance of his mother Monica attempting to bring food and wine to a memorial shrine, “in accordance (with my mother’s custom) in Africa.”¹⁴⁷ Monica’s action was swiftly reprimanded by the bishop of Milan as “similar to heathen superstition,” and a relic of the pagan past.¹⁴⁸ Ambrose was judicious in determining what customs he should endorse and what he should not. In endorsing miracles attributed to relics, Ambrose had his congregation and his leadership role within the congregation firmly in mind. It is impossible and fruitless to argue whether Ambrose actually believed in miracles as his congregation fervently did. His comments did not offer any evidence that he did not believe in miracles. Whether he believed in them or not, with his discovery of Gervase and Protase, Ambrose understood the power miracles had in his episcopate.

Augustine’s explanation of miracles was much more cautious than Ambrose’s and offers a rare witness to Augustine reversing his earlier position. Early in his priesthood, Augustine was didactically negative about the contemporary occurrence of miracles. In 390, Augustine wrote a treatise *Of True Religion* that displays his break as a disciple of Mani, and his early theories on the dispensation of grace. Augustine sent the treatise to Paulinus of Nola who called it “his Pentateuch against the Manichees.”¹⁴⁹ In the treatise, Augustine argued that Christ is the true completion to the work of Plato and stated that philosophers were beginning to turn to Christianity. In order to accommodate the philosophers with their rational training, Augustine had to explain miracles that occurred in the New Testament.

¹⁴⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.2.2 (CSEL 33.114; Chadwick).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Augustine has to deal with this problem in his see in North Africa as well. Drunkenness at the martyrs’ shrines was a problem not only in North Africa, but Paulinus’ Nola as well (see Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 32; *Carm.* 27.580, 28). Thus Augustine’s mention here of Monica’s sober and delicate use of wine is particularly prescient.

¹⁴⁹ Augustine, *Ep.* 25 (CSEL 34.78ff), a letter from Paulinus.

Augustine asserted that miracles had their relevance for early Christians and are not needed today:

We have heard that our predecessors, at a stage in faith on the way from temporal things up to eternal things, followed visible miracles. They could do nothing else. And they did so in such a way that it should not be necessary for those who came after them...on the one hand miracles were not allowed to continue till our time, lest the mind should always seek visible things, and the human race should grow cold by becoming accustomed to things which when they were novelties kindled its faith. On the other hand, we must not doubt that those are to be believed who proclaimed miracles...At that time the problem was to get people to believe before anyone was fit to reason about divine and invisible things.¹⁵⁰

Augustine conceded the veracity and necessity of New Testament miracles. However, he argued these miracles were before Christians could “reason” about the ineffability of the divine. Thus, miracles have no purpose in Augustine’s world since humanity utilized rational inquiry to understand divine things.

In *On the Usefulness of Belief*, written shortly after Augustine’s ordination, the presbyter argued further that the miracles of the gospels during the time of Jesus were real, and miracles had their particular importance during the time of Christ. Miracles performed during Christ’s ministry helped ingrain the Christian faith into any eyewitnesses. For Augustine, any believer in miracles following that period was foolish since they relied on the eyes not the rational mind: “Miracles must be presented to the eyes, of which fools are much readier to make use than of the mind...(Christ) did miracles in order to incite us to follow God.”¹⁵¹ Miracles were tools to elucidate dull minds. Augustine went on to differentiate between miracles and the miracles of Christ:

But again, there are two kinds of miracle. Some there are which merely cause wonder; others produce gratitude and good will. If one sees a man flying one merely marvels...But if one is affected by some grave and desperate disease and at a word

¹⁵⁰ Augustine, *True Religion* 25.47 (CSEL 77.33; Burleigh): “...nec miracula illa in nostra tempora durare permissa sunt...”

¹⁵¹ Augustine, *The Usefulness of Belief* 15.33 (CSEL 25.41; Burleigh).

of command immediately gets better, love of one's healer will surpass wonder at one's healing. Such things were done when God appeared to men as true Man, as far as was necessary. The sick were healed. Lepers were cleansed. To the lame the power to walk was restored, to the blind, sight, to the deaf, hearing. The men of that time saw water turned to wine; five thousand satisfied with five loaves of bread, waters walked on, the dead raised. Of these miracles, some looked to the body...but all of them had regard for men, bearing testimony to them of the majesty of Christ.¹⁵²

In these few lines, Augustine conclusively explained the significance and importance of purveying the image of Christ performing healings and miracles. The image ingrained faith. Augustine's position revealed that Christ's miracles demanded attention and increased faith. Augustine's statement possibly explains why Christ the Physician was consistently employed, and illuminates why the iconographic image of Christ performing miracles appeared pervasive in Augustine's time. Christ's miracles were useful tools, akin to church billboards on a highway; they draw attention and inculcate belief. In these early works, Augustine was arguing against the current existence of miracles. Miracles were for the dull, not the wise: "Christ's miracles, therefore, were done at the most opportune moment so that a multitude of believers might be drawn together."¹⁵³

As Augustine progressed through his priesthood and episcopate, he lucidly addressed his position to his congregation in his sermons. Just as the image of Christ the Physician appeared frequently in his sermons, Augustine used the subject of miracles quite often in this format as well. In his early sermons, he played the image of the Physician off the ridiculousness of miracles. Augustine understood the proclivity to believe in miracles due to the occurrence of Jesus' miracles in the gospels. He still exhorted his listeners to abandon any belief in contemporary miracles, citing that "better are those that do not see and

¹⁵² Augustine, *Usefulness of Belief* 16.34 (CSEL 25.42; Burleigh).

¹⁵³ Ibid.

believe.”¹⁵⁴ Augustine wanted his audience to neglect what can be witnessed with the “outer eye” and focus on what can be absorbed with one’s “spiritual eye.” To accomplish this, he expressed how the senses can deceive: “Therefore the Bridegroom has cautioned us that we ought not to be deceived by miracles.”¹⁵⁵ Augustine emphasized that ocular demonstrations are unreliable evidence of miracle.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, it was not miracles that can cleanse our bodies of sin; it was only the prescriptions of Christ the Physician. Augustine used the image of Christ the Physician as a metaphor of rationality to motivate his listeners to focus on Christ and not external signs or miracles.

As Augustine moved deeper into his episcopate in the early fifth century, a noticeable alteration occurred on his perception of miracles. The shift was marked by the arrival of the relics of the martyr Stephen in North Africa.¹⁵⁷ As the relics of Gervase and Protase healed in Ambrose’s Milan, so did the relics of Stephen in Augustine’s Hippo. With the relics of Stephen, the subject of miracles and healing took a central role in the life of Augustine’s episcopate. Augustine mentioned the existence of the relics of Stephen in a sermon given around 416: “and this is now certainly made known to almost all nations in the revelation of the body of the blessed Stephen.”¹⁵⁸ In his sermons from 425, Augustine preached to his audience on the efficacy of the miracles wrought by Stephen’s relics. God

¹⁵⁴ Augustine, *Serm.* 88.2 (PL 38, 540): “beati qui non vident, et credunt.” Also see 88.7-8.

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, *Trac. Ev. Jo.* 13.17 (CCL 36.140; *NPNF* 1.7.93): “Ergo cautos nos fecit sponsus, quia et miraculis decipi non debemus.”

¹⁵⁶ Augustine also employed metaphors from his understanding of the natural world, such as the springing of an olive tree in *On Marriage and Desire*, 1.21 (CSEL 42.234); *Ep.* 137.10 (CSEL 44.110).

¹⁵⁷ In 415, a priest named Lucian discovered the remains of Stephen through revelation in a dream. It usually is cited that Orosius is responsible for returning with the relics of Stephen in 416. This is clouded slightly by *City of God* 22.8 (CSEL 40.604) where Augustine refers to Bishop Praejectus bringing the relics of Stephen. It is more likely that Augustine was referring to a specific establishment at Aquae Tibilitanae, rather than the general advent of the relics of Stephen into North Africa.

¹⁵⁸ Augustine, *Trac. Ev. Jo.* 120.4 (CCL 36.662; *NPNF* 1.7.435): “quod certe modo in revelatione corporis beatissimi Stephani fere omnibus gentibus declaratur.”

“grants us such favors from the dust of the dead,” according to Augustine.¹⁵⁹ Augustine preached on the miracles that Stephen’s relics perform, and in one particular instance, he was awkwardly compelled by the congregation to exclaim the current reality of miracles wrought by Stephen’s relics.¹⁶⁰

Towards the end of his career, Augustine acceded that miracles did in fact occur in the contemporary world, “And in fact, even now miracles are being performed in Christ’s name...”¹⁶¹ Augustine conclusively contradicted his earlier stance that true miracles only occurred in an earlier age. After the entry of the relics of Stephen, the bishop expressed his desire to record the actual and numerous accounts of true miracles in his episcopate. Augustine noted that if he recorded all of the miracles he would never finish writing, even if he restricted his task to miracles of healing at Hippo and Calama. Augustine stressed his concern “that such accounts should be published because I saw that signs of divine power like those of older days were frequently occurring in modern times too, and I felt they should not pass into oblivion, unnoticed by the people in general.”¹⁶² The people of Augustine’s episcopate had little problem noticing the miracles. Augustine finally relented and viewed the incidents in Hippo not with the eyes of a skeptic but with the eyes of his people. Only then did he admit the reality and veracity of miracles.

It is still unclear why Augustine reversed himself from his earlier position on miracles. He attempted to explain himself in the composition of his *Retractations*, an event that occurred in the twilight of Augustine’s years. In his recollection of his work *Of True Religion*, Augustine claimed that miracles did not occur in the same fashion as the New

¹⁵⁹ Augustine, *Serm.* 317.1 (PL 38, 1435; Hill).

¹⁶⁰ Augustine, *Serm.* 323.4 (PL 38, 1440).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid* (Hill).

¹⁶² *Ibid*.

Testament. For instance no one is healed by the shadow of a minister like Peter's shadow healed in Acts. He vociferously claimed, "But I should not be understood to mean that today no miracles are to be believed to happen in the name of Christ," citing his witness of the Ambrose's discovery of Gervase and Protase as evidence.¹⁶³ In his review of *On the Usefulness of Belief*, Augustine argued that his point on Christ's miracles having their time and place did not mean "that such great miracles do not happen now, not that no miracles happen even today."¹⁶⁴ It is apparent that Augustine did not provide a suitable or detailed explanation to his shift in position on miracles, leaving readers of his works to draw their own conclusions.

The popularity of the shrine may in part explain why Augustine reversed his earlier position on miracles. The attention given to the shrine may have been a burgeoning trend that the bishop realized he could not reverse. Miracles, particularly miracles involving healing, elicited sincere devotion and faith. Miracles also addressed the maladies of human existence that afflict the general population. An argument for rationality could not quell the desire to believe in miraculous cures, such as those procured by the relics of Stephen. At the time of the relics' advent into Hippo, there may have been a need for a viable healing option or a tenable hope for continuing to exist. Augustine likely recognized the value in miraculous healings procured by the relics of Stephen.¹⁶⁵ The healing miracles not only educated faith, they provided comfort; and comfort in fifth-century Hippo was likely difficult to come by. Augustine provided enough gory detail of the horrors of surgery and disease to

¹⁶³ Augustine, *Retractions*, 1.13.7 (CSEL 36.62; Bogan). This is also not the only time Augustine altered his stance on an issue. During the Donatist controversy, he was forced to adapt his position on baptism and re-appropriated the writings of Cyprian, especially the letters.

¹⁶⁴ Augustine, *Retract.* 1.14.5 (CSEL 36.70).

¹⁶⁵ See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, reprint edition, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 418-422.

display the need for comfort: “As to bodily diseases, they are so numerous that they cannot all be contained even in medical books.”¹⁶⁶

Augustine softened his stance on miracles since he realized a need in his congregation that the relics fulfilled, and the relics’ detriment to the church was not so severe. He stated in his *City of God* that regardless how a miracle was procured, “they all testify to the faith in which the resurrection to eternal life is proclaimed.”¹⁶⁷ As Peter Brown points out, the later Augustine realized that human frailty focused attention on the future resurrection; an event and impossible belief that the martyrs and their relics corroborated.¹⁶⁸ To counteract the physical illness that tormented the body in life, Augustine preached the cure of *Christus medicus* that took place in the physical cleansing of the resurrection of the body. Augustine’s shift on miracles demonstrated the evolving nature of his role as shepherd to his flock, and the newly focused attention on the role of the saints.

Conclusion

The early Christian texts exhibit a motivation to emphasize Christ as a physician and worker of miracles, as a dominant religious figure greater than any opponent. A reason for the reiteration of the superior traits of Christ is that the position of Christian supremacy had to be continually supported and the believing public must be reminded of the authority of Christ. Exemplified in the previous texts and the particular sermons preached to the masses, the best vehicle to drive home the Christian message is the image of Christ the Physician and

¹⁶⁶ Augustine, *City of God* 22.22 (CSEL 40.638; Bettenson).

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *City of God* 22.9 (CSEL 40.613; Bettenson).

¹⁶⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 421.

Christ the worker of miracles. In material art, this motif can be identified as the image of Christ the Miracle Worker. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker in text and art allowed the listener and viewer to realize the uniqueness of Christian “healing,” of the salvation of the soul procured by Christ and his power over death. The examples where this message appears in fourth-century polemic is only matched by its frequent appearance in visual art. This connection is not unintentional, and as one can see in the remaining chapters, it is a possible effort to maintain the image of Christ the Physician in the minds of the populace. Ambrose and Augustine accommodated the ears of the population by preaching the dominant nature of Christ. The visual representations of Christ the Miracle Worker would take care of the eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEALINGS OF CHRIST IN CATACOMB ICONOGRAPHY

As Christians began to develop their visual language, the figure of Christ, as opposed to other scenes or figures from scriptural narratives, became a useful figure to promote Christianity at the expense of any rivals. The church fathers assertively depicted Christ as a supreme physician and healer; Christian art accomplished the same goal. Christ as a healer was a primary theme in Christian art shortly after its inception. Moreover, these images predominantly occurred in a sepulchral setting. Christ healing the ill and raising the dead were apt funerary themes as they reminded of the ultimate resurrection vouchsafed by Christ. Viewers visiting the dead or enjoying the Eucharistic feast in the catacombs likely responded to these images as well. By observing Christ, viewers could reflect upon the final resurrection secured by the ultimate healer.

While early Christians adopted artistic influences of their immediate neighbors, non-Christian imagery was appropriated to denigrate rival deities as inferior to Christ. Non-Christian themes in the catacombs reveal a Christian methodology in their artistic development. Christian imagery had several uses, and the images of healings were constructive in espousing the abilities of Christ. This chapter will examine images of Christ healing in catacomb art, including the similarities the manner of depiction of Christ shared with the healing god Asclepius, as well as the enigmatic healing image of the anatomy lesson at the catacomb of Via Latina. Healing and restoration was a theme that played well in a funerary environment. The image of the anatomy lesson demonstrates the interest in healing as well as revealing a possible Asclepius influence in catacomb art. The anatomy lesson

image also exhibits an interest in the theme of resurrection, one that occurs with great frequency in early Christian art.

I. Patristic Attitudes towards Healings and Imagery

Quite typically patristic endorsements of visual imagery are slightly ambiguous, and any description usually is focused upon the personhood of Christ. Athanasius offered a distinct portrait of the importance of miracles in his *On the Incarnation*.¹ Athanasius specifically mentioned the use of imagery at one point in his treatise, emphasizing the importance of “seeing” Jesus’ miracles. Witnessing the actions that Jesus performed while in his fleshly body allows one to realize his divine nature: “taking to himself a body like the others, and from things of earth, that is by the works of his body (he teaches them), so that they who would not know him from his providence and rule over all things, may even from the works done by his actual body know the Word of God which is in the body, and through him the Father.”² Athanasius believed that the healings Christ performed were crucial to inculcating belief in doubters: “Or who that saw him healing the diseases to which the human race is subject, can still think him man and not God? For he cleansed lepers, made lame men to walk, opened the hearing of deaf men, made blind men to see again, and in a word drove away from men all diseases and infirmities: from which acts it was possible even

¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 19; but more extensively in 38 (PG 25, 129B-C; 161B-C). John Chrysostom reiterated the importance of “seeing” the miracles as inculcating faith in the restorative power of Christ, just as the centurion in Matthew 8.5 was driven to faith by the healing of his servant, *Homilies on Matthew*, 26.6. Also see H. J. Frings, *Medizin und Arzt bei den griechischen Kirchenvätern bis Chrysostomos* (Bonn, 1959).

² Athanasius, *Incarn.* 14.8 (NPNF 2.4.44; PG 25, 120C-D). Athanasius was not speaking entirely about metaphorical “seeing.” It is questionable whether he was referencing tangible images of Christ. The early fifth-century author Theodore of Mopsuestia mentioned imagery as it pertains to the personhood of Christ. Theodore, like Athanasius, understood the power and effectiveness of the visual form, as he describes Christ as an icon (*On the Incarnation*, 13.7; PG 66, 989A-C).

for the most ordinary observer to see his Godhead.”³ Athanasius appeared to believe that it was not just the recognition of Christ as a unique individual that won converts but the visual witness of his healings that corrected unbelief.

The connection between healing and the visual was spelled out in the apocryphal *Acts of John* from the third century. Regarded as the earliest textual evidence of Christian icon veneration, the *Acts of John* described John’s encounter with a Christian interested in capturing his likeness for posterity.⁴ John healed Lycomedes and his wife Cleopatra, raising them from the dead in the name of the physician Christ, resulting in Lycomedes’ desire to retain John’s image. In the act of performing his miracle John notes in his prayer the power witnessing such an act has on the crowd of on-lookers: “by whom thou shalt convert them that are here unto thy way...for when they perceive thy power in that those that have died are raised, they will be saved, some of them.”⁵ The text reflected an understanding of the power of witnessing a miraculous act. Seeing John’s miracle was not unlike seeing the healings of Christ: it drew followers. Most pertinent is the action Lycomedes took in the aftermath of John’s miracle. He conscripted a portrait made of John so he could memorialize his savior for posterity which drew the consternation of John.

Lycomedes’ motivation reveals the utility of early Christian imagery. Lycomedes wanted a portrait of John, his miracle worker. Lycomedes desired a portrait, not an image of John’s miracle, and it appears it was for devotional purposes. The *Acts of John* is useful in that it shows an early Christian motivation to preserve events in the medium of visual imagery. While Lycomedes’ portrait memorialized the person of his miracle worker, the

³ Athanasius, *Incar.* 18.4 (NPNF 2.4.46).

⁴ *Acts of John*, 27.

⁵ *Acts of John*, 22 (James).

early Christian paintings of Christ's healings record the miraculous act for posterity. Although not portraits, the catacomb wall paintings of Rome show Christ in the act of healing and reflect the patristic emphasis on "seeing" the healings of Christ. Since Christians of the third century could not actually witness Christ's healings, they could witness them in art. Pertinent to this discussion is the *Mandyllion* of Edessa, the legendary first icon of Christ. The *Mandyllion* was a linen cloth that Christ wiped his face with, leaving behind a mirror image of his likeness. Legendarily, King Abgar of Edessa was ailing of an illness and sent his messenger to Jesus imploring him to come to his kingdom and heal him. Instead, Jesus impressed his face upon the cloth, and the *Mandyllion* miraculously healed the king. Notable in the *Mandyllion* legend is that Abgar initially requested the presence of Christ the healer, and in lieu of his presence Christ's physical image actually performed the miracle.⁶ The *Mandyllion* as well as the *Acts of John* and Athanasius' emphasis on seeing Christ's healings and miracles illuminate the initial steps of Christian image use.

It is apparent that early Christians were influenced by the non-Christian use of art either in icon devotion or in other material forms. Eusebius recorded a possible appropriation in his history describing a statue at Paneas (Caesarea Philippi). Granted that his *Letter to Constantia* was possibly not authentic, it is difficult to determine what Eusebius thought of the Christian use of imagery and he arguably was slightly more positive than

⁶ The legend is perhaps late fourth or early fifth-century captured in the Syriac doctrine of Addai, see *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. by Wilhelm Schneemelcher; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 1:437-44, but see the later text describing the cloth in the sixth century *Acts of the Holy Apostle Thaddens*, NPNF 8.558-559). The *Mandyllion* was an example of *achieropoietas*, an image divinely manifested not made by human hands, its counterpart in the West was the Veronica cloth, however that legend does not date until at least the twelfth century. While it provided personal cures, it also served as a communal protector, protecting Edessa and Constantinople from attack. For further reading see Averil Cameron, "The Mandyllion and Byzantine Iconoclasm," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation* (ed. Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf; Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 13-54 and Robin M. Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 135-137.

previously thought.⁷ However, this episode contains some telling features of the landscape of visual art in Late Antiquity. Eusebius explained the statue as an art work erected in gratitude for Jesus healing the woman with the issue of blood:

For they say that there stood on a lofty stone at the gates of her house a brazen figure in relief of a woman, bending on her knee and stretching forth her hands like a suppliant, while opposite to this there was another of the same material, an upright figure of a man, clothed in comely fashion in a double cloak and stretching out his hand to the woman; at his feet on the monument itself a strange species of herb was growing, which climbed up the border of the double cloak of brass, and acted as an antidote to all kinds of disease. This statue, they said, bore the likeness of Jesus.⁸

Eusebius' description of the statue, particularly the detail of the growing curative plant, makes it unlikely that this statue was originally intended to depict the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. His characterization of pagan image devotion, of their tendency to regard the statue as "Savior," implies that the Christians appropriated and altered a pagan statue. Eusebius' statements regarding imagery should not be construed as negative. He noted existing images of Paul, Peter and Jesus without any reservation. His criticism of image devotion gently reminds his readers of their pagan neighbors' proclivities. For the Christians, the natural subject to follow the pagan oeuvre was Christ performing healings and miracles.

Eusebius' description of the statue also invites an unsolvable comparison. It is tempting to argue that the statue at Paneas may have in fact originally been a statue of

⁷ See Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images before Iconoclasm," in *DOP*, no. 8 (1954), 142 and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 145 for their use of Eusebius' letter. The authorship of the *Letter* as non-Eusebian is convincingly argued by Mary Charles Murray in her "Art and the Early Church," *JTS* (1977) 303-345. No scholar has offered a credible counter-argument, except Stephen Gero in "The True Image of Christ: Eusebius' Letter to Constantia Reconsidered," in *JTS*, 32, (1981), 460-470. See *Vita Constantini* 3.48ff and 3. 29ff where Eusebius mentions imagery and the construction of the Holy Sepulcher without negativity.

⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.18 (PG 20, 679C; Oulton, LCL). The statue was also mentioned in Sozomen (*Hist. eccl.*, 5.21) and Philostorgius (*Hist. eccl.* 7.3). The late fourth century poet Prudentius was similarly accommodating to pagan statues now under the aegis of a Christian empire. In his reply to Symmachus, he exhorted Romans to abandon idolatry, but not to destroy pagan statues: "Let your statues, the works of great artists, be allowed to rest clean; be these our country's fairest ornaments, and let no debased usage pollute the monuments of art and turn it into sin" (*Against Symmachus*, 1.502; Thomson, LCL).

Asclepius. The growing herbal plant could have been a Christian alteration of the serpent-entwined staff. The local population at Paneas obviously interpreted the statue as a healer, influencing the Christian population to model it after a Christian healing story. Although impossible to prove, the suggestion is interesting to posit and it certainly would not be unprecedented for early Christians to imbue a pagan image with a Christian meaning.⁹ Even Adolf von Harnack was obliged to make the comparison between the two, “If the statue originally represented Asclepius as the curative plant would suggest, we should have here at least one step between ‘Asclepius the Savior’ and ‘Christ the Savior.’ But this interpretation of a pagan savior or healer is insecure.”¹⁰

Harnack found Eusebius’ statue as possible visual evidence of the rivalry between Asclepius and Christ. What can be drawn from Eusebius’ account, regardless of the origin of the statue at Paneas, is that Christians were developing a visual language to propagate a message of Christ as a healer and worker of miracles. Eusebius’ text apparently shows that the early Christians were discovering the utility of art and imagery, were capitalizing on the influences of their non-Christian neighbors, and were placing that imagery in the context of healing. Such a move suggests a Christian appropriation of the pagan tradition of healing, namely the cult of Asclepius. The visual evidence of the catacombs and of sarcophagus fragments made this appropriation quite lucid, and presents a greater opportunity to interpret the image of Christ the Miracle Worker.

⁹ See Steven Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes towards Images* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004), 188-189. Bigham follows Murray’s position, particularly on Eusebius’ stance on images. He does allow the possibility that the statue at Paneas could be Asclepius.

¹⁰ Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (trans. and ed. by James Moffatt; New York: Harper, 1962), 119.

II. Catacomb Scenes of Christ Healing

II. 1. The Healing of the Paralytic (Figures 1-2)

At the dawn of Christian art at the catacomb of Callistus, Christian art was narrative art. Images served as “pages” in with the medium of wall painting serving as the manuscript. Images of Daniel relate to images of Jonah, and Noah; they cannot be interpreted in isolation to one another. The images are integrated and intentionally placed within the surrounding examples creating a symphonic tableau instead of singular “staccato” notes. The narrative aspect of Christian art dissipated after Constantine as images of Jesus among others took upon a more dogmatic meaning as a divine symbol.¹¹ However, at the catacomb of Callistus and the third and early fourth-century catacombs, the images were narrative in nature.¹²

The baptism of Christ in the catacomb of Callistus is one of the earliest depictions of baptism. As with most images in this catacomb, the facial expressions and figural depictions are faded and difficult to interpret. Immediately adjacent to the scene of Christ’s baptism is an image of the healed paralytic. This scene does not include an image of Christ. Rather, the solitary figure of the healed paralytic is captured holding his pallet above his head that becomes emblematic of the healing action of Christ (Figure 1). The inclusion of this scene next to the scene of the baptism of Jesus is appropriate. The healing of the paralytic is

¹¹ Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 90-91.

¹² Catacomb paintings are not the “staccato” images that Thomas Mathews criticizes in his work on early Christian art. Mathews disputes the long-held view that early Christian images held no connection from one image to another to create a programmatic whole. He uses the musical term “staccato,” a term that refers to a musical note that is brief and separate from other notes on a sheet of music, to criticize Grabar’s interpretation of early Christian images (Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993, 13).

among the first miracles of Christ's ministry in the synoptic gospels.¹³ Mark begins with Jesus' baptism, and immediately follows with several healings and miracles of Christ. Matthew, Mark, and Luke include the healing of Peter's mother-in-law as well as the cleansing of a leper directly after Jesus' baptism and before the healing of the paralytic. The Gospel of John uses the episode in the healing scene at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:2-9. Christ encounters an invalid near the healing pool and orders him to take up his mat and walk.

It is unclear why the Christians at the catacomb of Callistus chose to depict the paralytic rather than the earlier scenes of Jesus' healing. If one is to read the image chronologically, following Jesus' baptism, a scene of healing the leper or Jesus casting out demons would logically follow. However, there are few depictions of demon-casting and exorcism in the corpus of early Christian art. Similarly, the cleansing of the leper was not a depiction included in the catacombs.¹⁴ The healing of the paralytic was likely a popular story due to its dramatic assertion that Jesus is the Son of Man and that Christ was unique. Mark and Luke ended the miracle narrative with the crowd exclaiming, "We have never seen anything like this." It was an early scene where Jesus' healing ability was witnessed by a large crowd, instilling awe and an awareness of his abilities. Church fathers such as Augustine found the paralytic story useful in his preaching of the healing power of Christ. Augustine demanded that his listeners lower the Physician through the roof of their homes by expounding on scripture, thereby binding up any fractures or maladies caused by greed or

¹³ Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:2; Luke 5:17. For Peter's mother-in-law, see Mark 1:29-31; Matthew 4:1-11; and Luke 4:1-13.

¹⁴ It is extremely difficult to depict an exorcism, and there was no direct precedent in pagan or Jewish art for such a scene. Consider Bosio's drawing, where the interpretation remains unclear, cf. Finney's figures, 41.3, and 40.2 in "Do You Think...?".

pride.¹⁵ The synoptic paralytic accounts emphasize Jesus' power to forgive sins while the paralytic story in John depicts Jesus differently, as the divine lawgiver. Thus, John's Jesus and paralytic scene are more different than similar to the synoptics. However in John's Bethesda account, the healing of the paralytic is also associated with baptism. The healing pool of Bethesda, with its curative waters, possibly implies baptism. A depiction of the paralytic along with a scene of Jesus' baptism, may recall John's account and would be congruent with a prevailing theme of baptism; a theme also reflected in the images of the baptistery of Dura Europos. The appearance of the paralytic scene in the earliest structure devoted to baptism arguably reflects John's Bethesda account, as the wavy lines that supposedly emphasize a pool continue into the next scene of Jesus walking on the water.

The recovered catacomb examples of the healing of the paralytic are few in number.¹⁶ Along with the representation at the catacomb of Callistus, there is another at the catacomb under the Vigna Massimo, and another in the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus. In the Vigna Massimo catacomb, Christ is depicted on a lower register relief amidst several scenes, including Daniel, Tobias with the fish and the figure of Job (Figure 2). Jesus is depicted next to the boy carrying his mat above his head. While the image is damaged, it appears that Jesus is not only gesturing towards the boy but touching him physically. The late third-century catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus includes the image of the paralytic in a ceiling relief next to an image of Daniel. Daniel, naked and flanked by the two lions, was also understood as a baptismal figure. His nudity may suggest baptism and his experience in

¹⁵ Augustine, *Serm.* 46.13.

¹⁶ Josef Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1903), 218-224. Some themes are more prominent than others, as Wilpert noted 15 instances of the healing of the paralytic, and seven instances of the healing of the blind, compared with sporadic instances of the healing of the leper, and the woman with the issue of blood that appears in the catacomb of Praetextus and the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus.

the lion's den marked him as the prototypical martyr.¹⁷ Thus, the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus scene may not be that different from the catacomb of Callistus scene with its context of baptism.

A common feature the catacomb of Callistus and the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus paintings share is that Jesus is absent from the scene. Instead, only the paralytic is captured holding his mat and following Jesus' command to walk. The singular representation of the paralytic bears witness to the healing Jesus performed. The catacomb of Callistus and catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus scenes are separated by time, just under a century. This indicates that the image operates on a symbolic level, echoing the healing power of Christ without Christ ever being represented. On relief sculpture featuring the miracles of Christ, Jesus is represented along with the paralytic, however the same manner of depiction of the paralytic remains. The catacomb examples, particularly the paintings at the catacomb of Callistus and the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, seem to be integrated into the other scenes. The successful healing power of Christ is symbolized by the walking of the paralytic, and with the image of Christ's baptism or with Daniel, the rejuvenating effects of baptism is emphasized as well.

In the catacombs, the symbol also expresses the nature of narrative imagery in early Christian art. The scene correlates to the cognate images in its immediate environment. While the paralytic scene is not the most duplicated in terms of exhibiting Christ in the act of healing, it does portray a successful healing. The examples of the healing of the blind, the woman with the issue of blood, or even the raising of Lazarus capture the dramatic moment of Christ's action. In the catacombs, the paralytic is a walking advertisement of the

¹⁷ See Tertullian, *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 8 and Cyprian, *Eps.* 57.2; 67.8 and *On the Lapsed* 19. Cyprian states that Daniel was the model of the martyr confessor. In *On the Lapsed*, Cyprian cites Daniel as the most glorious martyr as he asks "Who more strong for suffering martyrdom in firmness of faith" than Daniel? Also see Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 174-176.

successful healing power of Christ. The paralytic scenes capture the end result rather than the momentous action of Christ's healing ability. Later examples of the paralytic in Christian art will follow the precedent set by the catacomb examples. The boy walking with the mat over his head becomes the symbol of a successful healing of Christ the Physician. Other examples of Christ healing emphasize the power of his touch. The paralytic merely indicates the dénouement of an encounter with the healing power of Christ.

II. 2. The Woman with the Issue of Blood (Figure 3)

The woman with the issue of blood is a scene depicted in catacomb art that emphasizes the healing power of Christ's touch. At the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, the woman kneels below the figure of Christ, clutching the bottom of his tunic (Figure 3). Christ is not touching the woman; the woman is touching him, recalling the moment when Christ realized the healing power "goes out from him." Christ gestures towards the woman with his hand, possibly in recognition of the event or blessing. Christ's healing of the blind similarly captures the dramatic moment of healing as Christ's hand touches the eyes of his patient. These scenes not only exhibit Christ in the act of healing, they emphasize the physical nature of his healing ability.

From the catacomb evidence that has been uncovered, the woman with the issue of blood does not occur with much frequency. Wilpert catalogued only one other instance at the catacomb of Praetextus.¹⁸ It is difficult to make many convincing arguments with number of appearances in the catacombs since the images that survived cannot testify to the images that did not. There is no real way to tell if there many other catacomb representations of the woman with the issue of blood or the healing of the blind. However,

¹⁸ See note above, there are 15 examples of the paralytic in Roman catacomb art compared to the two examples of the woman with the issue of blood.

if the dating of the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus is correct, the scene of the woman with the issue of blood was completed at the end of the third century, just under a century removed from the iconography of the catacomb of Callistus. The woman with the issue of blood's inclusion at this later catacomb, and its persistent appearance on sarcophagi of the same time period, indicate that it was weaving itself into the repertoire of depictions of Christ in the act of healing. Viewed in the wider context of Roman Christian art, the woman with the issue of blood was a fairly prominent image in the late third century. Its inclusion in the corpus of healing images is not unexpected, as it captures a successful healing through physical interaction with the figure of Christ.

Images that feature the healing touch of Christ reveal an underlying message. Christ's healing touch is on display, demonstrating his power as a healer since his healings were a result of a conscious physical interaction between physician and patient. Asclepius' remedies were provided through the power of dreams. Prescriptions were supplied by priests of the temple after the patient's slumber in the Asclepieion. An image of Christ healing through touch spread the message of the superiority of Christ since his healing power was corporeal and earthly, not somnolent. Therefore, Christ and Asclepius bear a physical resemblance to each other in the earliest Christian art. Bearded or beardless, robed or bare-chested, the two figures demonstrate similar physical traits. After comprehending the visual appearance of Asclepius and the mode of depiction of Christ, one can gain insight into perhaps the most vexing and unique catacomb painting that concerns the practice of healing, the so-called "anatomy lesson" of Via Latina.

III. The Visual Appearance of Asclepius (Figure 4)

Asclepius enjoyed a fair level of prominence in iconography, usually located in proximity to an existing Asclepieia in the Late Antique Mediterranean world. Images of Asclepius proliferated around the centers of healing in each town, the Asclepieia. The images corresponded and reflected the healing action that took place in the immediate location. Most often depicted in statuary form or carved upon *stelai*, Asclepius had a definitive appearance that was easily recognizable. Clad in a *himation*, exposing his chest, Asclepius is depicted holding a scepter or scroll in one hand and his staff entwined with a serpent in the other (Figure 4). Ovid speaks to this frequent manner of portrayal in his *Metamorphoses*, as the god addresses a Roman crowd, exhorting them to “Only be sure to note this snake that twines about my staff, and mark it well to fix it in your mind!”¹⁹ The snake and the staff are markers of Asclepius and are much more reliable indicators than hair or beard.

Asclepius in statuary form is consistently depicted standing or leaning on his serpent-entwined staff, bearded or beardless with curly hair and occasionally depicted with the smaller figure of Telesphoros.²⁰ While many images of Asclepius were destroyed after the ascension of Christianity following Constantine in the fourth century, there are still numerous surviving images of Asclepius. Asclepius was captured in statuary form as an Apollonian youth in several instances, unbearded and leaning on his staff, shifting his weight to his front foot.²¹ In later examples from Epidauros and Athens, Asclepius appears as

¹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.650ff (Melville).

²⁰ Telesphoros was the hooded nocturnal god, accompanying Asclepius, reminding of the healing action taken place during sleep at night. His name literally means “The Finisher,” just as death is the finisher.

²¹ See LIMC, “Asklepios,” figs. 22-29.

Jupiter or Sarapis, fully bearded with flowing hair.²² Pausanias describes a statue of Asclepius in his book on Corinth, remarking that the statue of Asclepius was half as big as the Olympian Zeus, was made of ivory and gold, and depicting Asclepius with his staff and serpent.²³ This trend in depicting Asclepius appears to be uniform in many representations throughout the Late Antique Mediterranean world. In statuary examples from North Africa, now Tunisia and Algeria, Asclepius appears no different than representations in Athens; fully-bearded, draped in his *himation* and bearing his snake-entwined staff.²⁴ In statuary, Asclepius is never depicted in the action of healing, and on two-dimensional *stelai* such depictions are exceedingly rare. In the unique instances that Asclepius is depicted healing, it occurs on *stelai* and always refers to the dream-like nature of his healing method. The patient is depicted sleeping while Asclepius is portrayed arriving in the patient's dreams. In the image, Asclepius appears to touch the patient and administer some form of cure.²⁵ Physical touch is also involved in these Asclepius images, however it is apparent that the encounter between god and patient occurs in a dream. From a relief at the Asclepieion at Piraeus, Asclepius is depicted approaching the slumbering patient, suggesting the healing action of the god is taking place through the power of dreams.²⁶ This does not diminish the encounter, although the images of Christ recall more of a direct encounter with his

²² See LIMC, "Asklepios," fig. 321.

²³ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.27.2. Pausanias calls the staff a *bakteria*, not a *virga*, see Chapter Seven.

²⁴ See LIMC, "Asklepios," figs. 276-277.

²⁵ See the damaged relief at Athens, LIMC, fig. 56.

²⁶ Dating from 400 BCE. (For the image, see the plate in C. Kerényi, *Asklepios: Archetypal Images of the Physician's Existence*, New York: Pantheon, 1959, pl. 18).

supplicants rather than an indirect one. Asclepius is also not alone. In two-dimensional art, he is accompanied by the figure of Hygieia with a great degree of frequency.²⁷

The cult desired to attract not just the sick and the needy to the temples but the healthy as well. The cult of Asclepius wanted to be seen as attentive to the sick and also as preservers of health. Hygieia, the personification of Health, was called upon to express this message.²⁸ With the dual personifications of healing the sick and preserving the healthy, the cult of Asclepius could presumably draw larger crowds to the temples. The incorporation of Hygieia in the iconography of Asclepius expressed the desire to call the sick and the healthy to the local Asclepieion. While Asclepius required another figure to represent Health to gain “patients,” Jesus was not portrayed with any such figure in the visual representations of his healing. The message conveyed by the Christians was that healing the sick and preserving the healthy was completely accomplished in one persona not two, and was thus greater than any idolatrous healing cult.

The manner of depicting Asclepius was rarely altered since the advent of the cult in Greece. A pagan or a Christian could witness the snake-entwined staff or the presence of Hygieia and identify the figure as Asclepius. The patristic references and emperor Julian’s appraisal of Asclepius suggest that the cult of Asclepius posed a challenge to early Christianity. The iconography and visual appearance of Jesus possibly reflects such a threat. Images of Jesus began to take on traits of Asclepius, making Jesus a type of Asclepius. By

²⁷ *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*: (LIMC). Comité de rédaction: John Boardman, et al. (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1981-1997), 631ff. Out of almost 400 catalogued images, at least a fourth contained Hygieia, 55 of them appearing on *stelai*. Occasionally with Hygieia are the goddesses Akeso, Iaso, and Panakeia, as well as his sons Machaon and Podaleirios. The presence of Hygieia may appear to cast doubt on the derivation of the statue Eusebius described. However, it could be that the woman with the issue of blood was originally Hygieia (or Telesphoros) and was re-cast as the woman. It is impossible to know what Eusebius’ statue originally looked like.

²⁸ Michael T. Compton, “The Association of Hygieia with Asklepios in Graeco-Roman Asklepieion Medicine,” in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 57.3 (2002), 325. Especially see Asklepios, 252 in LIMC, 654 where Asclepius and Hygieia are depicted side by side, as co-deities in prominence, flanked by snakes.

incorporating manners of depicting Asclepius, early Christians could project a message of Christ as the one and only healing god, superior to any charlatan such as Asclepius.

IV. The Visual Appearance of Christ (Figure 5)

The manner of depicting the figure of Christ is consonant with other Greco-Roman prototypes. Christ, as well as Moses, is portrayed in the typical dress of a tunic and mantle, sometimes called a *pallium*. The dress of the figures is important in any discussion of visual appearance. The *pallium* refers to a long outer robe, very much like a toga but less voluminous.²⁹ Just as manner of depiction changes over time in the contemporary world, it did so in Late Antiquity. The manner of dress of the Greeks and Romans shifted to include the use of a *pallium*, sometimes worn with a tunic or undergarment. In portraying a philosopher, the undergarment is usually omitted, leaving the chest bare.³⁰ There is no adequate term to describe the dual use of a *pallium* and an undergarment, or *chiton*.³¹ The Christ that is depicted in the catacombs wears such a dual garment that Erwin Goodenough dubbed the “robe.” In spite of Goodenough’s reliability, this is an apt term to use for Christ’s garment.

²⁹ See Erwin Goodenough, “Catacomb Art,” *JBL*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Jun., 1962), 117. Goodenough is not exactly reliable, however he provides some of the few academic criticisms concerning the “Anatomy Lesson” catacomb painting discussed below and thus must be begrudgingly considered.

³⁰ Suggesting the peripatetic nature of the wandering teacher and the ascetic lifestyle embodied by a disregard for worldly goods. Also see Jensen, *Face to Face*, 146. To be clear, a *pallium* is not a toga, and occasionally one arm rests in a sling-like fold.

³¹ Goodenough, “Catacomb Art,” 118. A dalmatic was a flowing robe with wide sleeves; Noah appears wearing one occasionally. Jensen usually refers to the dress as a tunic and *pallium*, see *Face to Face*, 149. Goodenough is useful for his comments on dress, but must be used cautiously overall given more recent work has occasionally refuted his views on iconography. As seen below, the paucity of material on the Anatomy Lesson makes Goodenough a valuable resource.

From a contemporary point of view, it may appear problematic for Christians to drape themselves in the manner of their rivals and to depict Christ in such a way. The false notion may exist that early Christians embodied a pristine form of Christianity, unique and unspoiled and completely distinct from outsiders. However, it is logical that Christians would appear like any other ordinary citizen, and if there was a motivation, it was to blend in and not call attention. Christ's dress was typical for a citizen in the empire, and it also exhibits the fact that Christians did not erase their Roman identity. A Christian was a member of the faith but also in many cases a Roman citizen. Christians were members of Late Antique society, and as members they dressed in the typical manner of the times.

Tertullian offered some insight on the dress of Christians. He characterized the shift in dress in third-century Carthage with the passage of time and shifting of fortune. The manner of dress of a garment thrown over the shoulder, baring the chest, was reserved for the priestly class: "The garment of the mantle extrinsically—itsself too quadrangular—thrown back on either shoulder, and meeting closely round the neck in the gripe of the buckle, used to repose on the shoulders. Its counterpart is now the priestly dress, sacred to Asclepius, whom you now call your own."³² Tertullian identified the *pallium* as equal to what he calls the "mantle." The "mantle" indicated leisure and was also an identifier of professional intellectuals such as the Cynic philosophers. The popular dress of Tertullian's Carthage included an undergarment with the mantle, similar to Christ's "robe." Christians wore similar dress as their non-Christian counterparts, thus inviting an explanation from Tertullian. A shift in dress was practical, as Tertullian advocated its virtues, "What is your first sensation in wearing your gown? Do you feel yourself clad, or laded? Wearing a

³² Tertullian, *The Pallium* 1.1 (ANF 4.5).

garment, or carrying it?”³³ The new dress was easier to manage and it covered the shoulders equally. He called the dress the suitable garment for a Christian: “But I confer on it likewise a fellowship with a divine sect and discipline. Joy, Mantle, and exult! A better philosophy has now deigned to honor thee, ever since thou hast begun to be a Christian’s vesture.”³⁴

The dress Tertullian described, the dress of a Christian living in the empire, was the typical manner of dress used to depict Christ in visual imagery. Christ as depicted in the catacombs did not appear in the same dress as Asclepius statuary that was in existence. Asclepius by contrast was usually depicted in a Greek *himation*, with or without one fold draped over the shoulder, and with his chest bare. In the catacomb paintings, Christ wears the dress that Tertullian was describing, with the inclusion of the *chiton* underneath the *pallium*, a manner Tertullian was conscious of. Christ in the catacombs was appearing in a familiar compositional dress to his audience, not in a manner that would appear unlikely or foreign. In the catacombs as the Christians are developing their iconographic language, it is appropriate that they would clothe their Christ in the customary dress. Christ looks like everyone else in the paintings, and likely resembled the fourth-century audience viewing the paintings. He appeared like an everyman, albeit a fairly prosperous everyman. It was his miracle working actions that set him apart from every other figure.

With such a different appearance than the healing god, it can be argued that the catacomb Christ wearing the robe, bearing short hair and often beardless, does not resemble Asclepius at all.³⁵ The attributes of Asclepius in iconography were his staff, his bare chest, and quite often his beard. The appearance of the beard in visual representations of

³³ Tertullian, *Pall.* 5.1 (*ANF* 4.11).

³⁴ Tertullian, *Pall.* 6.2 (*ANF* 4.12).

³⁵ See James Breckenridge’s findings, *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 249.

Asclepius and Christ requires some explanation. In the third and fourth-century Roman catacombs Christ's beard is not uniformly depicted. In large part, the catacomb paintings of Christ portray him beardless, however there are still exceptions until the bearded Christ becomes standard following the sixth century.³⁶ The earliest example appears in the coffered ceiling of a cubiculum at the catacomb of Commodilla, Christ is bearded with a nimbus and a flanking alpha and omega (Figure 5). This image would become a typical mode of depicting the "cosmic Christ" in fourth and fifth-century Christian art.³⁷ Instances of a bearded or beardless Christ do not reflect a direct connection with Asclepius since there were many representations of gods fully bearded.

Asclepius is normally portrayed with a full beard as in the statue that resides now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome.³⁸ Asclepius was also not the only god depicted with a beard. Jupiter, Neptune, Mars, and Sarapis were other gods that were depicted with full heads of hair and lustrous beards.³⁹ Certain representations of a bearded Jesus reflect general attributes of the gods of the pantheon, as in the enthroned, majestic image of a bearded Christ at Santa Pudenziana from 400.⁴⁰ It is difficult to conclude whether the beard

³⁶ And not even then; instances in Byzantine art portray a beardless Christ as well, including San Vitale in Ravenna (546 CE).

³⁷ In cubiculum N5 of Commodilla.

³⁸ Although it was not uncommon to visually depict Asclepius beardless. See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.10.3; also see 2.13.5, "an image of the god not having a beard," (Jones, LCL); Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, 3.34.83 (Rackham, LCL), see Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies, vols. I and II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), vol. I, 368-359. Edelstein suggests that the beardless Asclepius is a relic of the past before the bearded Asclepius became the normative manner of depiction. A beardless Asclepius would be an apt choice of depiction as the cult was beginning to replace the cult of Apollo and capitalize on its status as the preeminent healing cult in the Roman world, Edelstein, vol. II, 220. These texts are balanced by recollections of the bearded Asclepius. See Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 23.5, and see Lucian's entreaty to Apollo to "not play the boy with us Apollo. Say what you think boldly and don't be sensitive about speaking without a beard when you have such a long-bearded, hairy-faced son in Asclepius." Lucian, *Jupiter the Tragedian* 26 (Edelstein, T. 684). Note Augustine's comments in *Sermon* 24.6 that Hercules' strength was in his beard.

³⁹ For further reading, see Jensen, *Face to Face*, 62.

of Jesus is recalling a particular god or all of them, but perhaps it is safer to realize that the beard generally connects Jesus with the “ruling” and authoritative nature of the mature gods depicted with beards.

The issue of the beard urges the question: does a beard recall Asclepius, and if the beard was so critical, why does the catacomb Jesus appear beardless in many instances?⁴¹ The instance of a bearded Christ does not conclusively link him to Asclepius since as mentioned above the healing god was not the only deity portrayed with a beard. The beardless examples in the catacombs reveal that the Christians were utilizing several elements of familiar Greco-Roman iconographic precedents to depict their subject.⁴² Christians were influenced by the existing pagan iconography that included bearded gods and youthful beardless gods such as Apollo.

Robin M. Jensen states that the figures in the catacombs operate more as actors in a drama than as devotional portraits.⁴³ With this in mind, the figures in the catacombs serve a narrative purpose to convey a message. Exhibiting Christ as a wisdom teacher, as a miracle worker, or a healer implies the special nature of Christ. It is important to examine how Christ was visually portrayed—his dress and manner of depiction—to realize what influenced the Christian conception of Christ. In addition to the physical depiction of Christ, it is the context and the action of the figures in the scenes that reveal a competition

⁴⁰ Thomas Mathews has also argued that the enthroned bearded image is also connected to the portrayals of the emperor, as the emperor desired to be clad with the attributes of the gods as well. See *Clash of the Gods*, 92-114. It should be noted that the ruling, majestic bearded type of Christ was favored as the healing type diminished after the fifth century.

⁴¹ However, Erich Dinkler has argued that a bearded Christ begs a direct relation to Asclepius and was modeled upon Asclepius. See Erich Dinkler (*Christus und Asklepios* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980), 15. Dinkler believes this is so and is rejected by Deichmann, 161 and Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 100.

⁴² Also see Jensen, *Face to Face*, 159, and the preceding pages on her treatment of the beard.

⁴³ Jensen, *Face to Face*, 151.

and the motivation for portrayals of Christ in the act of healing and working miracles. In the catacombs, Christ is largely portrayed beardless or with a slight trace of a beard, more akin to representations of youthful gods than the bearded gods. However, Christ is largely portrayed in these instances healing or performing feats of wonder and acting as a savior. Thus, Christ's appearance or dress may not reflect Asclepius but his action in these scenes does. Christ is in the act of healing and working miracles in a different manner than Asclepius, occasionally with touch and often with the staff. Whether with a hand or staff, beard or beardless, the images of Jesus attempt to convince the viewer that Jesus is a greater healer than any other representative from pagan traditions.

The depiction of Christ's physical, tactile healing power is one example of the visual supersession taking place, as is the more subtle appropriation of the indelible staff of Jesus. One particular catacomb image at Via Latina offers an opportunity to debate the influence of Asclepius on representations of Christ. The image includes a bearded teacher surrounded by disciples with what appears to be a patient at their feet. It is a scene involving healing and it is unclear who the main character is supposed to represent. If it is an image of Jesus it is unlike any other recovered painting in the catacombs.

V. The Anatomy Lesson (Figure 6)

The most telling and confounding evidence of the interest in healing in catacomb art is in a hall arcosolium at the fourth-century catacomb of Via Latina. The image of the "anatomy lesson" was labeled by Ferrua and other scholars, although it is unclear what

exactly is going on in the image.⁴⁴ The image purportedly represents a Late Antique physician teaching his students and gesturing towards a prone body. The central figure is shown bearded with a bare chest surrounded by a group of listeners. The figure prone at his feet has been interpreted as sustaining a stomach wound but this is dubious. The red blotch on the stomach of the prone figure has driven scholars to conclude that this is an anatomy lesson due to its resemblance to an open wound. However, the blotch is hardly conclusive evidence of an anatomy lesson, as the figure gazes up with open eyes and appears to be a conscious participant in the ongoing action.

The image is not an anatomy lesson in the manner of later European painters such as Rembrandt. It is an image of a healing, possibly even capturing a resurrection.⁴⁵ The image exhibits a “physician” appearing remarkably like Asclepius as the bearded figure wears a similar dress as many representations of the god. The “physician” is surrounded by followers while a solitary figure lies at his feet with the curious red blotch on his abdomen. The central figure looks to have short hair and definite traces of a beard, as he points downwards with his hand, gesturing towards the patient.

⁴⁴ See Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb: A Unique Discovery of Early Christian Art* (Florence: Geddes and Grosset, 1990), 121-123. Tronzo offers no interpretation on the image in his work on Via Latina, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth-Century Roman Painting* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1986). The International Catacomb Society indicates such an interpretation, although their reliance upon Ferrua is cited. Fink believes it might be the death of King Asa from the Old Testament, see Josef Fink, *Bildfrommigkeit und Bekenntnis: Das Alte Testament, Herakles und die Herrlichkeit Christ an der Via Latina in Rom* (Cologne, 1978), 19-27. Asa from 1 Kings 15:20 was “diseased” in his feet, although the obscurity of this figure makes this identification less feasible. Goodenough (see “Catacomb Art”) rightly points out that the early dating of Ferrua (315/20-350) and the late fourth-early fifth century dating of Deichmann and Dorigo are both correct (See Wladimiro Dorigo, *Pittura tardoromana*, Milan, 1966, 221; F.W. Deichmann, “Zur Frage der Gesamtschau der frühchristlichen und frühbyzantinischen Kunst,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 63 (1970), 50. One must use Goodenough at one’s peril, however when considering the issue of the “Anatomy Lesson” painting it is apt to consider Goodenough since so little has been offered concerning this particular artwork. Also see F.W. Deichmann and Theodor Klauser. *Frühchristliche Sarkophage in Bild und Wort*, Olten: Urs Graf-Verlag, 1966). The construction likely began in the 320s and extended into the late fourth century. Also see André Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art, 200-395* (Thames and Hudson, 1966), 231, who supports a later dating of the catacomb.

⁴⁵ Rembrandt’s *Anatomy Lesson of Professor Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), and even the American, Thomas Eakins’ *Gross Clinic* (1875).

What are we to make of such a scene? Is the figure Asclepius, is it Christ, or is it a Late Antique physician? It is safe to conclude that it is not Asclepius. Images of Asclepius in the act of healing are rare, and in any case, he is usually depicted with his staff along with Hygieia and occasionally Telesphoros. All are absent from this image.⁴⁶ Asclepius is never captured in a position such as this, teaching a group of followers.

In cubiculum N of the same catacomb, Hercules is depicted on the walls, performing his labors and rescuing Alcestis. In this instance, the patrons of the catacomb depicted a physician teaching anatomy. If the patrons were Christian, Hercules and non-Christian imagery was acceptable, showing that early Christians could accept elements from Greco-Roman culture and not consider them idolatrous. More likely, Via Latina represented a mixed family of pagans and Christians, neither group found fault in the imagery of the other. Even so, Hercules was a familiar symbol that Christians could live compatibly with in a diverse environment. If the painter or patrons of the anatomy lesson desired to feature Asclepius, they would have included telling iconographical features germane to Asclepius imagery, such as his ubiquitous serpent-entwined staff. Unlike Cubiculum N's inclusion of identifiable markers that reveal Hercules as Hercules, such as his lion's skin, there are no unquestioned Asclepius features outside of the physician's appearance in the anatomy lesson. The context of healing in the anatomy lesson image may recall Asclepius; however, it is not attempting to evoke the cult of Asclepius and instead draws a connection between Late Antique medical practices and Christ.

If the image is an actual medical lesson with a physician teaching students over a type of cadaver, then it is the only one of its kind in funerary wall painting. The prostrate figure

⁴⁶ Telesphoros was not an uncommon addition to Asclepius, depicted as a child-like, wearing a hood. He was a nocturnal god whose presence emphasized the healing action that takes place through slumber, and the eventual recovery from illness.

has discernible facial features with his eyes open, a conscious participant peering up at the group. Scholarly debate has centered on whether the prone figure is a lifeless subject or a conscious patient in the process of being healed. Ferrua argues that the painting was likely an adornment for the burial site of a notable surgeon.⁴⁷ More recently, Mary Charles Murray affirms that the scene is one of a practicing physician, claiming that the early Christians were influenced by pagan scenes depicting individuals of prominent professions. Her conclusion that an influence controlling early Christian art was personal autobiography is applicable to other catacomb scenes, however it is unclear whether that is the case with the scene of a physician since it is not a figure usually represented.⁴⁸

The prone figure appears remarkably similar to the figures resurrected by Christ in scenes of Christ raising the widow's son and Christ as Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones. In these scenes, mostly depicted on sarcophagi, the prone figure has facial features and gazes up at his savior (Figures 29-31). The patient in the anatomy lesson is a primary clue in its interpretation. It reveals an emphasis on resurrection and may have served as a precedent in later unquestionable images of Christ resurrecting.

The image at Via Latina is an example of a scene with a double meaning. First, the image portrays a physician with his followers in the gesture of speech, teaching his healing craft as he performs upon a wounded patient at his feet. Second, while the image shows a type of healing, or even a healing lesson, a different message of Christian resurrection is implied underneath the surface. The image is a unique precedent for the scenes of Christ resurrecting captured on sarcophagi, under discussion in the following chapter. This

⁴⁷ Goodenough, "Catacomb Art," 129.

⁴⁸ See Mary Charles Murray, "The Emergence of Early Christian Art," in *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (ed. by Jeffrey Spier; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 60. It is unknown if there were many, if any, prominent physicians in Rome at the time of the construction of the Via Latina catacomb. No other representation of a physician exists in catacomb iconography.

depiction of the physician operates in a similar manner as the image of Hercules saving Alcestis in Cubiculum N of Via Latina. Both images depict a *prima facie* scene of a well-told tale; however the insistence upon the theme of resurrection is implied in each image. While for Ferrua, any connection between Hercules and Christ is unthinkable, the evidence of Hercules, Orpheus, and the physician loudly claims that early Christians could use Greco-Roman figures as symbols to highlight the salvific power of Christ, namely resurrection.

The image of the physician and the listeners surrounding the physician is meant to evoke Christ and the twelve disciples.⁴⁹ The surrounding figures are difficult to number due to the deteriorated condition of the painting. Based upon the depictions of heads in the background, at least twelve are depicted. The inclusion of the inert body at the physician's feet evokes the action of Christ performing resurrections. Enslin believes that the image is meant to portray a scene from Acts 1:18 of Judas' fate ("whose body burst open in the middle and all his vitals poured out"). In his opinion the body is possibly Judas with the stomach wound and the audience is Christ and the Twelve. This is a compelling but largely unsatisfying interpretation; an image of Christ and the Twelve looking over the fate of the traitor would be an odd choice as there is no tradition of representing this scene in imagery. In my view, the scene is hinting at a resurrection. All of the elements of resurrection are included in this scene: a healing figure, a body coming to life, and even a staff-like instrument, in this case a very thin example held by one of the disciples. The figure does not appear to be dead and with the slightly raised head, appears to be coming to life again. The resurrected Lazarus is usually portrayed as mummified inside a small mausoleum-like structure, called an *aediculum*; however in sarcophagus frontals, the objects of Christ's

⁴⁹ Goodenough also believes it is Christ and the Twelve, although he notes the difficulty in choosing any interpretation of this image in "Catacomb Art," 129.

resurrection often appear as inert bodies in the same manner as at Via Latina.⁵⁰ In this catacomb, the physician is not wielding a staff or any other instrument, and is not touching the inert body. The image may evoke the notion of resurrection without openly portraying one (an action that would be impossible for a physician to perform). Thus, the context of resurrection reveals that the physician may actually be Christ clad in the guise of a physician.

The figure of the physician is meant to evoke Christ. The physician is surrounded by twelve followers, a broad hint towards the disciples. Catacomb images usually complement each other, and the facing image to this scene is one of Christ enthroned flanked by Peter and Paul, signifying the power and establishment of the church. An image evoking resurrection and the healing power of Christ would fit with this theme of Christ enthroned in power. The instrument wielded by the disciple instead of the physician is a possible clue. Goodenough believes the staff-wielder is Peter. This would be appropriate, as it would emphasize the healing power of Christ's church through Peter opposite an image that explicitly depicts the power of the church.⁵¹ Thus, the Master bequeaths the staff to Peter; a theme that will become prevalent in relief sculpture.

The manifold textual references of Christ as a Physician aid in identifying the physician in the anatomy lesson as Christ. The examples from the church fathers of the third and fourth centuries that characterized Christ as a Physician filled the ears of the Christian community. Here, the image of the anatomy lesson possibly exhibits a characterization of Christ as the Physician, satisfying the Christian audience's eyes. Christ is not as clearly identifiable as in other healing images, however it is the context of the image,

⁵⁰ Depictions of inert bodies include the widow's son and Christ as Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones. In some instances, the figure is rising, and in others is accompanied by a standing figure. For further evidence, see Chapter Six and Figures 29-31. For the Ezekiel text, see Ezekiel 37:1-14.

⁵¹ Goodenough, "Catacomb Art," 129: He believes it recalls Acts 9:36, Peter's power to raise the dead, "The healing and saving power of Christ through his church, especially Peter, seems to me, then, to be perhaps the idea depicted."

the action of the scene that the “actors” in the painting perform that reveals the physician as Christ the Physician.

At Via Latina, the Physician is depicted as a savior. The audience at this time in Christian history would be aware and receptive to any suggestion of Christ as a Physician. Instead of depicting a healing scene of Jesus, the patrons in this instance directly compared a physician to Christ. This may be an indication of a mixed audience of pagans and Christians in the catacomb; a Late Antique physician may have been acceptable to both pagans and Christians. In any case, resurrection is on display in this catacomb as a subject of critical importance to the Via Latina audience.⁵² Here, the restoration of the body is emphasized with the Divine Physician displaying his craft to his disciples, emphasizing cure and comfort in a funerary environment.

The image of the anatomy lesson at Via Latina also exhibits the selective nature of the images chosen to adorn the catacombs. If the image represents a characterization of Christ as the Physician, it is curious why this subject was chosen to stress healing when an image of Christ healing from the gospels could perform the task admirably, and could establish the notion of Christ as a Physician quite lucidly. Several other rooms in the catacomb include Christ and Moses performing miracles from scripture, why not here? Its inclusion may exhibit that the Via Latina patrons were sensitive in selecting iconographic themes and programs that would be appropriate for a mixed audience. The anatomy lesson is one that fit nicely with the theological program of resurrection and restoration whether the catacomb viewers were pagan or Christian. However, coupled with the texts examined in the previous chapter, it is also plausible that the anatomy lesson shows Christ the Physician. The image reflects the inundation of Christ the Physician by the church fathers, as it shows

⁵² For a discussion of whether a resurrection is a healing or not, see Chapter Five, 170.

Christ in the guise of a physician performing the ultimate restorative act that sets him apart from earthly physicians: raising the dead.

While the context of healing is evident in the scene of the anatomy lesson at Via Latina and in other catacomb scenes of Jesus healing, the scene illustrates the emphasis on raising the dead, a prominent funerary motif. Resurrection is an appropriate theme in a funerary environment as it testifies to the future life after death and assures the restoration that Christ offers. Images of Christ raising the dead are featured prominently in Christian imagery. Although they may be considered distinct from healings, they are associated with healings since they are restorative and they prominently display the unique power of Christ. Christ raising the dead was featured less ambiguously than the anatomy lesson in catacomb iconography, and it is to these images we now turn.

CHAPTER V

THE RAISING OF THE DEAD AND OTHER MIRACLES IN CATACOMB ICONOGRAPHY

The theme of resurrection emphasized in the anatomy lesson in the catacomb at Via Latina is similarly stressed in images that incorporate other pagan subjects. The selective eye of early Christians is evident in catacomb images of Hercules and Orpheus, pagan images that were compatible and chosen for the messages they conveyed. For all of the theological development of the Christians in the third and fourth centuries, they were still developing a visual language. The imagery of the catacomb of Callistus marked the dawn of Christian art and the Christian visual development did not end there. As late as the fourth-century catacomb at Via Latina, Christians were still appropriating and transforming images and themes of their Greco-Roman social context.¹ Many of the images on the walls and the ceilings of the catacombs have pagan prototypes; however, they reflect pertinent themes and issues the early Christian community desired to portray in a funerary environment.

Resurrection was a notable theme that reflected the desire and comfort the immortal life afforded in the wake of death. The theme of resurrection suitably depicted the superiority of

¹ For an extensive, and the earliest, discussion of Via Latina see Antonia Ferrua, S. I., *Le Pitture della Nuova Catacombs di Via Latina*, Città del Vaticano, 1960 (Monumenti di antichità cristiana, Ser. 2, Vol. 8), and, with reservations, Erwin Goodenough, "Catacomb Art," *JBL*, vol. 81, no. 2. (Jun., 1962), 113-142. See William Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth-Century Roman Painting* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1986), 10-11. He points out that the early dating of Ferrua (315/20-350) and the late fourth-early fifth-century dating of Deichmann and Dorigo are both correct (See Wladimiro Dorigo, *Pittura tardoromana*, Milan, 1966, 221; F.W. Deichmann, "Zur Frage der Gesamtschau der frühchristlichen und frühbyzantinischen Kunst," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 63, 1970, 50. Also see F.W. Deichmann and Theodor Klauser, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage in Bild und Wort*, Olten: Urs Graf-Verlag, 1966). The construction likely began in the 320s and extended into the late fourth century. Also see André Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art, 200-395* (Thames and Hudson, 1966), 231, who supports a later dating of the catacomb. Norbert Zimmermann, *Werkstattgruppen Römischer Katakombenmalerei*, *JAC*, 35 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2002), 67, reviews the arguments for dating.

Christ. Pagan heroes as well as scriptural heroes from the Old Testament, namely Moses were incorporated in Christian art to highlight the attributes of Christ. Hercules, Orpheus, and Moses served as typological images that pointed to the ultimate supremacy of Christ. This chapter will explore the usage of figures such as Hercules, Orpheus and Moses to stress the theme of resurrection and the abilities of Christ. This chapter will also examine the predominant Christian resurrection image in the raising of Lazarus that was an omnipresent theme in Christian funerary art.

I. Patristic Citations of Competing Deities

The second-century apologist Justin Martyr mentioned the similarities between the pagan hero Hercules and Christ: “And when it is asserted that Herakles, the son of Zeus and Alcmena, was strong and traversed the whole earth, and that, after death, he, too, ascended into heaven, ought I not conclude that the scriptural prophecy about Christ, ‘strong as a giant to run his course,’ was similarly imitated?”² In his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Clement cited Euripides’ words to paint Orpheus as a predictor of Christ.³ Just as Orpheus lured the wild beasts to peacefulness with his lyre, Christ lures men as the Divine Logos.⁴ The comparison between the deities was made by pagans as well. In his polemic, Celsus attacked Jesus’ divinity by slandering him as a magician and suggested there were several other heroes

² Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 69.3 (PG 6, 636C-637B; Falls).

³ Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 7.28. See Ex. 1.1: “that Thracian Orpheus.”

⁴ See Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife, Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art* (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981), 47ff, as she argues that Clement conveyed a meaning of Orpheus beyond the metaphorical, and really saw Plato in the figure of Orpheus. This is not uncommon given Orpheus’ attraction to the realm of philosophy, although it is harder to make the case that the catacomb artists were seeing Orpheus with Clement’s eyes when they constructed their paintings. It could be they only saw Christ as the New Orpheus. Murray believes that Clement revealed a Christianizing of the Orpheus tradition (“The Christian Orpheus,” *Cahiers Archéologiques*, vol. 26, 1977, 19-27).

that were much more dignified than Jesus. Celsus offered some alternatives by claiming that “if Herakles, Asklepios, and others held in honor long ago did not please you, you had Orpheus, a man, as all agree, with a divine spirit who also died a violent death himself; but perhaps he had already been chosen by others... you regard someone as a god who lived a most infamous life and died a most miserable death.”⁵ Moreover, Celsus suggested alternatives within the Christian tradition that would be more suitable than Jesus: “How much more suitable than him (Jesus) would Jonah have been for you with his gourd, or Daniel escaped from the beasts, or others whose stories are even more miraculous than these.”⁶

Origen responded to these suggestions rationally, as he pointed out that Jonah and Daniel were admirable, but they were not as heroic as Christ.⁷ Origen did not accept Celsus’ attack on Jesus’ divinity and instead of uplifting Jonah and Daniel as types of Christ, he stated that they were figures to be emulated in prayer, since they are examples of those whose prayers were answered.⁸ Jonah and Daniel, along with the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace, became competing heroes to Celsus’ mention of Hercules and Orpheus.⁹ All three

⁵ Celsus in Origen, *Against Celsus*, 7.53 (Chadwick). Celsus also accuses Christians of reading and blaspheming the Sibylline Oracles. Also see William S. Babcock, “Image and Culture: An Approach to the Christianization of the Roman Empire,” in *Perkins Journal*, vol. 81, no. 3 (July 1988), 4-6, as he ruminates on the importance of Jonah/Endmyion and its emphasis on the fleshly resurrection.

⁶ Origen, *Cels.* 7.53 (Chadwick).

⁷ Origen, *Cels.* 7.57.

⁸ Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 5.33: “But we...shall imitate those holy youths.” Origen also mentions them again in a similar context, as well as Daniel and Jonah, as examples of those whose prayers were answered in *Prayer* 13.2 and 16.3.

⁹ The nudity of Jonah and Daniel is vexing since along with Adam, they are the few figures that are uniformly depicted nude. Their nudity may be explained due to their Greco-Roman stylistic prototypes, or it could be a reference to the ritual of baptism. See Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 174-176. Jensen offers a similar interpretation of a nude Daniel as an image connoting resurrection, akin to Jonah. Jensen states that Daniel’s nudity can suggest baptism as well, absent any water imagery that appears in the image of Jonah. Daniel’s nudity represents the ritual nudity that took place during the rite.

subjects can be read Christologically, implying resurrection. Origen's response to Celsus is not the only source that made the Christological use of these figures explicit. The fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* that was found in Syria, a collection of liturgical documents, mentioned Jonah, Daniel and the Three Youths as symbolizing resurrection:

Besides these arguments, we believe there is to be a resurrection also from the resurrection of our Lord. For it is He that raised Lazarus when he had been in the grave four days, and Jairus' daughter, and the widow's son. It is He that raised Himself by the command of the Father in the space of three days, who is the pledge of our resurrection. For says He, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' Now He that brought forth Jonah in the space of three days, alive and unhurt, from the belly of the sea monster, and the three children out of the furnace of Babylon, and Daniel out of the mouth of the lions' does not want power to raise us up also. But if the Gentiles laugh at us, and disbelieve our Scriptures, let at least their own prophetess Sibylla oblige them to believe who says thus to them...¹⁰

The author of the *Apostolic Constitutions* described Jonah, Daniel, and the Three Youths as types of Christ; the very figures that early Christians used to adorn their catacomb walls. More importantly, the author cited the resurrections of Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and the widow's son at Nain. The text reveals the strong attention given to Christ's resurrections. Since the *Apostolic Constitutions* were found in Syria and deal mainly with Christian ritual, it is highly unlikely there is a direct correlation between the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the art of the Roman catacombs, however it exhibits themes and motifs early Christians obviously found compelling. The author of the *Apostolic Constitutions* included these incidents from scripture to emphasize the superiority of Jesus over preexisting figures. The art of the catacombs similarly exhibits Jesus as a greater hero than any other figure, including the heroes Celsus mentioned in his polemic.

¹⁰ *Apostolic Constitutions*, 5.1.7 (ANF 7.440). The author of the *Apostolic Constitutions* not only cited the figures from scripture, but pointed the unbelievers to look at the Sibylline Oracles as well. The Oracles were the very works that Celsus believed the Christians misused (Origen, *Cels* 7.53), and Lactantius appropriated, see *Inst.* 4.18-19; 4.15, although Augustine discouraged their influence (*Against Faustus* 13.1-2).

II. Hercules, Orpheus and Asclepius in the Catacombs

Hercules and Orpheus are represented frequently in art of Late Antiquity, a body of evidence that includes Christian art. There is evidence of pagan objects that include representations of Orpheus and Hercules.¹¹ The instances of images of Hercules and Orpheus declined considerably after Constantine but were still in existence.¹² Paintings of Hercules' deeds were included in the catacomb of Via Dino Compagni as late as 350. The savior aspect and power of Hercules made him a suitable subject for devotees as he connoted divine aid and strength. The story of Hercules' resurrection of King Admetus' wife Alcestis was of apparent interest to early Christians, as it was depicted in a cubiculum at Via Latina. It represented Hercules' ability to travel to the underworld and overcome death on behalf of another. Moreover, the death of Alcestis, sacrificing herself for someone she loved, would appeal to Christians who may recognize Christ's sacrifice in the story. In Late Antiquity, Hercules was revered less as a god and more as a divine helper and occasionally a defender against disease. The cult of Hercules was largely sacrificial, and the shrines at Attica and Huetos drew visitors seeking healing remedies.¹³ Hercules was notably associated with Chiron, the centaur healer who legendarily taught Asclepius. The hero god was revered as a protector against evil. Clement of Alexandria noted of a house that had

¹¹ The Boston Sarcophagus features Orpheus. See A. Van den Hoek and J.J. Herrmann, "Celsus' Competing Heroes: Jonah, Daniel, and their Rivals," in *Poussières de christianisme et de judaïsme antiques* (Lausanne: Éditions du Zèbre, 2007), 326-327.

¹² See Van den Hoek and Herrmann, "Celsus' Competing Heroes," 333. The authors cite the small amount of post-fourth-century imagery of Hercules in the *LIMC* as evidence. The same can be said for Asclepius. No coins were pressed with either image of the god (see Otfried Deubner, *Das Asklepeion von Pergamon*, Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1938, 20); however there were scattered images of Asclepius and Hygieia in the fifth century.

¹³ See Lewis Richard Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921). Farnell describes the exclusion of women at shrines to Hercules, although occasionally slave women were allowed to enter (161-163).

inscribed over the door, “Hercules, for victory famed, dwells here; let nothing bad enter.”¹⁴ Philostratus connected Hercules to the healing of a plague in Ephesus, as his cult statue was regarded as the averter of evil.¹⁵ Apollonius recalled the event in Philostratus’ text, as he claimed the god helped him remove the pestilence since the “temple of Hercules...averts disease.” He went on to recall how Hercules purged the city of Elis of plague by removing the disease-bearing river tide.¹⁶

Hercules’ legend associated him with healing. Ovid’s *Fasti* detailed Hercules’ visit to Chiron who also taught the hero Achilles peaceful arts such as medicine, astronomy, and music.¹⁷ Pausanias stated that in Olmones, he found “a temple of Hercules, from whom the sick may get cures.”¹⁸ The war-like nature of Hercules was less needed in Late Antiquity when the military conflicts of the Greek states were over. Hercules’ softer attributes as a helper, comrade, and healer became more prominent in his cult. Hercules’ status as a medicinal god extended until the end of paganism. Farnell noted that some gods were converted into Christian saints, an anonymous epigram in the Greek Anthology recorded Hercules reminding his viewers that he was not actually “Lucius,” although they share the common designation as a physician.¹⁹ While his healing ability is less prominent than

¹⁴ Clement, *Miscellanies* 7.4 (ANF 2.529). Clement is citing Diogenes Laertius here.

¹⁵ Philostratus, *Life*. 4.10.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 8.7.

¹⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.379-414. Hercules’ visit sadly results in Chiron’s death as one of his poisoned arrows strikes the foot of the centaur. The presence of Hercules and Achilles suggests the foreshadowing of their own deaths; Hercules’ death by the blood of the centaur Nessus, and Achilles’ with an arrow in a part of his foot, his heel. Also see Ian Brookes, “The Death of Chiron: Ovid, *Fasti* 5.379-414,” in *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2, (1994), 444-450.

¹⁸ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.24.3 (Jones, LCL). He also notes that a statue of Hercules was erected in thanks for healing the plague at Athens.

¹⁹ *Greek Anthology* 11.269: “I, victorious Hercules, the son of Zeus, am not really Lucius, but they compel me to be so.” It is possible the association with Luke is implied here, however W.R. Paton believes that it is a jibe at

Asclepius, Hercules was revered as more than just a hero. Sickness was occasionally understood as the absence of the soul from the body.²⁰ Hercules' journey with Alcestis exhibited his status as a type of healer, one who could travel to the underworld and restore the soul to the body. It is a pagan resurrection story that even the bishop Epiphanius of Salamis recognized in the fourth century.²¹ The existence of Hercules' iconography in Cubiculum N of Via Latina, including scenes with Alcestis, fit in a funerary environment. The scene portrays a healing in a sense; the victory of life over death.

Orpheus, like Hercules, journeyed to the underworld on behalf of another, although his resurrection of Eurydice ended tragically. There are six recovered wall paintings of Orpheus in the catacombs, the oldest found in the catacomb of Callistus.²² Orpheus is often depicted seated with a lyre surrounded by at least one or more animals. At the catacomb of Callistus, only sheep encircle the figure of Orpheus. At the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, the image of Orpheus is surrounded by six sheep, and at the catacomb of Domitilla the animals also include birds, a lion, a horse, a mouse, a snake, and several other undetermined animals. The pastoral character of the images of Orpheus led early commentators to claim that the image of the Good Shepherd was modeled after Orpheus, prompting art historians to label catacomb images of Orpheus as "Christ-Orpheus with the

the statue of Commodus/Hercules, "Lucius Commodus." (see Paton, LCL, vol. IV). Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults*, 151.

²⁰ Edwin Elliott Willoughby, "The Role of Hercules in the Resurrection of Alcestis," in *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 5, (Feb., 1927), 380.

²¹ Epiphanius, *Anchoratus*, 85 (PG 43.176). Epiphanius also mentions Asclepius and Castor and Pollux in terms of resurrection.

²² These are found at Callistus, two each in Peter and Marcellinus and Domitilla (one destroyed), and a destroyed one at Priscilla catalogued by G.B. De Rossi in 1877. See Paul Corby Finney, "Orpheus-David: A Connection in Iconography between Greco-Roman Judaism and Early Christianity," *JJA*, vol. 5 (1978), 6-15. The argument that the David figure at the Dura synagogue is Orpheus, and that the Christians were influenced in their usage of Orpheus by a Jewish "David-Orpheus" was introduced by H. Stern in *Orphée dans l'Art Paléochrétien, Cahiers Archéologiques*, vol. 23 (1974), 1-16. His position of a Jewish influence was rebutted by Murray in "The Christian Orpheus," 19-27. At Dura, it may not be Orpheus at all.

gentle animals.”²³ Floor mosaics found north of Lepcis Magna in North Africa certainly influenced such a connection, as they also display Orpheus with his harp surrounded by animals, akin to the pastoral image of the Good Shepherd. The presence of animals and elements of music constituted an image of Orpheus.²⁴ Mary Charles Murray has argued instead that these figures are distinct in catacomb art, given the fact that the Orpheus of Christian art is never consistently depicted in dress akin to the Good Shepherd. The only really consistent attribute they both share is the appearance of sheep.²⁵ Orpheus singing to the animals was important enough to early Christians to depict the scene visually. The Christians witnessed in the image something that a biblical scene did not provide. Orpheus was popular in pagan imagery and respected in antiquity as a peaceful figure, a patron of music and the arts, and supporting a moral life. As Murray states, the result in Late Antiquity was that Orpheus attracted several different groups, and was a unifying religious figure.²⁶

Instead of labeling figures of Orpheus in a Christian catacomb “Christ-Orpheus” it is possible that these images intentionally represent the pagan deities themselves. Thus, the images of Hercules or Orpheus in the catacombs are not actually representations of Christ; they are depictions of Hercules and Orpheus.²⁷ Their appearance in the catacombs may reveal a Christian appropriation of these heroes. The early Christians took them from the pagan realm and transformed them as figures of cultural unity and types of Christ. A

²³ G. B. De Rossi, namely, but also Grabar, pl. 84. See Théophile Roller, *Les catacombes de Rome: histoire de l'art et des croyances religieuses pendant les premiers siècles du Christianisme* (Paris, 1881), 244-249.

²⁴ Murray, “The Christian Orpheus,” 25.

²⁵ Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 42.

²⁶ See Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 46, and her entire chapter on the Christian Orpheus.

²⁷ Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 46. Murray claims these figures “are Christ himself.”

problem with such an explanation is that catacombs such as Via Latina that contain multiple pagan and Christian images may have been used by both groups. Scholars such as Ferrua, one of the early researchers of the Via Latina catacomb, are loath to admit any connection between Hercules and Christ.²⁸ Instead, Ferrua explains that the families buried at Via Latina were not entirely Christianized. However, the catacomb exhibits the traits of a mixed, extended group whose members decorated their rooms to their liking. Under this assumption, pagan members chose pagan designs for their burial chamber while their Christian brothers and sisters chose Christian themes. Via Latina could exhibit a coexistence of pagan and Christian themes that are not entirely at odds with each other.²⁹ The Samson images that appear in Cubiculum F and Room L are possible conflations of the labors of Hercules.³⁰ In the fourth century, Samson was a figure understood by Christians as connected to Hercules as Augustine stated, “Samson was judge of the Hebrews, who is thought to be Hercules, because of his wonderful strength.”³¹ While it is likely the audience of the Via Latina catacomb was mixed, it certainly had a number of Christian viewers.

The painting of Hercules and Alcestis in cubiculum N of the Via Latina catacomb may have been chosen by the patron to represent marital devotion.³² Scenes of spouses reuniting after death are non-existent in the Christian canon, likely since there was no

²⁸ See Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb: A Unique Discovery of Early Christian Art* (Florence: Geddes and Grosset, 1990), 158-159; Goodenough, “Catacomb Art,” 132.

²⁹ See Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb*, 165. The Via Latina is a unique site in that it was not under church control, unlike its earlier cousins. Ferrua believes that the private nature of the catacomb perhaps lent itself to a larger degree of creativity in pictorial representations, rather than relying on traditional motifs. However even referring to catacomb art of Callistus, Domitilla, or Peter and Marcellinus as “traditional” is an overstatement. Christians did not have traditional art as of yet. What Via Latina represents is a larger degree of creativity and adaptability that is still present in earlier catacombs.

³⁰ See Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb*, figs. 87 and 114.

³¹ Augustine, *City of God* 18.19 (NPNF 1.2.370).

³² See Beverly Berg, “Alcestis and Hercules in the Catacomb of Via Latina,” *VChr*, vol. 48, no. 3, (Sep., 1994), 220.

narrative as familiar as the Alcestis story. At Via Latina, a spouse possibly chose the Alcestis narrative was for this reason. The appearance of Hercules imagery should not suggest a level of Hercules devotion. The patrons included mythological representations that could be read as Christian allegories. Hercules and Alcestis may have been specifically chosen for this cubiculum while the painter filled in the gaps with other images of Hercules' labors that are perhaps less significant. The painter may have added the labors of Hercules in the same cubiculum as familiar scenes to balance the Alcestis scene. However, it seems possible that such figures and themes that are pagan in genesis fit nicely in a mixed catacomb at time when the world was becoming increasingly Christianized. The Alcestis story of deathly sacrifice does have Christological overtones that are apparent. Hercules and other figures from the pagan pantheon represented well-known tales that Christians could recognize as compatible and not as idolatrous threats.³³

Cubiculum N can be dated to the period of 350-370 CE.³⁴ This was a period of confrontation between pagans and Christians with the apostasy of emperor Julian and the altar of victory dispute in Rome. There was likely a strong familiarity amongst Christians and pagans of the religious figures in the pantheon of their opponents. Christians did not cease being Roman members of society and encountered stories of images in the pagan pantheon in their daily life. Thus, in the Via Latina catacomb the conflation of pagan and Christian themes does not appear antagonistic. Adjacent to Cubiculum N, is the scene of the raising of Lazarus in Cubiculum O. Ferrua noted that the hallway leading into the Lazarus cubiculum includes painted representations of Ceres and Proserpina, and they

³³ During the Reformation, the Cranach workshop incorporated mythological themes in visual art such as the Three Graces, Venus and Cupid, and Hercules and Omphale. Christian art could utilize these figures since they represented certain themes that were compatible with Christianity.

³⁴ Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb*, 17.

appear again in the ceiling of the chamber.³⁵ The pagan goddesses possibly guide the viewer from one chamber emphasizing marital devotion with the scene of Hercules and Alcestis to a chamber containing a primary scene of resurrection in the raising of Lazarus. Alcestis was a suitable choice for a married couple reunited in the midst of death in Cubiculum N. Arguably, the patrons chose the Lazarus painting as the ultimate scene of resurrection for the person lying in repose in the cubiculum.

The catacomb at Via Latina appears to be a mixed use catacomb, with pagan viewers and Christian viewers. Whether the Via Latina patrons were Christians or pagans, they found utility in images of Orpheus, Hercules and images of Christ. The catacomb iconography, even in a unique catacomb like Via Latina, leads one to believe that Christian viewers found both pagan and Christian images and themes suitable in some capacity. Early Christians could exhibit images of Hercules or Orpheus and still witness Christian themes. Both pagan figures embodied charity, harbored a level of control over the dead, and enjoyed a heroic apotheosis.³⁶ Orpheus and Hercules were raised to divinity after a period of suffering; Hercules with his labors, and Orpheus with his tragic loss of his love and subsequent death. With the Christian visual lexicon still developing, it is apparent that pagan themes and prototypes took on a Christian valence.

Images of Asclepius, such as those of Hercules or Orpheus, do not exist in the catacombs. Arguably, the cult of Asclepius was more prominent than Hercules or Orpheus. Asclepieia were scattered throughout the empire and enjoyed a vast scope and range, playing a pivotal role in late antique health care. The healing cult of Asclepius certainly engendered

³⁵ Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb*, 119.

³⁶ See David Aune, "Heracles and Christ: Heracles Imagery in the Christology of Early Christianity," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians* (ed. by David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne Meeks; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 3-19. The comparisons that Aune cites are not unique to Hercules, but are also embodied by Asclepius as well. His usage of Aristides fails to mention the effect Asclepius had on his writings.

popular devotion and fervor in Late Antiquity.³⁷ The Corinthian Asclepieion enjoyed some longevity; it functioned until its destruction in the 520s.³⁸ Jerome remarked on the continued practices of the Asclepieion in his commentary on Isaiah, and the philosopher Proclus was extremely devoted to the god before his death in 485.³⁹ In Marinus' biography of the Neoplatonist, he recorded Proclus praying at the temple of Asclepius on behalf of a friend, calling the Asclepieion the "temple of the savior," and describing the subsequent healing, "for the savior, being a god, healed her (Proclus' friend) easily."⁴⁰ In the fifth century, the Asclepius cult was still celebrated, and the god was remembered as a "savior." Even as late as the eighth century, Alcuin of York referred to Asclepius as the false Christ.⁴¹ Alcuin's mention shows that centuries following the art of the catacombs Asclepius was mentioned as an opponent of Christ. The scattered observance of the cult and the persistent references in Christian texts suggest that the Christians in Late Antiquity and beyond felt it necessary to address the Asclepius cult as a continuing problem.

Although Asclepius is nonexistent in catacomb iconography, the image of Christ healing and working miracles may still recall the cult of Asclepius. In the absence of images of Asclepius or images of Christ rendered as Asclepius, it is the subject matter of the images

³⁷ See Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.13; *Oratio* 39.5; and Chapter Two, 69, as well as Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1.200B. Also see *Oration* 4.144B where Julian juxtaposes Asclepius to Christ; and 153B for his claim of Asclepius as "the savior."

³⁸ See Chapter Three, note 111.

³⁹ Jerome, *On Isaiah*, 65; Farnell commented that if only the cult of Asclepius had a genius or true prophet touting its fame instead of Aristides and Julian, then the cult could develop a high theology and create an even greater problem for the Christians, *Greek Hero Cults*, 279. The continued references, however, reveal that Asclepius was not a light threat.

⁴⁰ Marinus, *Life of Proclus*, 29 (Edwards). Also see 31-32 for other healings attributed to Asclepius. The temple Proclus prayed in was at Lydia. See *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (trans. by Mark Edwards; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Alcuin, *Ep.* 245 in Ernst Dümmler's *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Berlin, 1891-97). Alcuin calls the false Christ, "Scolapius falsator." See Edelstein, vol. II, 134, note 6 that cites the substitution of Asclepius' name for Christ's during the Renaissance when words foreign to classical Latin were forbidden. It is an example of the continuing juxtaposition of Christ and Asclepius.

that bears the most resemblance.⁴² Portraying the feats of Christ may be an obvious choice for a Christian catacomb viewer; however, a scene such as Christ healing the paralytic places Christ in the realm of Asclepius. Asclepius is possibly appropriated by depicting Christ performing healings and miracles. Christ is not evoking a generic physician; the scenes recall the episodes from the gospels of chronically ill followers. The images of Christ healing illustrate a divine healing; an arena occupied by the cult of Asclepius not Late Antique physicians. In these images, Christ is often directly encountering his “patients” and physically touching them, something Asclepius accomplishes through dreams, however in the Christian iconography Christ’s touch is more prominently featured. Christ raising the dead exhibits Christ performing a feat that Asclepius was killed by Zeus for performing. Thus, the depiction of Christ raising the dead begs the question whether a resurrection can even be considered a healing.

A resurrection is restorative in a sense and it is not a resurrection to immortality that is portrayed. Christ raising Lazarus is not the final resurrection of the flesh; Lazarus is restored to mortality, susceptible to catch cold, the flu, and to die again. Resurrections were not something that physicians or healing cults routinely performed, but as we saw in the anatomy lesson, a resurrection is not the work of an ordinary physician but of the Physician Christ. By focusing on this question, we might lose sight of the larger connection to Asclepius. Christ performing a resurrection recalls Asclepius as it has more to do with divine authority than with healing. Asclepius was also known for raising the dead. Here, the textual references are helpful. Julian’s teacher Libanius referred to this connection in one of his orations praising Julian: “You were, for the body of our world, what in legend Asclepius

⁴² See Chapter Six, on the unique fragment in the Terme museum. In Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*, figs. 48-49.

was for Hippolytus.”⁴³ Since legendarily Hippolytus was raised from the dead by Asclepius, so Julian was the savior of the people from darkness by restoring pagan religion. However, Asclepius was killed by Zeus for his act of resurrection; he did not have authority over life and death. The church fathers knew this quite well, as this lack of authority was the tactic of choice when deriding Asclepius. Justin, Clement, Origen and Tertullian all point out that Asclepius’ downfall was due to his lack of authority, since he was not really a divine agent.⁴⁴ Christ exhibited raising the dead is evocative of Asclepius’ shortcoming, as it shows Christ requiring no authority to raise the dead, a miracle of charity and benevolence not greed. Outside of the debate of whether a resurrection is a healing or not, an early Christian viewer may see Christ performing an action that sets him apart from any opponent from pagan tradition, including Asclepius.

In the paintings of the catacombs, Greco-Roman images and themes were malleable to the Christians. The heroes of Jonah, Daniel, and the Three Youths were continuing themes of hope and resurrection. The heroes Orpheus and Hercules occur as types of Christ in catacomb art. As a solitary figure, Asclepius is absent; however the healing god is recalled as the Christians demonstrate a degree of innovation by transposing themes of healing and resurrection onto the person of Christ. In the catacombs this recollection of Asclepius can be witnessed in images of Christ healing the paralytic, the woman with the issue of blood and the raising of Lazarus. The raising of Lazarus fits nicely with these annexed images in a funerary context and its frequent depiction speaks to its importance.⁴⁵

⁴³ Libanius, *Orationes*, 13.42 (Norman, LCL).

⁴⁴ Justin, *1 Apol.* 21 (PG 6, 360A); Clement, *Ex.* 2.24 ; Origen, *Cels.* 3.22 (PG 11, 944C); Tertullian, *To the Heathen* 2.14.45 (CSEL 20.127). Also in Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 4.24 (CSEL 4.161) and Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.19.3 (CSEL 19.71).

The images of Christ in the catacombs indicate a visual effort to portray Christ as unrivaled in his power and ability. This can be recognized by examining the catacomb scenes of Christ resurrecting Lazarus.

III. The Raising of Lazarus (Figures 7-12)

The scene of the raising of Lazarus is another prominent miracle of Christ that is depicted first at the catacomb of Callistus, then at several other catacomb locations.⁴⁶ The catacomb of Callistus image, like the paralytic scene, includes several typical elements while containing key differences. Christ stands to the side of a small *aediculum*, containing the figure of Lazarus. The features of Lazarus are indiscernible; it is clear that the figure is not mummified as in later depictions of this scene, and that he originally had some type of facial features (Figure 7). This is indicative of the novelty of portraying this scene. The mummified figure became the standard for portraying Lazarus instead of the figure at the catacomb of Callistus, standing with two feet planted firmly underneath the *aediculum*.⁴⁷

In the image, Christ is wearing his robe, a tunic with a *pallium*, with his right arm extended towards the *aediculum*, emphasizing the miraculous action taking place. In his left hand he is holding what can be construed as a staff, a wand, or a scepter. As mentioned above, this is a telling iconographic feature that occurred at an early stage in Christian art, and will be discussed in Chapter Seven. However, it should be noted that the catacomb of Callistus Jesus is not using the staff as part of his resurrection of Lazarus. It is not an

⁴⁵ See Wilpert, *Die Malereien*, 310-321. The Raising of Lazarus is represented in the catacombs 53 times. This makes Lazarus most prominent amongst the wonders of Christ depicted in catacomb art. Also see Roller, *Les catacombes*, 134.

⁴⁶ Found in Level 2, area I, cubiculum A6 (Finney, *The Invisible God*, 218).

⁴⁷ See Maurice Besnier, *Les catacombes de Rome* (Paris: Leroux, 1909) plate 14.

instrument that is pointed towards the *aediculum*, touching the structure or body of Lazarus, signifying the transference of miraculous power. Rather, Jesus is gesturing with his hand towards the body of Lazarus, a rather unusual depiction. The scene at the catacomb of Callistus is unique in this rendering of the raising of Lazarus. It includes both players in the drama while not exhibiting the action of the miracle. It may be that this image is capturing not the action of the miracle but the completed miracle. Lazarus is resurrected standing in the foreshortened area in front of the *aediculum*. Christ's gesture towards Lazarus is not one of action but one of praise, even victory, of his completed effort. Thus, it is not the raising of Lazarus that is represented but the resurrected Lazarus.

In one representation in the catacomb of Priscilla, the raising of Lazarus image is slightly similar to the catacomb of Callistus image, offering another example of Christ gesturing towards Lazarus with his hand rather than the reed-like staff. The image is badly damaged, however it is clear that Lazarus is now mummified, residing in the *aediculum* rather than standing in front of it as at the catacomb of Callistus (Figure 8). The Priscilla image illustrates that catacomb representations of Lazarus have slightly evolved since the catacomb of Callistus to depict the actual raising of Lazarus. Christ is depicted gesturing towards the *aediculum* of Lazarus, emphasizing the action that is taking place. Given the state of the painting, it is unclear whether Christ is holding a staff in his left hand as at the catacomb of Callistus. It is apparent that a staff is not part of his gesturing motion with his right hand.

The catacomb of Domitilla offers another example of the evolution of depicting the Lazarus scene. In the "Red Cubiculum," Christ is depicted gesturing towards a mummified Lazarus residing in the *aediculum*. Instead of gesturing with just his hand, Christ is holding the instrument of the staff and physically touching Lazarus with it (Figure 9). The staff is not just an accessory as in the catacomb of Callistus image, but is part of the miracle working

action of Christ. The staff became a standard iconographic feature, just as the mummified Lazarus, in any further depiction of the Lazarus scene in the catacombs. At the Via Latina catacomb, there is at least one depiction of the raising of Lazarus. In one example in Cubiculum O at Via Latina, Christ surrounded by his followers touches the forehead of a mummified Lazarus, inside his *aediculum*, with the staff (Figure 10). The raising of Lazarus appears in two instances at the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus. On a wall painting in a cubiculum, Jesus is depicted in a robe with a monogram of the Chi Rho at the bottom.⁴⁸ The figure of Jesus is larger-than-life, as his staff touches the *aediculum* of Lazarus bearing a much smaller mummified figure. In these examples, the power of Christ's touch, with hand or staff, reveals his miracle-working power.

In the second image at the Via Latina catacomb, depicted on an arcosolium wall of Cubiculum C, Christ with a band of followers touches the *aediculum* of Lazarus, with no body of Lazarus to be found within it (Figure 11). The lack of a mummified Lazarus may be evidence that the Lazarus scene was not the original representation. Both Lazarus scenes at Via Latina face a scene of Moses crossing the Red Sea, balancing a scene of the miracle working Moses with one of the miracle working Christ. Due to its proximity to the crossing of the Red Sea, Grabar believed the Cubiculum C image to originally have been a scene from Exodus showing the Hebrews crowding into the sanctuary built by Moses with Aaron at the door.⁴⁹ Tronzo argued that since Moses is depicted adjacent to the image, the scene must naturally progress through the Exodus narrative and thus captures Joshua entering Israel

⁴⁸ See Antonio Ferrua, "Una nuova regione in SS. Marcellino e Pietro," *RAC*, 44, (1968), 73. Ferrua points out the slight difference in how Christ holds the staff, "Diversa è la maniera di tener la verga nella mano di Gesù."

⁴⁹ Ferrua rejects Grabar's argument based on the attitude of Christ touching the mummified Lazarus, see *The Unknown Catacomb*, 170. Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb*, 53; See Enrico Josi, "Découverte d'une série de peintures dans un hypogée de la voie Latine," *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1956), 275-279.

with the twelve tribes.⁵⁰ This seems unlikely given the instrument Christ wields was also wielded by Moses in cognate scenes, not Joshua. Regardless, the alteration of the Cubiculum C scene into a scene of the raising of Lazarus signifies the popularity of the Lazarus image and its inherent interpretation of resurrection. Whatever the original depiction was, it was altered to become Christ resurrecting Lazarus, adjacent to Moses crossing the Red Sea. The motivation behind such an alteration reveals the close connection in catacomb art between the figures of Jesus and Moses.

In a ceiling lunette at the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, an image of the raising of Lazarus exhibits Christ standing next to the *aediculum* of Lazarus, touching it with his staff. Directly next to the scene is an image of Moses striking the rock with a similar type of instrument (Figure 12).⁵¹ The connection between these two themes is made clear in several other examples in the catacombs. In the “Red Cubiculum” of Domitilla mentioned above, the raising of Lazarus is balanced on the other side of an image of Moses striking the rock (Figure 9). At the Vigna Massimo catacomb, a series of images including Daniel, Job, and the paralytic also includes balancing scenes on the upper and lower registers of Moses striking the rock and the raising of Lazarus. The juxtaposition of Moses striking the rock with Christ raising Lazarus appeared with some frequency in catacomb iconography, and demonstrates the early Christian emphasis on the miracle working power of Christ. Moses was indeed a miracle working figure within the tradition, and could be understood as a competitor to Christ.⁵² However, it appears that the early Christians used Moses to contrast

⁵⁰ Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb*, 56.

⁵¹ This is also not the sole juxtaposition of Moses and Christ raising Lazarus at Peter and Marcellinus. It occurs in at least two other instances, see Wilpert, *Die Malereien*, for the images.

⁵² Origen, *Cels.* 1.45, see below and Chapter Six for more evidence.

Christ as a superior miracle worker. The image of Moses striking water from the rock helps demonstrate their intent.

IV. Moses in the Catacombs (Figure 13)

In the cubiculum next to the image of the baptism of Christ and the healing of the paralytic at the catacomb of Callistus is a wall painting that depicts the striking of the rock. It is a difficult scene to identify given its condition (Figure 13a). A figure is prominently standing next to what appears to be a large rock or column. The figure holds a type of instrument in his right hand, extended towards the rock. Finney believes this is an image of Moses striking the rock.⁵³ The scene of Moses striking the rock is the most replicated scene in all catacomb paintings depicting Moses.⁵⁴ The scene is depicted in another instance at the catacomb of Callistus in a wall painting that was created later and is much clearer (Figure 13b). The reproduction of the scene at the catacomb of Callistus signifies that the image has become more established in the visual lexicon of the group. Moses is standing before the rock, holding his staff, striking the object and releasing a stream of water. A smaller figure, presumably one of the Israelites, is depicted standing below gathering the water. Behind Moses is a figure standing on a rock, kneeling as if he is removing his sandal.

There are antecedents for such a scene; although they are spread apart by time and geography. In the later catacomb of Callistus scene Moses is sandaled while the figure before him removes his sandal. There are images at the Via Latina catacomb that illustrate a

⁵³ Finney, *The Invisible God*, 216. Wilpert, *Die Malereien*, 266. The image of Moses striking the rock recalls baptism, as Wilpert noted, “Das beliebteste Symbol der Taufe war des Quellwunder des Moses in der Wüste.

⁵⁴ Wilpert, *Die Malereien*, 266-281. Wilpert noted that its frequency in depiction, at least 68 examples in the catacombs, indicates its importance to early Christians. In conjunction with the Raising of Lazarus, Moses striking the Rock is fairly astounding in its frequency compared to other scenes of works and wonders. Also see Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 76.

singular figure of Moses removing his sandal in such a fashion. It could be that the secondary catacomb of Callistus image is illustrating two different scenes of Moses, or the figure is an Israelite emphasizing the sacred moment taking place. Later images of this scene in the catacombs do not replicate the kneeling figure, and thus remove any opportunity for confusion. Instead, the major figures are Moses with the smaller figure gathering the water. This scene represents the visual capriciousness of the early Christians. At this point, they had not hammered out their understanding of how to depict their desired subjects and scenes. The later catacomb of Callistus scene is an opportunity to view the selection and incorporation of figures, as early Christians began to establish how they wanted to depict scenes important to them, such as the raising of Lazarus and Moses striking the rock.⁵⁵

It is quite common to witness the typological connection between Moses and Christ in patristic texts. There are several instances in the church fathers that illuminate the significance of particular scenes involving Moses in catacomb art. Justin Martyr provided telling evidence that makes the connection between Moses striking the rock and Christ explicit. Just after he claimed Asclepius is an imitator of Christ in his *Dialogue*, Justin proved the prediction of the healing action of Christ by quoting a passage from Isaiah 35:1-7:

“Be glad, O thirsty wilderness, let the desert rejoice, and flourish as the lily...Behold, our God brings, and will bring, the revenge of recompense. He shall come and save us. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear. Then shall the lame man leap up as a hart, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be free: for water is broken out in the desert, and a stream in a thirsty land, and the dry land shall become swamps, and in the thirsty land there shall be a spring of water.”

Justin provides some commentary on the passage:

⁵⁵ See Umberto Fasola, *Le catacombe di S. Gennaro a Capodimonte* (Rome: Editalia, 1975). The striking of the rock also appears in the catacomb of San Gennaro in Naples, dating from the late third-early fourth century. Moses is depicted striking the rock, and nearby Christ is depicted in a similar manner as at Callistus, merely holding the instrument. Also see the early fourth-century image in the catacomb of Priscilla of the striking of the rock, also in conjunction with the raising of Lazarus, see fig. 5A in Spier, *Picturing the Bible*.

“The fountain of living water,” which gushed forth from God upon a land devoid of the knowledge of God (that is, the land of the Gentiles) was our Christ, who made his appearance on earth in the midst of your people, and healed those who from birth were blind and deaf and lame. He cured them by his word, causing them to walk, to hear, and to see. By restoring the dead to life, he compelled the men of that day to recognize him.⁵⁶

Justin’s words offer keen insight into the iconography of Christ in the catacombs. Jesus healed the blind and the deaf, as Justin described, however it was Justin’s language of the “thirsty land” and the “spring of living water” that will gush forth that is notable. Jesus wields an instrument akin to the staff of Moses striking water from the rock, providing relief for the “parched,” those people in need. Here Justin connected the action of Jesus to the action of Moses. According to Justin, Christ restoring the dead to life allows people to recognize him. Miracles served a purpose, as they drew attention, inculcated faith, and showed the power of Christ. It is no surprise that the iconography of Jesus’ miracles such as the raising of Lazarus would incorporate a similar wonder working instrument as the staff of Moses in the striking of the rock and the crossing of the Red Sea. The connection of Moses was further implicated by Justin, as he foresaw the argument that Jesus will be ridiculed as a magician:

Yet, though they witnessed these miraculous deeds with their own eyes, they attributed them to magical art; indeed, they dared to call him a magician who misled the people. But he performed these deeds to convince his future followers, that if anyone, even thought his body were in any way maimed, should be faithful to his teaching, he would raise him up at this second coming entirely sound, and make him free forever from death, corruption, and pain.⁵⁷

Moses was a wonder worker whose actions such as the striking of the rock foreshadowed the coming of the supreme wonder worker in Christ. Moses was considered a supernatural figure as Origen tells the Jews: “There have been two men who have come to visit the

⁵⁶ Justin, *Dial.* 69.5-7. Justin mentions it again at 86.1-4 and at 131.6, “And water gushed forth from a rock for your benefit...” (Falls).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

human race of whom supernatural miracles have been recorded; I mean Moses, your lawgiver...and Jesus.”⁵⁸ Moses captured in the catacombs striking the rock and crossing the red sea with the use of his staff, like Jesus, bore the traits of a magician, a title that some likely believed him to personify.⁵⁹

Two centuries later, Augustine re-affirmed the connection between Moses and Christ. In a reply to Marcellinus addressing the issues of Volusian, Augustine specified Moses as a great wonder worker, fulfilled by Christ, solidifying any connection: “We read that the magicians of the Egyptians, men most skilled in these arts, were surpassed by Moses, the servant of God, for, when they produced certain wonders by their wicked arts, he simply called upon God and destroyed all their devices. But Moses himself and the rest of the most truthful prophets foretold Christ the Lord and gave great glory to him.”⁶⁰ The inclusion of Moses striking the rock as well as Christ raising Lazarus intended to exhibit the foretelling of Christ and to show Christ as the Christian patriarch, as a New Moses.⁶¹ The catacomb images insist upon Jesus as an even greater wonder worker than Moses and as the fulfillment of Moses’ works. Just as Moses led his people to a new land, Jesus was the New Moses who led his people to eternal life. The raising of Lazarus was a funerary theme that emphasized resurrection, however seen in conjunction with the image of Moses striking the rock as in the catacomb of Domitilla, the combined force of the images show Christ as the New Moses.

⁵⁸ Origen, *Cels* 1.45 (Chadwick). Moses was considered a theurgist, a “wonder worker,” see Chapter Seven, 236 for a fuller treatment of this distinction.

⁵⁹ See Chapter Seven for more evidence on the magician.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Ep.* 137.13 (Teske).

⁶¹ Martine Dulaey claims the rod marks Christ as a new Moses in “Le symbole de la baguette dans l’art paleochrétien,” *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 19, 1-2 (1973), 7.

V. Other Catacomb Images of Miracles (Figures 2, 14-15)

The healings of Christ and the raising of Lazarus are not the only miracles that are depicted in the catacombs. There are multiple instances of the nature miracles, including the wedding at Cana and the division of loaves, although these do not appear in the earliest catacomb art. At the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Christ is depicted standing above the baskets of bread in the scene of the division of loaves with the raising of Lazarus on the opposite side.⁶² In a painting on an arched doorway, the image of Noah separates the flanking images of the division of the loaves and the Cana miracle (Figure 14). In these depictions at the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Christ is using his staff to enact the miracles, as he stands pointing his staff downwards towards the baskets and the jars. At the Via Latina catacomb, the scene is replicated as Christ uses his reed-like staff to touch the baskets of bread. In this image in Cubiculum O, Christ is shown with short, cropped hair, and the edge of his robe is marked with an ancient symbol. This same ancient symbol is exhibited on the border of Moses' robe in the crossing of the Red Sea on the opposite wall. In appearance and dress, Christ working his miracle with the staff is mirrored by Moses crossing the Red Sea with his staff. The visual appropriation of Moses' staff in the image of Christ is apparent, as Christ miraculously provides bread for his followers in the guise of Moses, just as Moses provided manna for the Israelites.

In the Vigna Massimo catacomb image, the division of the loaves is included among other representations of the miracles of Christ as well as other scriptural figures (Figure 2). Christ pointing his staff towards several baskets at his feet is accompanied by a scene of the raising of Lazarus. Not only does this painting provide evidence of a nature miracle, it

⁶² For the image, see fig. 10B of the appendix in Jeffrey Spier, ed., *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

exhibits the tendency in catacomb art to use images as narrative devices. Each figure and theme depicted, including Daniel and Noah at the corners, was likely included as integral elements interpreted as messages of comfort, deliverance, and resurrection in a funerary setting. The inclusion of the division of the loaves was possibly viewed by the early Christians as an image that emphasized life-giving sustenance, as Christ provides the bread for the people. The scene can also be interpreted sacramentally, as an image emphasizing the ritual of Eucharist often performed in a catacomb setting.⁶³

In a separate cubiculum at the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, the miracle at Cana is portrayed, flanked by scenes of the baptism of Christ and Moses striking the rock (Figure 14). Jesus is illustrated similarly as in the division of the loaves, touching the jars of wine with his staff. He performs his miracle in front of gatherers at a sigma-shaped table. The scene recalls other banquet scenes at the same catacomb that shows guests dining with captions above, issuing commands for more wine to servants Irene and Agape. The image appears as if Christ is caught in the act of supplying the wine for the festal party. The Eucharistic implications are more pronounced in this scene, as the meal taking place recalls the Last Supper. The Eucharistic overtones in the division of the loaves and the Cana miracle are apparent. In a funerary environment where people either dine with the dead or more likely celebrate Eucharist, the nature miracles of Christ mirror the sacramental action taking place within the sacred space.⁶⁴ The image of Christ the Miracle Worker not only defined the person of Christ; it defined the identity of the Christians by reflecting the liturgical actions that made them Christians.

⁶³ See Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 11.175-190 who emphasizes the benefit of enjoying Eucharist in the catacombs.

⁶⁴ For further reading, see Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Robin M. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead: From the Mensa to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity," *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2008).

The Cana miracle scene also should be interpreted along with the cognate scenes in the arcosolium of the baptism of Christ and Moses striking the rock. It is a unique cubiculum that includes several images filled with a sacramental flavor. The baptismal connection between Moses and Jesus is also made clear by Origen:

You daily devote yourself to hearing the law of God and to looking upon the face of Moses, through which the glory of the Lord is revealed. But if you also have entered the mystic font of baptism... then when the Jordan parted, you will enter the land of promise by the services of the priests. In this land, Jesus receives you after Moses, and becomes for you the leader of a new way.⁶⁵

Origen's viewed Moses' works as typological prefigurements of the Christian sacraments; just as the Israelites crossed the Jordan with Moses, Christians pass through the baptismal font with Christ. Christ is thus connected to Moses, and in Origen's words is a successor to Moses as a patriarchal leader. Origen attempt to compare Jesus and Moses in his homily is apparent in the visual art of the catacombs. Nearly a century after Origen's homily, in a painting at the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus the striking of the rock and the baptism of Christ face each other in a cubiculum with the miracle at Cana the central work. With the miraculous release of water juxtaposed with Christ's baptism and the changing of water into wine, the sacraments of the church are visually accentuated in this setting.

Outside of the images of Christ raising the dead, Jesus' staff use is limited to the examples of nature miracles in catacomb representations. Even with such few examples in comparison with the Lazarus paintings, the staff is a fairly key stylistic element that symbolizes the miracle working ability of Jesus. It is not accidental that the use of the staff is often juxtaposed with the staff of Moses. At the catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus, Via Latina, Domitilla, and Vigna Massimo, images of Christ performing his miracles are included

⁶⁵ Origen, *Homily on Joshua* 4.1 (Bruce).

in rooms that also include a representation of Moses wielding his staff.⁶⁶ Just as Moses provided bread from heaven and water from a rock for his people, Christians could witness Jesus in the catacombs supplying bread and wine. Jesus is thus portrayed as a miracle worker like Moses using a similar instrument. On fourth and fifth-century sarcophagi, the staff is frequently wielded by Peter as well as Christ; however Jesus, not Peter, holds the staff in the performance of the nature miracles. As can be witnessed in the catacomb iconography, the staff of Jesus has a connection with Moses, as it emphasizes the miracle working nature of Christ, and in the performance of the nature miracles, the Eucharist.⁶⁷

VI. The Significance of the Catacomb Paintings

The significance of the paintings in the catacombs lies within the fact that they reveal a visual progression from the earliest Christian art into the post-Constantinian era. The catacombs exhibit how the perfunctory manner of depicting the paralytic with the mat, the raising of Lazarus with the staff, and the mummified Lazarus in the *aediculum* came to be. Themes in early Christian art were developed underground in the wall paintings as well. The catacombs can be considered underground laboratories where early Christians were testing and developing images for their visual lexicon. Some themes stuck, as we see images of Daniel, Jonah, and the *orant* in later catacombs such as the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus and even Christ as Orpheus on sarcophagi into the fourth century, and some themes eventually dropped out.⁶⁸ Sixth-century Christian art reflects the influence of the

⁶⁶ See Wilpert's plates in *Die Malereien* for the representations in Domitilla, among others.

⁶⁷ The use of wine at the Eucharist, connecting it with the sacrifice of Christ, is made explicit by Cyprian in his *Ep.* 63 of 254 CE.

work the early Christians performed, particularly in their depictions of Christ. Some churches by the end of the fourth century and the start of the fifth century included some images, although now lost.⁶⁹ Most church imagery is slightly later than the catacombs and occasionally is different in the manner of representation. In the catacombs, the manner of depicting gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon were applied and considered, and themes such as Christ performing healings and miracles were more prominent.

It is important to consider the thematic and stylistic adaptation in catacomb art as compared to the theological developments that occurred within Christianity in the same time frame. As late as the fourth century the early Christians still had not completely developed a visual language of salvation to call their own. Instead, images of Hercules, Orpheus, and the physician were used to evoke Christ. The art seems underdeveloped compared to the theological advancements going on in fourth-century Christianity. Art, of course, operates differently than philosophy or theology. Christian art also had a much later start than Christianity's theological development, given that they did not have much land or capital until the third century. Therefore it should not be entirely shocking that Greco-Roman images and prototypes were still in use in catacombs into the fourth century. Adaptation and annexation were key components to the construction of Christianity's visual language.

If the catacomb of Callistus is the earliest domain of Christian art, it cannot be labeled as entirely syncretistic.⁷⁰ What the catacombs prove is that the early Christians

⁶⁸ See Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 57. Hercules imagery eventually dropped out as well.

⁶⁹ See Paulinus of Nola, *Carmen* 27.406-620. Paulinus provides a detailed account of what church imagery looked like in his basilica, describing the placement of relics as well as larger works of art, such as the portraits of the disciples, and of Christ as the Lamb separating the sheep and the goats.

⁷⁰ Finney, *The Invisible God*, 146. And his "Antecedents of Byzantine Iconoclasm: Christian Evidence before Constantine," in *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (ed. by Joseph Gutmann; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 28. Given the epigraphical evidence in the catacomb and the textual

experimented with different prototypes in the early development of early Christian art. Christian art did not arrive *ex nihilo*; the process of establishing a visual language included borrowing elements from outside influences. The catacomb paintings exhibit that in their experimentation, early Christians found the image of Christ's healings and miracles as particularly resounding. The images of Christ the Miracle Worker reflected the textual and homiletic insistence of Christ as the supreme Physician. The catacomb paintings also reveal the influence of the healing cult of Asclepius as well as the appropriation of the miracle worker Moses. The early Christians made choices in their iconographical patterns and several of those choices included representative images of Christ's healings and miracles. These choices in early Christian catacomb art carry over to the period of the late third and fourth centuries where the image of Christ the Miracle Worker was featured prominently in relief sculpture.

evidence, Paul Corby Finney dates the wall paintings of the catacomb of Callistus to the year 200, plus or minus fifteen to twenty years.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST IN RELIEF SCULPTURE

The miracles of Christ are pervasive in early Christian relief sculpture, even to a larger degree than in the catacombs. In the recovered evidence of the third, fourth and fifth centuries, the miracles of Christ are a persistent theme. By the fourth century, the early Christians were not in the experimental phase of their artistic development; by this point the image of Christ the Miracle Worker was an artistically canonical motif. The image of Christ in relief sculpture demonstrates several key similarities and differences with the image of Christ in catacomb art. Christ in early Christian relief sculpture was greatly aided in appearing superior to Christian rivals by drawing upon the Gospel of John to a larger degree than in catacomb art. With this tactic, the Christ of fourth and fifth-century relief sculpture is more overt in subverting any threats to his rise and continued dominance.

Christians of the third century understandably included many representations of Christ the Miracle Worker in their catacomb paintings. The image provided comfort to its audience while emphasizing Christ's superiority over his rivals. After Constantine when Christ's supremacy was less in doubt, one might assume that the Christians would not require an image suggesting a rivalry with other religious figures. The propensity of Christ's miracles in fourth-century relief sculpture refutes this assumption. Much of the recovered evidence of Christian relief sculpture in Italy and Roman Gaul dates from 350 CE. This reality begs the question: Why did the image of Christ's miracles remain so visible from 350 onward? In examining the chronology, the issue of scriptural interpretation, and the context of the portrayals of Christ, a cogent answer to this question can be formulated. The images

of Christ in relief sculpture depict a level of influence and possible competition between Christ and any religious rival. A Late Antique viewer may have expected nothing less than an image of their devoted god's heroic feats, greater than all others. Combined with the multiple attacks against the idolatrous pagans preached from the Christian pulpit and captured in Christian treatises as detailed in earlier chapters, it can be argued that the images of Christ healing and performing miracles were viewed as propaganda against any neighboring non-Christian threat. Moreover, the relief sculpture signifies a transition in the manner of depicting Christ. Something has changed in fourth-century depictions of Christ from the earlier portrayals. The relief sculpture exhibits a uniquely divine Christ, a Johannine Christ, superior to any other god.

I. The Chronology of Christian Sarcophagi

Most Christian sarcophagi date from the fourth century through the fifth century, although some examples are possibly earlier. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker is portrayed on sarcophagi beginning in the mid to late fourth century.¹ André Grabar has argued that in the second half of the fourth century, beginning with the Junius Bassus sarcophagus, the central theme on Christian sarcophagi is Christ in Majesty.² However, Grabar does not fully take into the account the manifold representations of Christ's healings and miracles that are, if not the central scene, flank many scenes of Christ in Majesty.³ While

¹ David Knipp calls this art "Theodosian art" to mark the era of the later emperor, an odd choice since the dating of artifacts is so difficult and there is obvious overlap with other ruling eras of other emperors. Knipp, *"Christus Medicus" in der frühchristlichen Sarkophagskulptur: Ikonographische Studien der Sepulchralkunst des späten vierten Jahrhunderts* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 22.

² André Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art, 200-395* (Thames and Hudson, 1966), 249.

Christ in Majesty is a popular image to occupy the central area of several late fourth-century sarcophagi, it is not exactly the most noted theme in Christian art of that period.⁴ By focusing on less centrally-oriented scenes of Christ healing and performing miracles, one can see that the theme of Christ the Miracle Worker continues to be extremely popular. Compositional placement is not insignificant; however, it does not necessarily belie the image as central in the minds of a fourth-century Christian audience.⁵

Nearly a century after the “birth” of Christian art, the pervasive theme in Christian relief sculpture was the image of Christ the Miracle Worker. This development can be established by recognizing the dating of some of the examples. On Christian sarcophagi now housed in museums in Rome and Arles, the earliest examples bear a date of the late third century while most date from the fourth to the fifth century.⁶ This follows the dating theories of F.W. Deichmann. In the fourth century, the catacomb images and sarcophagi share some thematic overlap. The catacombs of Via Latina and Peter and Marcellinus feature images of Christ’s healings and miracles dating from the late third and fourth century

³ For a relevant example, see Knipp, *Christus Medicus*, pl. 1 of a sarcophagus in Saint-Victor, Marseille depicting Christ in Majesty in the center, and Christ healing the blind man directly adjacent to this scene, dating from the first half of the fifth century. See F.W. Deichmann, ed. and G. Bovini G. and H. Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarcophage I-III* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1976). Also see J. Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi cristiani antichi* (Rome, 1929).

⁴ For more examples, see Deichmann, Band I, pt. 2 pls. 676-679.

⁵ In Deichmann’s catalog of Christian sarcophagi in Rome and Ostia, miracles and healings outnumber images of Christ enthroned in majesty, or the *traditio legis* by a considerable margin. The enthroned images of Christ make up a little more than half of the number of occurrences of Christ healing the blind. There are over 40 examples of “Christ in Majesty, etc.” extant to 71 occurrences of the Healing of the Blind, see Deichmann, *Ikongraphisches Register*, Band I, 122-124.

⁶ At the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican, the Musei Capitolini and Museo Nazionale Romano delle Terme in Rome, and the Musée de l’Arles et de la Provence Antiques in France. Deichmann is an invaluable resource for examining the chronology of Christian sarcophagi. For example, in his catalog of sarcophagi at the Vatican, one fragment dates from the late third century (pl. 696). Deichmann’s chronology supports an early dating for Christian sarcophagi of the late-third century.

while parallel examples, such as the sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus, provide multiple portrayals of the miracles of Christ.⁷

Relief sculpture continues the popular tradition of depicting Christ's miracles well into the late fourth and early fifth century.⁸ While difficult to date with any certainty, several of the latest examples bear a provenance of the early fifth century.⁹ Christ performing healings, such as the paralytic scene, are interspersed in the same frame with images of Christ dividing loaves and raising Lazarus. Each individual scene displays the triumphant ability of Christ. Within the sarcophagus frontal, the individual scenes operate as notes in a symphonic tableau, exuding an overall programmatic message of the superiority and unique nature of Christ. By examining some of these images in Christian relief sculpture, one can realize the intentional effort made in art of this era to reiterate the unrivaled abilities of Christ.

II. The Healing of the Paralytic (Figures 16-21)

16. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

17. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

18. Late fourth century-early fifth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

19. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

20. 330-350 CE, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

21. Mid fourth century, Musée de l'Arles et de la Provence Antiques, Arles, France

⁷ In the Terme museum in Rome, from the second quarter of the fourth century.

⁸ See Walther Kuhn, *Frühchristliche Kunst aus Rom* (Essen: Villa Hügel, 1962) and Erich Dinkler, *Der Einzug in Jerusalem* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1970).

⁹ Several in particular at the Museo Pio Cristiano have a later dating from the end of the fourth century to the beginning of the fifth century (following Deichmann and the Vatican Museum's own dating): the sarcophagus with the Bethesda miracle (Figure 18), and the sarcophagus of the *traditio legis*, and the sarcophagus with the crossing of the Red Sea.

The healing of the paralytic was among the most popular depictions of Christ's healings in relief sculpture.¹⁰ The scene directly recalls the healing that took place in the gospels. On relief sculpture, as in the catacombs, the image does not portray the story from Mark and Luke of the paralytic lowered through the roof due to the crowds and placed upon his mat in front of Jesus.¹¹ Instead, the image of the paralytic is noted by the inclusion of the mat of the paralytic that is often carried above his head. In the gospels, Jesus heals the paralytic without touch, but heals him through his physical presence. He forgives the sins of the paralytic, and in response to the crowd's frustration that he does not have the authority to forgive sins, he tells the man to take up his mat and walk. In the synoptic accounts, the story reflects the healing ability of Christ as well as marking the authority of Christ to forgive sins. In John's gospel, Christ healing on the Sabbath, breaking the Sabbatical restrictions, leads into a discussion of the unique status of Jesus. In the art, the story from John and the synoptic gospels is possibly recalled, reflecting the special nature of Christ to forgive sins and showing that Christ is above any Sabbatical mandate.

The iconography of the scene in Christian relief sculpture is similar to the scene represented in the catacombs.¹² The standard of portraying the young man almost as a boy, carrying his mat after the action of healing continues in the sarcophagus frontals (Figures 16-18). There are more surrounding figures in the relief sculpture scenes, including representations of Christ. The size of the figures is significant. Christ is quite large compared to the recipients of his healing power. The paralytic in this scene, as well as the

¹⁰ In Roman examples, it appears over 46 times, Deichmann, *Ikongraphisches Register*, Band I, 122; in around 17 times in examples from Gaul and North Africa, see Band III, 299.

¹¹ Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:2; Luke 5:17. Also the healing at the pool of Bethesda in John 5. For a good representation of Luke's account in Christian art, see the mosaic of San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, dating from the late fifth-early sixth century.

¹² See Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 95.

woman with the issue of blood, the blind man, Lazarus and Jairus' daughter all are much smaller than their healer and miracle worker. The paralytic is small enough to appear as a boy in the sarcophagus images. However, while Christ is larger in comparison to the recipients of his power, he is of equal height and stature to his disciples flanking him in the scene. The inferiority of those being healed is emphasized with this distinction in size, and the figures requiring Christ's aid are easily pointed out at the feet of their savior. The discrepancy in height can partially be explained due to spatial considerations on such a limited surface. While the differentiation in size does occur in images of Christ in the catacombs, unlike the catacombs there is less space for the artist to use in the medium of relief sculpture. It is more likely that the larger height of Christ and his disciples reveals who the powerful characters in the drama are. Christ and the disciples have power in comparison to those that receive their power. This size differential is common in Greco-Roman depictions of the gods. It is noteworthy that the size of the supplicants is much smaller and seemingly odd-sized while Christ and his disciples are quite large. The focus in the healing and miracle scenes is on Christ and his disciples, not the recipients of his power.

In the majority of instances in relief sculpture (and in the catacombs as discussed in the previous chapters), the healing of the paralytic is typically depicted with Christ in the action of speech towering over the paralytic carrying his mat over his head. The scene pictures a successful healing completed. The paralytic carrying his mat denotes the healing power of Christ and his authority. There are exceptions to this standard in depicting the scene, including a particular "before and after" manner on a sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Figure 18). Several examples of relief sculpture in the Museo Pio Cristiano exhibit the boy seated, or lying on his mat while Christ is depicting directly next to him issuing his edict (Figures 16-19).

In relief sculpture, the figure of Christ in the paralytic scene is akin to the images of Christ in the catacombs. He is depicted either beardless or bearded with short, curly hair, draped in a robe with sandals. This is not an image of Jesus meant for veneration, rather it emphasizes the narrative drama that is taking place.¹³ Christ performs his healing usually flanked by multiple other scenes of his miracles (Figures 16-17). Occasionally, sculpted columns or barriers “frame” each scene. With few significant narrative details, the identification of each scene usually hangs upon repeated symbols such as the mat of the paralytic. While the boy carrying his mat easily signifies the paralytic account in the synoptic gospels, there is one particular example that recalls the Johannine account of the pool at Bethesda (Figure 18).

In this sarcophagus now in the Museo Pio Cristiano, there is an indication of a pool in the scene recalling the Bethesda miracle in John 5. In the central scene separating the upper and lower zones, a carved barrier with wavy striated lines indicates water. Knipp has noted that the usual interpretation of this central scene involving a ritual at a pool intentionally recalls baptism.¹⁴ The association between water and a restorative healing signals the restorative washing that takes place at baptism. What makes this sarcophagus unique is the double illustration of the action of the scene in the central panel. In the lower register, the paralytic is lying on his bed in the posture of Jonah/Endmyion although the paralytic is not nude. The figure represents one of the disabled people that John describes lying near the pool.¹⁵ Above, Christ orders him to walk, gesturing towards the paralytic with his hand, almost appearing to touch the top of his mat. Christ here clutches a scroll in his

¹³ See Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 151-152.

¹⁴ Knipp, *Christus Medicus*, 154-156. Although he points out that it also reflects a competition with the Asclepius cult as well: “Diese Szene ist als Darstellung eines Traumes während des Inkubationsschlafes im Abaton gedeutet worden.”

¹⁵ This “before and after” portrayal of the scene is unique to this particular sarcophagus, dating from 375 CE.

other hand, emphasizing his authority, just as the biblical scene affirms his authority to forgive sins on earth (Figures 16-17).

The boy carrying his mat is depicted low on the Bethesda relief, quite small, while Christ gestures towards the top of the mat with his hand.¹⁶ It is difficult to discern whether Christ is actually touching the top of the mat, making this a healing with the power of Christ's touch. For the most part, the relief sculpture follows the gospel accounts that specify that the healing occurred through the speech of Christ, not through the power of his touch.¹⁷ Christ's hand is in the gesture of speech, three fingers closed, with one or two fingers extended. Due to the lack of space, it does appear that Christ touches the mat in all three examples in Rome, but the depictions of the scene also appear to stay true to the gospel: the boy walks with his mat after Christ issues his verbal edict. This is clearer on a double register sarcophagus dating from 300-325 CE also at the Vatican, where the figures are carved even smaller (Figure 19).¹⁸ Christ still stands over the boy and his mat; however his hand hovers directly over the mat clearly not touching it.

In two examples in the Museo Pio Cristiano and at Arles, a seated paralytic is portrayed as the viewer glimpses the moment of healing rather than the proof of its efficacy (Figures 20-21). Christ is directly next to the paralytic who is sitting on the edge of his mat, as Christ's hand is directly above his head, seeming to touch the paralytic. In the example at

¹⁶ It should also be noted that in Figure 16, the figures on the right half of the frontal have been restored. Unfinished faces of figures, or damaged figures, have been noticeably repaired and carved.

¹⁷ As in any aspect of early Christian art, there are always exceptions. In Figure 16, Christ is clearly touching the mat with his hand. However, this section of the fragment was restored, quite noticeably given the color of the stone compared to the previous section, and the facial features of the characters. It may well be the hand was altered during restoration to touch the mat. The cognate image of Figure 17 lends credence to this argument. The section is unaltered and the hand is clearly in the gesture of speech, not touching the mat of the paralytic.

¹⁸ Originally from the cemetery of Praetextus. Notice that the boy holds what appears to be a staff, an inclusion that appears in some representations of the blind man as well.

Arles, Christ's hand appears to touch the head of the paralytic as well as indicate speech, signaling that his edict heals as well as the power of his touch. Christ's left hand clutches a scroll while his right hovers over the boy's mat, yet the power of touch is still emphasized in these enigmatic instances. The moment of Christ's edict before the paralytic takes up his mat and walks is the focus, proving the authority and power of Christ. With few exceptions, in Christian relief sculpture the healing of the paralytic is a scene emphasizing the authority of Christ noted by the scroll, and the auditory healing power of Christ marked by his gesture of speech with his other hand, while some instances display Christ touching the paralytic.

III. The Healing of the Blind Man (Figures 22-23)

22. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

23. Mid fourth century, Musée de l'Arles et de la Provence Antiques, Arles, France

The subject of Christ healing the blind is the most frequently represented healing scene in extant Christian relief sculpture. In the surviving Roman examples, it appears more often than any other healing scene.¹⁹ The scene portrays Christ touching the patient, emphasizing his power and his status as the supreme healer. Unlike the healing of the paralytic that includes several divergent representations, Christ healing the blind is fairly uniform. The representation consists of the larger figure of Christ, touching the eyes or face of the patient who is depicted on his left or right (Figures 22-23). All of the gospels include the story of Christ healing the blind. Some accounts describe the healing event as predicated by the patient's faith, as Christ affirms their faith has healed them. Other accounts describe

¹⁹ 71 occurrences as recorded by Deichmann, *Ikongraphisches Register*, Band I, 123; 44 times in examples from Gaul and North Africa, see Band III, 299.

the healing touch of Christ as the catalyst of the event.²⁰ In Christian relief sculpture, the representations of Christ healing the blind follow the accounts that describe the power of Christ's touch. That is, instead of emphasizing the gesture of speech as in the paralytic scene, the healing power of Christ's touch is on display in the healing of the blind man. Several representative examples of the scene in relief sculpture from Rome and Gaul offer insight into its significance.²¹

Examples of relief sculpture now in the Museo Pio Cristiano and at Arles often include the healing of the blind man along with other representations of miracles and healings. The blind man is usually depicted much smaller than the figure of Christ, and holding a staff similar to the one the paralytic boy occasionally wields (Figure 22). Christ places his hand or fingers on the person's face or touches the top of the blind man's head (See Figure 17). The scene stresses Christ's touch, as the fingers of Christ touching the face of the afflicted is detailed, occasionally to the point where the blind man's sightless eyes are given definition.²² Christ grasps the face of the afflicted as he covers the blind man's eyes with his fingers (Figures 22-23).

As in the scene of the paralytic, here Christ is usually portrayed clutching a scroll in his other hand. The sarcophagus in Saint-Victor, Marseille, dating from the first half of the fifth century, contains a scene of the *Traditio Legis* in the central panel with a scene of Christ healing the blind next to it.²³ In the scene, Christ's fingers are placed on the patient's eyes.

²⁰ The gospel accounts of this event include, the healing of blind Bartimaeus by faith in Mark 10:51; Jesus heals two blind men with the power of touch in Matthew 9:27-30 and 20:29-34; by faith Luke 18:35-43; with touch in John 9:1-41

²¹ See F. Benoit, *Sarcophages paleochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille* (Paris, 1954), 39, 51.

²² See the ivory Andrews diptych (450-460 CE) now at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and in Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, fig. 48.

²³ Knipp devotes a large section of a chapter to this sarcophagus beginning on *Christus Medicus*, 24.

On the sarcophagus example at Arles, Christ holds his scroll and places his thumb directly on one of the eyes of the afflicted, who apparently holds a staff or cane in this portrayal (Figure 23). It is debatable whether the depictions of Christ healing the blind man are following the Matthean, Lukan, or Johannine account. The synoptic accounts merely mention Jesus touching the man's eyes. The account in John is more detailed as it describes Jesus spitting, mixing mud, and rubbing it on the man's eyes. Regardless of which account the images follow, or even if the images are quite that literal, they are referring to episodes from scripture to emphasize the power of Christ's physical touch.

IV. The Woman with the Issue of Blood (Figures 24-26)

24. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

25. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

26. Late fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

The woman with the issue of blood is another scene highlighting Jesus' healing ability.²⁴ While the narrative asserts that the woman's faith has made her well, touch is still emphasized in the story although the normal sequence is reversed. The woman touches Jesus out of her desire to be healed. The story appears in all three synoptic gospels, however it is absent from the Gospel of John.²⁵ In Christian relief sculpture, the scene is depicted similarly as the catacomb painting of Peter and Marcellinus (Figure 24). Jesus stands over a kneeling woman who clutches the hem of his robe. Jesus either touches the woman's head

²⁴ The scene occurs in Roman examples 38 times, see Deichmann, *Ikonomographisches Register*, Band I, 123; and 15 times in examples from Gaul and North Africa, see Band III, 301.

²⁵ For the woman with the issue of blood, Mark 5:21-34; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-48.

or motions his hand towards her in the gesture of speech, akin to the scene of the healing of the paralytic.

A columned sarcophagus at the Vatican is indicative of the typical manner of portrayal of this scene (Figure 25). Christ touches the woman while she touches him; it is a scene centered upon physical contact. Some examples may include only the woman touching Jesus' robe, while others may exhibit Christ not touching the woman's head but motioning towards her in the gesture of address (Figures 21, 26). Knipp discusses a unique example of the image on the sarcophagus of San Celso, dating from the late fourth or early fifth century.²⁶ In the scene, the woman clutches at the hem of Christ's robe. However, the woman is leaning down and is not kneeling at Christ's feet as in other portrayals. Christ is positioned away from the woman and his head glances back. The scene captures the moment Christ notices his power went out of him, as he looks back at the woman. Neither hand of Christ clutches a scroll or is in the gesture of address. This image details a moment in the narrative that is not typically captured in other depictions.

In certain examples of Christian relief sculpture, it may appear that the woman is included in the scene of the raising of Lazarus (Figure 27). In representations that include the raising of Lazarus, Jesus is portrayed in the act of resurrection while a woman kneels at his feet touching Jesus' robe.²⁷ The woman at Jesus' feet is in a similar position as the woman with the issue of blood, however the figure is meant to depict Lazarus' sister Martha as it follows the text from John quite closely. Martha's presence is important as she is the one that recognizes Jesus as the Messiah in John (11:27). Her presence announces Jesus as the "resurrection and the life" just as Jesus restores Lazarus to new life. Examples of relief

²⁶ Knipp, *Christus Medicus*, 110ff, and pl. 15.

²⁷ See Benoit, *Sarcophages paleochrétiens*, 50, pl. 19 where he argues that Jesus raises Jairus' daughter and heals the woman with the issue of blood in a single relief at Arles.

sculpture that contain both images of the woman with the issue of blood and the raising of Lazarus support this conclusion.²⁸ The woman with the issue of blood was healed by Jesus due to her faith, but the physical nature of Christ's healing is emphasized throughout the representations of this iconographical "note" in the larger narrative of early Christian relief sculpture. The raising of Lazarus is another "note" in the cacophony of miracle and healing images that exhibits Jesus' transformative touch in a similar manner.

V. Scenes of Christ Raising the Dead (Figures 27-31)

27. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

28. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

29. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

30. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

31. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

The gospels include accounts of resurrecting individuals as cited by the *Apostolic Constitutions*: "We believe there is to be a resurrection also from the resurrection of our Lord. For it is he that raised Lazarus when he had been in the grave four days, and Jairus' daughter, and the widow's son."²⁹ The three figures the author identified are recognizable in Christian relief sculpture. Despite whether a resurrection is a healing or not, in these depictions Christ's touch with his hand or his staff induces a miraculous, restorative effect. Relief sculpture includes slightly more variety in the resurrection scenes than catacomb wall paintings. The raising of Lazarus is still the primary motif, joined by the widow's son at Nain and Jairus' daughter.³⁰ The raising of Lazarus occurs in 65 extant examples of Roman

²⁸ See Kuhn, *Frühchristliche Kunst*, pl. 457 from the grotto of the Vatican, dating from the fourth century.

²⁹ *Apostolic Constitutions*, 5.1.7 (ANF 7.440).

sarcophagi and the image appears over 23 times in examples from Gaul and North Africa.³¹ The image of Christ as Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones appears with some frequency (Ezekiel 37:1-14). While the figure in the image could be Ezekiel it is likely a depiction of Christ touching an inert body in the same manner as other resurrection scenes.³² The inclusion of the Ezekiel text from the Old Testament demonstrates Christ fulfilling an earlier prophecy. In the Christian sarcophagi, Christ is usually the only figure depicted with the power to raise the dead; no figures from the Old Testament are portrayed with this power. In some rare instances in the fourth century, Peter is possibly depicted raising Tabitha from the dead; however the figures in the scene closely resemble Jesus raising Jairus' daughter making the identification of Peter questionable.³³ The Ezekiel text is an apt selection as it stresses bodily resurrection, and it can contribute to the early Christian argument of Jesus as the supreme miracle worker. Thus, the figure depicted in the scene is Christ as Ezekiel.

In the representations of the raising of Lazarus on Christian sarcophagi, Lazarus resides within a carved *aediculum*, mummified without any discernible facial features. A

³⁰ The Lazarus account is in John 11; the widow's son in Luke 7:11-17; and Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:35-43, Matthew 9:18-26, and Luke 8:40-56.

³¹ Deichmann, *Ikonographisches Register*, Band I, 123; Band III, 302. The widow's son and Jairus' daughter occur in 16 examples in the Roman material, and in 8 examples from Gaul and North Africa, see Band I, 123; Band III, 301-302.

³² Deichmann is not as useful on this particular subject. He cites around 11 examples of Ezekiel and the Valley of the Dry Bones in the Roman evidence; however he tends to cite questionable images as Ezekiel that may in fact be the raising of the widow's son. Deichmann also consistently identifies the prone figure, even without remnants of heads or skulls, as the Ezekiel scene, not the widow's son. This is problematic. See Deichmann, Band I, pt. 1, 11.

³³ Christ grasping Jairus' arm becomes Peter raising Tabitha in later instances in Christian art on ivories in the British Museum, visually emphasizing Peter as Christ's heir. See Herbert Kessler, "Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles on Some Early Christian Ivories," in *Gesta*, vol. 18, no. 1 (November 1977-February 1978), 112. Kessler cites a possible example of Peter raising Tabitha at Arles (however it is unclear what image he is referencing), but it is not conclusive whether it is Peter, and more likely it is Christ raising Jairus' daughter along with the woman with the issue of blood. Benoit suggests that it is "le Christ ressuscite la fille de Zaire... et tandis qu'au pied du Christ est prosternée la mère de la défunte, mentionnée par les evangelists Marc et Luc," (*Sarcophages paleochrétiens*, 50, pl. 19). Benoit does indeed label a fragment at the collection of Arles the Raising of Tabitha (*Sarcophages paleochrétiens*, 39, pl. 7), although this is also debatable.

larger-than-life Christ using a wand or staff-like instrument touches the *aediculum*, sometimes with Martha at his feet (Figure 27). As in the previous healing scenes, Jesus is of a stature similar to the other central characters while the recipients are significantly smaller. Most often, Jesus utilizes the staff when performing his resurrections while the other hand clutches the scroll (Figure 28). Christ is youthful, dressed in his robe with short curly hair. Sometimes Christ faces towards Lazarus, sometimes not. Lazarus's face is consistently indiscernible in the relief sculpture; his face and body are covered by burial wrappings.

In early Christian art, the figure of Lazarus is a minor character in the drama that is unfolding. Lazarus is not a figure in the image that required much artistic embellishment or definition, especially compared to the figure of Christ. The mummified Lazarus is smaller compared to Christ, revealing that Christ is the indisputable focus in the resurrection scene. The action of Jesus, touching his staff to the mausoleum or the figure, is the most prominent feature as it emphasizes his power over death, hinting at the future resurrection of the flesh that lies within the very sarcophagus the image is carved upon.

The raising of the widow's son at Nain and the resurrection of Jairus' daughter are more difficult to identify, since they do not bear the recognizable iconographic features such as Lazarus' mummified body within an *aediculum* hailing from catacomb art. In these resurrection scenes, Christ is depicted touching his staff to the bed of Jairus' daughter, a burial box containing a rising figure, or to a prone figure lying inert at his feet (Figure 29). The scene of Christ in the Valley of the Dry Bones also features a figure lying flat at Christ's feet, waiting to be restored. The Valley of the Dry Bones scene includes several distinctive aspects, such as skulls or body parts that are adjacent to the prostrate figure. While the prone figure may be confused with prone figure in the scene of Christ in the Valley of the

Dry Bones, the absence of the various signs that reflect the Ezekiel text or the bed of Jairus' daughter make it more likely it is the widow's son at Nain.

Identifying the raising of Jairus' daughter is more challenging; especially if one believes the artists were paying strict attention to the scriptural narrative. Jairus' daughter is not on a bier, in an *aediculum*, or in a burial box, but on a bed. In a fragment at the Museo Pio Cristiano, Jesus pulls an awaking figure to a seated position on a bed (Figure 30). In this scene of Jairus' daughter, Jesus does not use a staff to resurrect but uses the power of touch directly. This identification is appropriate as Jesus is captured in the drama of awaking a "sleeping" child who was once dead.

A unique and well-preserved depiction of this scene from the late fourth century occurs on the reliquary box of Brescia, known as the Brescia Casket. Two scenes of resurrection occur on the box, the raising of Lazarus and the raising of Jairus' daughter.³⁴ The scene of Jairus' daughter appears much in the same way as in the fragment at the Museo Pio Cristiano. Christ grasps the wrist of the girl who lies on a bed and pulls her to a seated position. Although these are similar to the scenes of Christ healing a seated paralytic, these are not scenes of the healing of the paralytic (Figures 20-21). In the rare instances that the paralytic is on the mat during the healing event, the patient appears to be in a seated position, and not rising from previous slumber as Jairus' daughter is depicted. From the recovered evidence, these scenes of the resurrection of Jairus' daughter are rarely duplicated in comparison to the widow's son and the raising of Lazarus.

³⁴ See Catherine Brown Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket: Typology and the Early Christian Imagination* (Paris: University of Notre Dame Press; Institut d'Etudes Augustiennes, 2001), 105. Tkacz makes the argument that there is an attention to the balancing of men and women in the inclusion of the Lazarus and Jairus' daughter resurrection scenes. It is difficult to make this argument, as Brescia is a well-preserved reliquary with all sides and lids intact, compared with sarcophagus fragments and frontals.

Christ in the Valley of the Dry Bones is a much more recognizable scene as it contains several identifiable markers (Figure 31). Jesus points his staff downward towards a figure lying prone on the ground. The figure is not in a coffin, but is out in the open and not in any type of structure like Lazarus's body. A scene of Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones occurs in a Jewish context in a recovered wall painting from the Dura synagogue. In this image, heads, feet, hands, and arms are strewn about as the hand of God constitutes the newly constructed persons.³⁵ In Christian relief sculpture, it is not a disembodied hand that is the actor in this scene but the figure of Christ, touching his staff to the inert body indicating his power of resurrection.³⁶ In the passage from Ezekiel, the Lord commands the prophet to, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord'" (Ezekiel 37:4-6). As in the visual example at the Museo Pio Cristiano, the prone figure is often accompanied by standing individuals of varying heights that have been wrapped in new flesh, or several skulls, hinting at the bones in the grave.

The Ezekiel passage was understood by Christians as a proof-text of Christ's power of resurrection. Justin Martyr and Cyril of Alexandria both interpreted Christ as the acting figure in the story of the Valley of the Dry Bones.³⁷ The text in Ezekiel calls the prophet "Son of Man," and says that "these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to

³⁵ For plates, see Herbert L. Kessler, and Kurt Weitzmann. *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990).

³⁶ See Anthony Cutler, "Ezekiel and the Politics of Resurrection" in *DOP*, 46, 47-58. Cutler rejects all of the early Christian evidence to focus on a tenth-century Byzantine ivory containing the scene.

³⁷ Justin, *1 Apol.* 43; Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanation of Teachings* 7.562.

them: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them” (Ezekiel 37:11-14). Predictably, early Christians understood Christ as represented in this prophetic text. The “Son of Man” in Ezekiel represented Christ, and bodily resurrection, a distinctive Christian theme also appeared in the Ezekiel passage. The text fits well into the arguments of patristic authors stating that Christ predated Creation and was witnessed in the Old Testament texts.³⁸ The passage also reflects the hope of God raising humanity up from the grave. Christians could easily realize Christ in the text, acting as a member of the Godhead, resurrecting the body and binding new flesh.

Christ in the Valley of the Dry Bones occurs with a great deal of frequency in relief sculpture. In a funerary context, any scene hinting at resurrection would be a logical choice to place on a sarcophagus. The notion of physical and bodily resurrection that is detailed in the passage, attaching tendons and flesh to bone, is one that is of premier importance to Christians. The image of bodily resurrection is captured in the creeds, recited and reiterated by Christians in Late Antiquity up to the present day. An impending bodily resurrection is part of Christian belief and is reflected in portrayals such as Christ in the Valley of the Dry Bones in Christian art.³⁹

Patristic authors emphasized a final bodily resurrection to their audiences, a key Christian doctrine, often using themes from scripture as a vehicle to spread their message. The patristic insistence of a bodily resurrection is reflected in Christian art as well. Tertullian

³⁸ Justin, *1 Apol.* 63 (PG 6, 424C), *Dial.* 60; Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 60 as well as Chapter Three, 106-109.

³⁹ Note “the resurrection of the body” as part of the Apostles’ Creed, dating as early as the second century. And see Justin, *1 Apol.* 18-19, where he discusses our bodies at the resurrection. Also see Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 158-159.

in his *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, included Jonah as a proof of the eventual fleshly resurrection, possibly illuminating Jonah's popularity in visual art as well.⁴⁰ Over 150 years later at the end of the fourth century, church fathers such as Jerome were busy defending themselves against charges of Origenism that denied the full fleshly resurrection of the body. Jerome responded in a letter against John of Jerusalem (398-399) that upon death the flesh is clothed in heavenly glory in a physical resurrection.⁴¹ Augustine also preached the notion of a physical resurrection to his audience. The frailty of human life drove Augustine to preach of the role of Jesus as *Christus medicus*, and of the final cleansing that will occur in a physical resurrection.⁴² Just as the belief in Christ as the supreme miracle worker is taken to heart by the believing public, so is the belief in a physical, bodily resurrection. The bones that re-acquire flesh in Ezekiel are akin to Augustine's insistence to his listeners that the body will re-acquire flesh in the tomb.⁴³ Christ in the Valley of the Dry Bones, and its propensity to appear on fourth and fifth-century relief sculpture, testifies to this theological development.

In Christian relief sculpture, Christ in the Valley of the Dry Bones is an easy scene to identify. Jesus standing above a prone figure with the staff is accompanied by several smaller standing figures as well as skulls or hands close to the ground (Figure 31). The scene bears some similarity to depictions of the raising of the widow's son (Figure 29). Accompanying Jesus in two examples at the Museo Pio Cristiano is a smaller, nude figure standing to his

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *The Resurrection of the Flesh* 58; also see William S. Babcock, "Image and Culture: An Approach to the Christianization of the Roman Empire," in *Perkins Journal*, vol. 81, no. 3 (July 1988), 5-6.

⁴¹ Jerome, *Ep. to Pammachus*, 23-27. For further reading see Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁴² See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, reprint edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 418-422, and Chapter Three, 130.

⁴³ See Augustine, *Sermon 242*; *City of God* 22.11-22. Augustine is refuting critics such as Porphyry and reminding his listeners that everyone had bodies initially until the first sin resulted in bodily sin. Augustine obviously is aware of Porphyry and understands the danger *On the Return of the Soul* posed. He sidesteps a direct answer by attacking those that would question the ability of God to make such events as a physical resurrection possible. See Eugene TeSelle, "Porphyry and Augustine," *Augustinian Studies*, 5 (1974) 142.

side. While similar to the Valley of the Dry Bones scene, there is no inclusion of other standing individuals, skulls, or heads on the ground to recall the prophetic narrative. Instead, there is just the solitary nude boy standing to the side of Jesus. This figure also appears in several representations of the raising of Lazarus (Figure 28). Jesus touches his staff to the *aediculum* of Lazarus and standing to Christ's side is the smaller nude figure. As mentioned above, the raising of Lazarus scene occasionally includes Lazarus' sister Martha at the feet of Christ in a position similar to the woman with the issue of blood; however this figure is nude, not dressed as Martha is. The figure is possibly a representation of the newly resurrected person. As Lazarus' dead body is mummified, the nude figure represents the newly-born Lazarus. The nudity of the figure is significant as it suggests new birth and new creation due to the resurrecting power of Christ.

The nudity of the figure in the Lazarus scene also recalls baptism, a rite that was performed in the nude and emphasized new birth in Christ. Nude figures such as Adam, Jonah, and Daniel in Christian art also reflect baptism and resurrection.⁴⁴ There is a possible precedent for a small, standing figure connoting new birth in pagan relief sculpture depicting Prometheus. In the examples in Rome and Naples, Prometheus holds a newly created person in the form of a small, nude figure.⁴⁵ The nude boy in these resurrection scenes serves as a reminder of Jesus' ability to perform a successful resurrection, resulting in re-birth.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* 2.2; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Baptismal Homily* 3.8, and Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 87.

⁴⁵ There are two such representations from the third century in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, and the fourth century in Naples. See the figures in Robin M. Jensen's "The Economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve," *JECs*, vol. 7.4 (1999), 527-546.

⁴⁶ While there likely is no strong connection, the nude figure is similar to the hooded boy-god Telesphoros who accompanies representations of the god Asclepius. The main difference is his nudity as opposed to Telesphoros omnipresent hooded cloak. While difficult to prove, the boy in a Christian context may possibly

VI. The Wedding at Cana and the Division of the Loaves (Figures 32-33)

32. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

33. Mid fourth century, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums

Nature miracles are also popular subjects of depiction in Christian relief sculpture, chiefly the Cana miracle and the division of loaves.⁴⁷ Christ's wonder working staff is featured in the recreation of the Cana miracle. Christ points the staff towards several small jars at his feet, indicating the miraculous transformative action taking place (Figure 32). No tool is usually depicted in the recreation of the division of the loaves. Instead, Christ is portrayed facing the viewer with both hands extended, blessing two loaves held by flanking figures (Figure 33). At his feet are baskets of bread ready to be shared amongst the people. It is curious that the staff-like instrument is used in one instance at Cana while it is not uniformly employed in the division of the loaves. The use of the staff, its appearance in some miracles and disappearance in others, will be tackled in the next chapter.

The inclusion of these two miracles in a funerary context is appropriate, as they both emphasize the sacramental nature of Christianity. Eucharist is stressed at the Cana miracle and at the division of the loaves. With the Cana miracle and the division of the loaves, both elements of the Eucharistic meal are on display.⁴⁸ The Eucharistic meal was considered the

remind its audience that Christ heals successfully on his own, with no need of a "Finisher." See W. Deonna, *De Téléphore au "moine bourru": Dieux, génies, et démons encapuchonnés* (Brussels, 1955), 42.

⁴⁷ In the Roman body of evidence, the Cana miracle appears over 44 times, in the Gallic and North African evidence, it appears over 21 times (see Deichmann, *Ikongraphisches Register*, Band I, 122; Band III, 303). For the division of loaves, the miracle appears in the Roman evidence over 84 times, in the Gallic and North African evidence, over 12 times (Band I, 122; Band III, 299).

⁴⁸ As far as the elements of a Eucharistic meal in Late Antiquity, there are manifold patristic references. See Tertullian, *Apology*, 39:16-21 and Cyprian, *Ep.* 63. Also see Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 207; and references in Lee M. Jefferson's "The Pagan Feast and the Sacramental Feast: The Implication of Idol Food Consumption in Paul's Corinth," in *Sewanee Theological Review* (Christmas 2007), 22-47

mark of the Christian and the doorway to eternal life. It is natural that it would be included in funerary art as the feeding that took place in life continues into death. Similar food and dining scenes that occur in the catacombs (at the catacombs of Callistus, Priscilla and Peter and Marcellinus) with a group of figures surrounding a sigma-shaped table also recall funerary meals and the popular custom of dining with the dead, a practice that drew the consternation of bishops like Augustine and Paulinus of Nola.⁴⁹ It is important to note that many of the extant sarcophagi were discovered within the catacombs. As in the catacombs, representations of the Cana miracle and the division of the loaves on funerary relief sculpture likely reflect the sacramental action taking place in the immediate space, be it a catacomb or another environment.

VII. The Centrality of the Gospel of John

The miracles of Christ in the relief sculpture of the fourth and fifth-century exhibit a divergence from the catacomb paintings discussed in the previous chapters. The art portrayed in the relief sculpture depicts the miracles and healings of Christ drawn heavily from the Gospel of John. Each entry in the tableau of images in Christian relief sculpture bears a connection to the Gospel of John. The raising of the widow's son, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood might be cited as evidence opposing this argument. However, those instances pale in comparison to the large number of images that rely upon John's gospel, particularly the raising of Lazarus and the

⁴⁹ See Cyprian, *Ep.* 63 and Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.2.2, and his mention here of Monica's sober and delicate use of wine. Drinking at the tombs of the saints is a problem Ambrose and Augustine had to address as well. Augustine writes to Aurelius of Carthage in *Ep.* 22, exhorting congregations to abandon customs of drunkenness and riotousness. Augustine could not control events in private homes, but he was determined to eradicate such practices in churches. Also see Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 32; *Carm.* 27, 28 and Jensen's "Dining with the Dead: From the Mensa to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity," *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2008).

nature miracles. The sheer number of occurrences of Johannine scenes warrants consideration that the relief sculpture of this era paid a strong reliance upon the fourth gospel, and its specific Christology.⁵⁰

The Gospel of John begins Jesus' ministry with the Cana miracle, a scene that is repeatedly carved in relief sculpture of the fourth and fifth century. The miracle at Cana was "the first of his signs" as John insists it was meant to reveal "his glory" (2:11). John's words are pertinent to understanding the division of his gospel into the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory.⁵¹ The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50) in John details the healings and miracles of Christ, culminating in the raising of Lazarus, whereas the Book of Glory (13:1-20:31) moves into the Passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. In John, the healings and miracles are more neatly divided than the synoptic gospels. There is also more of a realized eschatology in John. Jesus has more statements detailing his special nature in John, such as "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25).

The Cana miracle in John inaugurates the "signs" of Christ's miracle working ability, and it is recognizable in the fourth-century relief sculpture. In the text, Jesus heals an official's son upon his return to Cana. Then John details the healing of many different types of people at Bethesda, including the blind, lame, and paralyzed; all are subjects in the relief sculpture (4:46; 5:2-4). The feeding of the five thousand in John 6 is possibly reflected in the scenes of Jesus dividing the loaves. This is an interpretive leap as representations of the division of loaves could arguably recall the scene from any gospel. However, the story in

⁵⁰ Consider the catalogued scenes of the Cana Miracle (44), the Division of Loaves (84), and the Raising of Lazarus (67) in Deichmann, *Ikongraphisches Register*, Band I, 122; Band III, 303; Band I, 122; Band III, 299; Band I, 123; Band III, 302. Compare the number of Lazarus occurrences to the 16 examples of the widow's son and Jairus' daughter in the Roman material, and the 8 examples from Gaul and North Africa, see Band I, 123; Band III, 301-302.

⁵¹ Raymond E. Brown popularized this division in the fourth gospel, see his *The Gospel of St. John and the Johannine Epistles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1965).

John is a significant sign of Jesus' divine authority. As in the gospel, the art reflects the insistence of Jesus as the bread of life sent from heaven. As mentioned above, the sacramental interpretation in the imagery is overt. Underlying the image of the division of the loaves could be John's emphasis on the authority of Jesus, that all who desire salvation must go through Jesus (6:37).

The healing of the blind man and the healing of the paralytic in John 5 and John 9 are also scenes that John shares in common with the synoptic passages. While they occur in the synoptic gospels, their usage can still point towards a consistent attention to the Gospel of John. The narrative of the paralytic in John mentions the paralytic's "mat" and Jesus' order to "take it up and walk" more than any of the other passages in the synoptic gospels.⁵² With such an emphasis on the mat, it could be that the proclivity of the image in relief sculpture reveals the reading from John. While the passage in the synoptics is meant to highlight Christ's authority in his ministry on earth, only John includes an extended passage following the event detailing the authority of the Son of Man. The paralytic carrying his mat is a symbol of Christ's authority, and perhaps in relief sculpture it directly recalls the reading from John 5:19, memorably reiterating the power and preeminence of the Son. It is difficult to discern whether the scenes that overlap with the synoptic passages are derivative of John. Nevertheless, when coupled with scenes that are exclusive to John such as the Cana miracle and the raising of Lazarus, it is worthy to pursue the notion that the art does reflect John's narrative.

The scenes of Christ's miracles in relief sculpture are not usually in isolation from one another. The raising of Lazarus is balanced with other scenes of Christ's miracles, particularly the nature miracles (Figure 32). Resurrection and the new covenant are not the

⁵² For example, the Matthew (9:2) story includes the edict to stand and walk, although it does not mention the mat nearly as much as John's account.

only themes being reflected in this funerary medium. The replication and insistence of Christ's miracles in relief sculpture reveal a different Jesus than the one captured in catacomb wall paintings. The repeated inclusion of Lazarus and the nature miracles reminds the viewer of the authority of Jesus that is apparent in John's gospel. The Lazarus miracle served an important purpose in John's gospel. John included the raising of Lazarus (John 11:28) as a bridge, showing Jesus' special power over death and including the image of Lazarus emerging in his burial clothes, the very clothes Christ will leave behind when he emerges from the tomb (John 20:5). Thus, Christ is not bound by death, personified by the burial wrappings. John uses the raising of Lazarus to illustrate Jesus' divine son-ship and authority. Jesus is portrayed as something different in John, something new. From the Prologue through Lazarus, Jesus is characterized as the Divine Logos and his ability to raise the dead exhibits this identity. A key difference in the Jesus as portrayed in the raising of Lazarus and the Jesus raising the dead in the synoptic gospels is captured by Luke. In the narrative of the widow's son at Nain, upon the completion of the miraculous event, the crowd calls Jesus a "great prophet." In the raising of Lazarus, John's witnesses recognize Jesus not as a prophet as in Luke, but as the Messiah. Martha says, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world (John 11:27)."

The raising of Lazarus embodies a transitional moment in John's gospel. It is the final sign in the Book of Signs as the text moves into the passion narrative and ultimate resurrection of Christ. The scene of the raising of Lazarus similarly indicates a transition in depictions of Jesus in Christian imagery. The scene's frequent inclusion in relief sculpture reveals what specific source material the artists were relying upon. The art serves as the able witness for John's Jesus, "the very works that I am doing testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36). The rise in scenes of Lazarus' resurrection and the Cana miracle

that are purely Johannine, combined with other scenes of healings and miracles that John shares with the synoptics, lend weight to the argument that images of Christ's miracles in Christian relief sculpture had John's Jesus firmly in mind.

The proliferation of the theme of Christ's miracles in mid fourth-century relief sculpture reflects an attention to the Johannine Jesus. An argument for the reliance upon John does not explain the inclusion of images from Luke/Acts and the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* that involve the apostle, such as Peter's arrest at Acts 12 and his miraculous striking of the rock.⁵³ The relief sculpture exhibits more of a blended reading of John and other elements from scripture. This does not diminish the significance of the Jesus portrayed in the art. Omnipotent and all-powerful, his miracles attest to his divine status that inculcates awe, wonder, and faith.

The early catacomb evidence from the third century does not appear to devote as much attention to the Gospel of John. The catacombs were not bereft of scenes from the Gospel of John; the raising of Lazarus appears in the catacombs, but the nature miracles were much rarer than other scenes from the synoptic gospels. Many catacomb wall paintings that include representations that are Johannine, such as Lazarus and the Cana miracle, date from the fourth century as in the catacombs of Via Latina and Peter and Marcellinus. Thus there is an overlap between fourth-century catacomb paintings that are Johannine and fourth-century relief sculpture images. As many examples of sarcophagi were discovered within the catacombs, an overlap in depiction is unsurprising.

For example, the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus contains a significant portrayal of the Cana miracle (Figure 15). The wall painting does not depict the Cana miracle in the same manner as it is displayed in relief sculpture, with the sole focus on Jesus performing the

⁵³ The striking of the rock episode occurs in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, a text that has a complicated provenance. See Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 1, 1-22 for the text. Also see Chapter Seven, 251-52.

action. Instead, Jesus is portrayed touching the jars with his hand in front of a sigma-shaped table filled with guests. The Cana miracle and the division of the loaves also appear in fourth-century examples in the catacomb of Domitilla, and the division of the loaves appears in the late fourth-century catacomb of Via Latina. While earlier catacombs are largely empty of purely Johannine scenes, the later date of this catacomb suggests a connection with the Johannine imagery in the relief sculpture. However, the transition that occurs in the mid fourth-century relief sculpture is more clearly marked with figures that are not in the Gospel of John at all. The inclusion of Peter in the relief sculpture, bearing the enigmatic wonder-working instrument of Christ's miracles signals this transition. In the image of the striking of the rock, Peter is depicted as Moses. Instead of juxtaposing the miracle working Jesus with the miracle working Moses as in the catacombs, Peter appropriates the traits of Moses. Instead of Jesus being portrayed as the New Moses, the relief sculpture portrays Peter as the New Moses (see Figures 16-17). With Peter as the New Moses, it is possible to see the figure of Jesus in the relief sculpture as derivative of John's gospel.

In the relief sculpture, the figure of Peter as Moses accentuates the Johannine Jesus portrayed in the other scenes. John's Jesus is in line with Moses, but offers something different than Moses. In the prologue of John 1:17 the author states that "the law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." For John, Christ offers a greater alternative than the Law.⁵⁴ John's Jesus is the Divine Logos. Instead of miracles providing evidence of his status or currying faith as in Luke, the miracles of John's Jesus require the foreboding of the people. In this endeavor, the evangelist succeeds

⁵⁴ In the post-resurrection story of the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene mistakes Jesus as "the gardener." Jaime Clark-Soles argues that this may be a significant sign that the evangelist had the school of Epicurus in mind in the composition of the gospel. Instead of "a gardener" it is "the gardener." John may be in competition with Epicurean philosophy, but his gospel makes a great effort to surpass any similarity with Epicureanism. Jaime Clark-Soles, *Death and Afterlife in the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 149.

admirably, and the art reflects that success. Jesus' miracles are meant to testify to his authority and that he is "above all," especially his competitors. With the large number of exclusive Johannine scenes coupled with other scenes that appear in John, the relief sculpture possibly portrays the Johannine Christ, a Christ that is uniquely divine, and comparable to no one.

Moreover, a reading of the Gospel of John in Christian art of this era is congruent with the mid fourth-century historical context. Christians were drawing upon existing traditions in pagan art and in effect transcending them by portraying a dominant Christ. Post-Constantinian Christian leaders did not desire to see any members stray or return to idolatry. An image touting the powers of Christ would remind viewers of Christ's abilities in the arena of healing and miracle working and advertise that Christ provides the final resurrection. The Lazarus scene and the nature miracles specify the superior attributes of Jesus against any competitors. John mentions that Jesus has the authority to raise the dead, setting him apart from any figure that claimed a similar feat (John 5:21). Jesus is the supreme raiser of the dead and the living, of the good and the evil, and thus the image of the raising of Lazarus should inspire awe and fear. This Jesus is not merely supplanting Moses as a new patriarch but is appearing uniquely dominant. With the inclusion of Peter, Christ is not consistently characterized in the relief sculpture as the New Moses but as the Divine Logos, miracle worker, and resurrector of the flesh. His miracles are meant as visual testimony supporting that fact. John's Jesus is "the one who comes from above is above all...the one who comes from heaven is above all" (John 3:31). Portraying Jesus as a superior raiser of the dead recalls a familiar opponent of Christ's in Asclepius.

VIII. Jesus and Asclepius in Relief Sculpture

Christ in the gospels and in Christian art heals with the power of his personality. With his voice or his touch, Christ heals and performs miracles directly. Christ's touch heals his recipients immediately. The art of the catacombs reflects this aspect of his healing ability. In the catacomb images, Christ touches the blind man, the paralytic, the woman with the issue of blood, and the *aediculum* of Lazarus with the staff. In relief sculpture, the power of Christ's touch is also apparent. In the healing of the blind man, Christ's hands and fingers are the instruments of healing. In the woman with the issue of blood, touch is emphasized. In the miracles that include the use of a staff, the resurrection images and the nature miracles, touch is still involved. In the accounts of Aristides, touch and physical interaction are not the mode of Asclepius' healings. As Aristides noted, the devotees of Asclepius touted the efficacy of Asclepius' ability, however it was not touch but somnolent remedy that was the god's calling card.⁵⁵ The healings Jesus provided were instantaneous and did not require the process of dream interpretation and prescription.

The emphasis on resurrection images arguably reiterates Christ's superior divine attributes. The raising of Lazarus exhibits Christ performing a successful resurrection, an action that caused Asclepius' death. The scene also established the divine authority of Jesus as compared to Asclepius or any other god. Jesus needed no divine sanction to raise the dead, while Asclepius obviously did. There was no Olympic hierarchy Christ needed to follow for his miracle since he was divine. In the imagery, Jesus accomplished his miracle through the power of physical touch with hand or staff. Jesus confronted and touched his recipients, and he had witnesses to his physical presence and the resulting miraculous act.

⁵⁵ Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 48.21, and Chapter Two, 64.

Origen argued against Celsus along these lines, claiming that Christ's miracles were real since he had eyewitnesses.⁵⁶ The church fathers realized the danger of Asclepius, and the image of Jesus in relief sculpture possibly mirrored their concerns.⁵⁷ The rise in miracle images in this era can be explained as an attempt to solidify control and eradicate competition. With the mentions of Asclepius in the patristic authors, it is possible that a Christian audience could see Christ as a greater healer than in these images.

One particular fragment at the Terme museum in Rome includes some pertinent images of Christ healing and addressing the crowd that closely resembles Asclepius.⁵⁸ In the fragment, Christ is portrayed healing the paralytic, dividing the loaves, raising the widow's son, and addressing the crowd. Touch is emphasized as his hand rests upon the head of the afflicted; however it is Jesus' dress that has caused scholars to comment. Jesus is dressed not in his typical robe as in the catacombs and in other sarcophagus scenes with inner toga and *pallium*. Instead, his chest is bare with one fold draped over the shoulder, like a philosopher, and also akin to representations of Asclepius.⁵⁹ The facial type approximates Asclepius' appearance, as Christ has curly hair and is fully bearded.⁶⁰ With the healing power of Jesus'

⁵⁶ Origen, *Cels.* 24.

⁵⁷ See Chapter Three, 92ff for the patristic references.

⁵⁸ In Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), figs. 48-49.

⁵⁹ John Dominic Crossan has insisted that the fact Jesus holds the scroll in his hand and is dressed in such a way intentionally recalls Cynic philosophers. A Cynic association is a leap. The bare chest and clutched scroll does not necessarily support such a conclusion. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1994), v.

⁶⁰ See Erich Dinkler, *Christus und Asklepios* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980), 66. Dinkler asserts a comparison between the Terme Jesus and Asclepius due to their resemblance. He also believes the scroll to the Law of the Old Testament; See Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 300. Zanker disagrees with Dinkler on the Asclepius comparison, however he argues that any association with Cynic philosophy is erroneous; rather he claims the image bears a relation to "pagan holy men."

touch so heavily emphasized, the Terme scenes highlight the shortcomings of his healing rival while cloaking Jesus in the garb of Asclepius.⁶¹

While the Terme fragment emphasizes Jesus' abilities at the expense of the healing god, it is a very unique example and not entirely indicative of the manner Christ was normally portrayed in Christian relief sculpture. For contrast, the images in most Christian relief sculpture are not similar to rare surviving images from the Asclepieia that depict the god healing a slumbering patient, capturing the moment Asclepius approached through dreams.⁶² Reliefs from Asclepieia depict the dream-like nature of the god's healing ability, not the actual physical encounter. The Christian relief sculpture shows Jesus healing his recipients directly, not through visions or intermediaries. His remedies are palpable.⁶³ The further insistence on Jesus' power of resurrection is meant to remind viewers of the future life, and of Christ's unique abilities that set him apart from any other competitor. Christ resurrects successfully whereas Asclepius failed and did not have the authority. The images convey the divine authority of Christ, proved by his work as a healer and miracle worker.

⁶¹ See Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*, 69-70. Also see note 80 below. Mathews makes an apt connection regarding the fragment, however he should note that the Terme fragment is a unique instance in early Christian art. Mathews is also not the first to rest his argument on this particular object. L. de Bruyne realizes its import in his "L'imposition des mains dans l'art chrétien ancien," *RAC*, 20, 1-4, (1943), 113-278, albeit without making the connection between Jesus and Asclepius.

⁶² This particular relief comes from Piraeus, dating from 400 BCE. The dream-like nature of Asclepius' healing is insisted in these images. For the images, see C. Kerényi, *Asklepios: Archetypal Images of the Physician's Existence* (New York: Pantheon, 1959), 35-36.

⁶³ In addition to the figures cited, the Brescia Casket offers clear examples of Christ healing and resurrecting with the power of touch, see Tkacz, 105.

Conclusion

When viewed in conjunction with the emphasis on miracles and numerous citations of *Christus medicus* in the church fathers, it is unsurprising that the same themes are reflected in the Christian art of the fourth and fifth century. These artworks emphasize Christ's divine status as well as his earthly ministry. The emphasis upon authority is reflected in the depiction of a Johannine Jesus. Augustine in his sermons on the Gospel of John understands the power the miracle stories in John have on his audience. He urges his listeners to look behind the miracles and healings at the power and authority demonstrated by Jesus that will occur in the final resurrection, a moment that is greater "than healings of bodies. We have treated of this already, and must not linger upon it now. Greater is the resurrection of the body unto eternity than this healing of the body, wrought in that impotent man, to last only for a time. And greater works than these he will show him, that you may marvel."⁶⁴

John's Jesus demands authority testified by his signs in the Book of Signs. While the catacomb wall paintings emphasize more obvious funerary themes of comfort, initiation, and future resurrection, the relief sculpture uses the healings and miracles to emphasize the authority of the church. Such an emphasis on authority at a moment when the church was just becoming established may have been necessary to send a message of finality to its audience that Christ is the final authority above all competitors. An image of an enthroned Jesus could accomplish this goal as well. However, the enthroned Christ does not emphasize the traits and abilities that make Christ greater than his competitors.⁶⁵ The image

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 23.12 (NPNF 1.7.156).

⁶⁵ It is also possible the enthroned Jesus is more indicative of the imperial cult than other figures of pagan religion, however this is a tendentious argument. See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image*

of Christ the Miracle Worker shows an active Jesus plying his superior abilities, not a seated and passive Jesus. More importantly, Christ the Miracle Worker exhibits a unique Jesus, John's Jesus, a Jesus that is the resurrection and the life. Christ healing and performing miracles also mirrors the pervasive interest in healing and miracles in the Christian populace. With the large number of these scenes on relief sculpture, witnessing their savior performing these feats was obviously meaningful to Christians of Late Antiquity. The timing of Christ the Miracle Worker's rise to dominance in the fourth century is prescient. Threats to Christ's authority are possibly driving the emergence of this theme.

Following previous studies, it is apparent that this emphasis on healings and miracles also borrowed from the available visual prototypes of Roman culture as well.⁶⁶ However, the emphasis is more than just a borrowing of pagan symbols and themes. The emphasis reflects the competition of Jesus against pertinent threats to his status, and it demonstrates an influence from patristic attention as well. The emphasis of Christ's status as a supreme physician and miracle worker came from treatises as well as the Christian pulpit. The message duly reached patrons and artists as it was painted and carved upon Christian walls and artifacts. Asclepius was but one perceived threat to Christ's dominance. The images of Christ's healings and miracles indicate not only outside threats but a strong internal anxiety regarding church establishment. In the relief sculpture after Constantine, Moses is often replaced with the figure of Peter in an attempt to underscore the patriarch of the church. Moses and the Jews were not exactly a dire outside threat that required attention in the visual art. The relief sculpture scenes of Peter appropriating the person of Moses, including the wonder working staff, reveals the intent of exuding a sense of church authority at a time

before the Era of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and Mathews position beginning on *Clash of the Gods*, 3.

⁶⁶ See Jensen's position in *Face to Face*, 153.

when the ecclesial body was taking its infant steps towards a firm establishment. Up to the fourth century, the stylistic inclusion of Christ's staff in the performance of his miracles is a pertinent clue that illustrates Christ as the prophetic fulfillment to the patriarch Moses. However, by the fourth century Christ's staff is also wielded by Peter in relief sculpture of that era. Christ, Moses and Peter are all attached to the wonder working staff in visual art, and it is to that subject this dissertation now turns.

CHAPTER VII

THE STAFF OF JESUS

From its inception, Christian art captured Jesus in the act of performing miracles and healings with the peculiar inclusion of what has been called a *lituus*, a *rabdos*, a *virga*, a scepter, a staff or a wand. In catacomb paintings of the third and fourth centuries and the relief sculpture of the fourth and fifth centuries, Christ the Miracle Worker is rarely portrayed without this enigmatic iconographic inclusion. As perplexing as the instrument is, it tends to be misconstrued and misunderstood by contemporary audiences. The term “wand” does not help in understanding its inclusion in visual art of this era. This term is derivative of a contemporary approach to the iconography and exhibits the influence of the magician argument advanced by Morton Smith and Thomas Mathews. Thus, the “wand” is a loaded term to characterize Christ’s instrument. The term “staff” is less conspicuous, and more accurately describes the motivation of its inclusion in images of Christ’s miracles. Still, the staff is either disregarded as unimportant, or is used as evidence that early Christians believed Jesus to be a type of magician or a philosopher. A more suitable explanation can be derived by examining the immediate context of the staff scenes and identifying two other figures in Christian art that wield staffs, Moses and Peter.

As vexing a feature as the staff is, it remains highly significant for understanding the image of Christ the Miracle Worker. This chapter will discuss the staff’s appearance in visual art, then introduce the relevant arguments asserting that this stylistic feature reveals Christ as a magician. This chapter will subsequently consider that the staff identifies Christ as a theurgist, a category related to philosophy but distinct from magic. Finally, this chapter will

examine the staff as indicating a connection to the wonder worker Moses, and treat its bestowal to Peter and its eventual disappearance after the fifth century. This chapter will show that the staff is not an unimportant attribute in early Christian iconography. The staff's appearance is an attempt to portray Christ as a greater theurgist than Moses, while the context of the staff images suggests Christ as the supreme healer. Thus, the staff is a vital component in understanding the role Christ played in early Christian art.

I. The Appearance of the Staff

The staff is a key stylistic element that appears in scenes involving Christ, Moses and Peter. It is a slight challenge to distinguish images of Moses and Peter in a wonder working context since a great majority of their staff-wielding scenes involve the striking of the rock. The immediate scenes in relief sculpture depict Peter's arrest or his betrayal of Christ. These scenes are determining factors in identifying the figure as Peter striking the rock. Moses striking the rock is far more prominent in catacomb scenes while Peter striking the rock occurs with a greater degree of frequency in relief sculpture.

This is not to say that Moses disappears entirely in Christian relief sculpture, however when the striking of the rock is depicted alongside other scenes involving Peter, Peter is most likely the character in the scene (see Figures 16-17). Moses is more easily identified wielding his wonder working staff in the crossing of the Red Sea. In a particularly fascinating depiction at Arles, Moses is more passive than Christ or Peter in his use of the staff to effect the miracle (Figure 34). The staff is merely at Moses' side, touching the water

below his feet and separating the waters that surround the Egyptian soldiers.¹ The striking of the rock is a much more frequently depicted scene that involves staff use. Deichmann numbers the examples of Moses striking the rock in Roman relief sculpture at a little over 22; he identifies Peter in cognate scenes around 56 times.² At least in the relief sculpture of the mid to late fourth century, there is a concerted interest in exhibiting Peter striking the rock, and moreover, Peter wielding a staff.

Christ's use of the staff is always in the context of performing healings or miracles. There is no scriptural evidence in the gospels of Christ ever making use of such a staff in any of his miracles or healings.³ When Christ holds the staff, its appearance is not always consistent. The staff of the catacomb paintings is thin and reed-like, while in relief sculpture the staff is thicker and tapered towards a point at its end. This ruddy appearance in relief sculpture is possibly due to the medium, it would have been challenging for a sculptor to replicate the thin wand painted in the catacombs. In the nature miracles, the staff appears in the wedding at Cana, however in the division of the loaves the staff is often absent, instead exhibiting the miracle-working quality of Christ's physical touch through his hands.⁴ The

¹ Deichmann notes the Crossing of the Red Sea in 11 instances in the Roman corpus, and about 15 times in the Gallic and North African corpus (*Ikonomographisches Register*, Band I, 121; Band III, 300, also see plates in Band III, 340, 356).

² See Deichmann, *Ikonomographisches Register*, Band I, 124; the Gallic and North African material is similarly conflated, see Band III, 302).

³ Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 28. Thomas Mathews believes the staff is represented in non-miracle context in the entry to Jerusalem in two instances. This does not appear to be the case. The fragment is damaged, and whatever Christ appears to be holding has broken off long ago. Mathews dismisses the possibility that it could be a scroll, claiming that it is the wand pointed towards the head of the donkey. See Erich Dinkler, *Der Einzug in Jerusalem* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1970), fig. 6. In a child's sarcophagus fragment from the Campo Santo Teutonico, Christ's entry to Jerusalem exhibits the instrument close to the donkey's head. The object may in fact be a scroll, not a wand, as Christ's other hand is in the gesture of speech

⁴ In the Roman body of evidence, the Cana miracle appears over 44 times, in the Gallic and North African evidence, it appears over 21 times (see Deichmann, *Ikonomographisches Register*, Band I, 122; Band III, 303). For the division of loaves, the miracle appears in the Roman evidence over 84 times, in the Gallic and North African evidence, over 12 times (Band I, 122; Band III, 299).

staff is used in resurrection scenes, most prominently in the raising of Lazarus, as well as the widow's son, Jairus' daughter, and Christ in the Valley of the Dry Bones.⁵ As omnipresent as the staff is in scenes of resurrection, an action that can be characterized as a healing, it is absent in most representations of Christ healing the blind, the woman with the issue of blood, and the healing of the paralytic.⁶ In the healing scenes, Christ heals through auricular command or physical touch. The staff does not consistently appear in all miracle scenes. In relief sculpture, Christ occasionally uses his hands to indicate the miracle of the division of the loaves. The staff's absence in these scenes does show that the staff is not consistently attached to the person of Christ in all of the representations of his miracles and healings (Figure 33). However, the evidence of Christian relief sculpture shows that for the most part the staff is employed in the raising of the dead and the nature miracles.⁷

The appearance or absence of the staff does not clearly distinguish scenes of raising the dead and healing scenes. Raising the dead and healing are both restorative acts that display the power of Christ. Christ raising Lazarus shows his divine authority to perform a resurrection. It is possible a Christian viewer would expect to witness Christ performing a resurrection through the touch of a staff rather than with his hand. As detailed in the purification laws of Numbers 19:11, no person could touch a dead body without becoming ceremonially unclean and requiring purification. As a Jew, Christ would understand these

⁵ Lazarus occurs on 65 examples of Roman sarcophagi and over 23 times on examples from Gaul and North Africa. See Deichmann, *Ikongraphisches Register*, Band I, 123; Band III, 302. The widow's son and Jairus' daughter occur in 16 examples in the Roman material, and in 8 examples from Gaul and North Africa, see Band I, 123; Band III, 301-302.

⁶ On whether resurrections are healings or not, see Chapter Five, 181. A staff also appears on several unique examples of the healing of the blind but it is unclear (Figure 23). The blind figure appears to grasp a staff instead of Christ touching the patient with it; however it is quite possible the staff belongs to the blind man, not the healer.

⁷ There are exceptions to this rule, see Figure 7 at the catacomb of Callistus for the raising of Lazarus and Christ pulling Jairus' daughter awake in Figure 30. In Deichmann's catalog (see note 5 above), the staff is used in the majority of cases of the raising of the dead and the nature miracles.

laws, and Christian viewers may not anticipate an image of Christ touching a dead body with his hand. With a touch of the staff, Christ could touch the dead without becoming unclean. Regardless, what is apparent in all of the images of Christ's healings and miracles is the power displayed through touch and physical interaction. This cuts across any distinction between resurrection and healing since Christ's touch with hand or staff is the active ingredient in each scene.

Since Christian art borrowed elements from the visual resources available in Late Antiquity, the staff is possibly a stylistic element appropriated from pagan artistic contexts. Sculptors' workshops were possibly indifferent to the minor divergent characteristics of pagan and Christian imagery. It was up to the viewers to use their belief system to fill the image with meaning.⁸ The onus of interpretation is arguably always on the viewer. This does not mean that patrons, sculptors, and viewers were indifferent to the specific manner in how figures were depicted in art. Christians were influenced by the pagan imagery surrounding them, resulting in the enduring manner early Christian images appear.⁹ This is still not an adequate answer as to why the staff is in Christian art.

If early Christians did not find value or significance in a feature such as the staff, it would have fallen out of existence by the fourth century. If the staff was a prototypical way of depicting Christ's miracles, it is curious that it does not appear in all of the scenes of Christ's healings and miracles. Its presence indicates that it was important, and contributed to an overall image of Christ that is greatly significant. Just explaining the staff as a feature of the pagan visual language is not adequate, for it is a superficial answer that does not delve

⁸ This is the view of Jás Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100-450* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153, and more recently, James Francis in his conference paper "Biblical Not Scriptural: Perspectives on Early Christian Art from Contemporary Classical Scholarship," at the Fifteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies, August 6-10, 2007, Oxford, UK.

⁹ See Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, 153ff.

deeply into the milieu of the images in question. The staff is indeed significant and is deserving of a greater status than a stylistic feature. The staff is an important enough feature to be bequeathed to the figure of Peter. In order to understand the significance of the image of Christ the Miracle Worker, the staff must be understood in its immediate artistic context without explaining it away as a stylistic feature.

II. The Heritage and Terminology of the Staff

In Late Antiquity, a “wand” or “staff” was called a *rabdos* in Greek or a *virga* or *lituus* in Latin. The word *rabdos* initially referred to a supple or pliant twig while a *lituus* refers to a more rigid implement.¹⁰ The names and definitions of a flexible or stiff instrument became mixed in the classical period, and in modern language, this trend followed suit. Whether it is a “staff” a “wand” or a “rod” it possibly refers to the same type of object. Earlier historians and scholars have interpreted the stylistic attribute with some degree of divergence. Wilpert identified the staff as *virga virtutis*, as the mark of a wonder worker, while Deichmann refers to the staff simply as a “wand.”¹¹ In the *Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicity*, Perpetua speaks of a huge man in her vision approaching her bearing a “rod like a master of gladiators” (*et ferens virgam quasi lanista*).¹² The rod is memorably referenced in terms of

¹⁰ See F.J.M. De Waele, *The Magic Staff or Rod in Greco-Italian Antiquity* (The Hague, 1927), 21.

¹¹ Wilpert, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane*, Testo I (Rome, 1903), 41. Also in his *I Sarcophagi*, Testo I, 41, he identifies Moses’ instrument as a *virga*. Deichmann calls it a “stab,” a simple but evocative description; for an example see Deichmann, Band III, 53 in his description of a sarcophagus at Arles. Martine Dulaey believes that the Christians appropriated the *virga* as a symbol denoting power: “Ainsi donc, la virga avait une signification vivante dans la société antique; c’était la baguette de commandement et elle était devenue un véritable symbole. Da cette virga symbole du pouvoir, see Dulaey, “Le symbole de la baguette dans l’art paléochrétien,” *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 19, 1-2 (1973), 12. Hermes and the *flamens* are figures that use a similar instrument construing a similar meaning of power and authority. L. de Bruyne also reflects upon the numerous instances of the “baguette” and its significance with other symbols in “Les ‘lois’ de l’art paléochrétien,” *RAC* 39, 1-2 (1963), 27.

protection and comfort in Psalm 23: “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Augustine comments on this Psalm that the “rod” was more for discipline and the “staff” mentioned in the Psalm was for protection.¹³ Indicated in other writings, the church fathers understood the *virga* as an attribute of power. In a sermon on Psalm 45, Augustine compares the scepter wielded by an enthroned God to a “rod of direction,” as he tells his listeners that it is Christ who rules with an iron and inflexible rod.¹⁴ Ambrose compared the use of the rod of Moses in Exodus to the power of Christ’s words in the institution of the Lord’s Supper.¹⁵ The staff likely represents power, authority, and even divine authority.¹⁶ The more important question is what Christ represents or is intended to represent when he is depicted working healings and miracles with such an instrument. Thus, the matter of terminology and interpretation appears far from settled.

The problem in the staff’s interpretation is that it must grapple with earlier references of a *lituus*, *rabdos*, or *virga* that occur in different contexts. A “staff” has been mentioned in classical literature to refer to an instrument symbolizing power. In Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Romulus was cited as Rome’s first augur, and as such bore the instruments of that office that included

¹² *Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicity*, 3.2 (ANF 3.702).

¹³ Augustine, *Enarrations on the Psalms* 23.4 (trans. Author). Note Augustine’s use of *virga*: “*Virga tua et baculus tuus, ipsa me consulat sunt. Disciplina tua tamquam virga ad gregem ouium, et tamquam baculus iam ad grandiores filios...*”

¹⁴ Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps* 45.16, Augustine uses the term “virga”; Gregory of Nyssa recalls the staff of Moses in *Life of Moses*, 2.36; 2.124.

¹⁵ Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 9.51.

¹⁶ L. de Bruyne, “L’imposition des mains dans l’art chrétien ancien,” *RAC*, 20, 1-4, (1943), 129-130, and 196 where he calls the instrument “virga thaumaturga.” He directly related the use of the *virga* to the miracles Christ wrought by hand: “Les gestes de Jésus étaient l’expression de sa volonté de guérir. De Bruyne is utilizing J. Coppens, as he centers his argument on pertinent scenes such as the healing of the paralytic. However for his argument on the significance of the imposition he focuses on the indelible Terme fragment of Jesus, noting its emphasis on touch, without commenting on the connection between Jesus and Asclepius that Mathews exploits (see 133-134; Mathews, 69-70). It is difficult to make firm conclusions based on this unique fragment, and while his article is based upon Christ’s use of touch with his hands, the staff does not largely factor into his discussion.

a staff: “There with the augur’s staff (or Quirinal staff, *lituus*) sat Picus to the life, girt up in the short robe of state, his left hand holding the sacred buckler. Picus, breaker of horses, whom his bride, Circe – seized with a blinding passion – struck with her golden wand (*virga*), and then with magic potions turned him into a bird and splashed his wings with color.”¹⁷

In one section, Vergil mentioned a staff of an augur and the “rod” of Circe using two different terms. It can be argued that Circe’s usage of such a tool indicates a common usage or attribute of a magician; however, this is short-sighted.¹⁸ The *lituus* of the augurs and the *virga* of Circe became conflated, as both were known to represent power and authority. The only story passed down through classical literature that describes staff use is that of Circe, and even it is not entirely consistent or clear. Homer’s *Odyssey* introduced the story of Circe’s transformation of men into pigs, connecting an act of magic to the use of a type of wand: “and when they had drunk she turned them into pigs by a stroke of her wand (*rabdos*)”¹⁹ It was a popular story, as not only Vergil but Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* described Circe’s use of a wand (*virga*) to transform people into pigs: “And then the demon goddess lightly laid her wand upon our hair, and instantly bristles (the shame of it! But I will tell) began to sprout; I could no longer speak; my words were grunts, I groveled to the ground. I felt my nose begin to change to a tough wide snout.”²⁰ In Vergil’s text, the *virga* is not actually connected to magical practice, rather he noted that “drugs” were the catalyst for Circe’s magic. This is consistent with the actual practice of magic. Other than the legend of

¹⁷ Vergil, *Aeneid* 7.185-190 (Fagles).

¹⁸ Mathews argues as such, and in my view incorrectly as I discuss below, on *Clash of the Gods*, 57.

¹⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey* 10.293. *Rabdos* is the term used.

²⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.278 (Melville). Also 413, “She touched their faces with her poisoned wand (*virga*).”

Circe's pig transformation in Homer and Ovid, there is simply no indication or clear reference that Late Antique magicians ever used such a tool.²¹

In Pausanias' book on his travels to Corinth, he describes the statue of Asclepius in the temple as holding a *bakteria*, a lesser-used but still viable term for a "staff."²² Asclepius' staff, however, is easily recognizable in imagery as it is most-often entwined with a serpent. Even in the rare cases that Asclepius' staff does not include a wrapped serpent, it appears as a ruddy, walking staff. In the images of Christ, the staff is an integral part of the unfolding action. In the images of Asclepius, the staff is a symbol and not elemental to Asclepius' healing power. The staff of Asclepius bears no relation to the staff of Christ.

The only other mythical evidence of "wand" use is Hermes/Mercury.²³ In this case, Hermes used an implement that is often translated as a scepter. The god was known as philanthropic and was a bringer of sleep and messenger of the dead.²⁴ Hermes' *caduceus* is something different than the staff depicted in the miracles of Christ. It is often expressed in art as a scepter marked by two intertwined serpents. Not only do the two instruments not bear much in common in terms of depiction, they also differ in how they are used. Christ is physical with his staff, touching his recipients directly. Hermes does not use his instrument in such a manner; it is more of a reminder and symbol of divine aid and power. Further distinguishing the two instruments, there are rare images depicting Hermes carrying his

²¹ Even De Waele who attempted to construct a history of wand use admits that any textual evidence is largely indeterminate on wand usage in the practice of magic, *The Magic Staff*, 21. De Waele jejunely relies largely on literature and myth for evidence of wand use among magicians; he does not refer to the magical papyri that provide the most telling evidence. For an image of Circe on pottery, see his fig. 7, dating several centuries before the dawn of Christian art. Christ's wand is not meant to connect him with Circe, either, given that Circe illustrations were not in great abundance in the fourth and fifth century. Circe was not worshipped in any of the papyri.

²² Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.27.2.

²³ Homer refers to the *rabdos* of Hermes, *Iliad* 24.343; *Odyssey* 5.47; 24.2.

²⁴ See Edelstein, vol. 2., 113, note 10; O. Kern, *Die Religion der Griechen*, vol. II (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1926-1938), 19.

caduceus and wielding a staff, more akin to Christ's staff.²⁵ The *caduceus* of Hermes is more of an emblem of the god. Prudentius calls Hermes the god that uses his scepter to beckon the spirits of the dead to the light, as he refers to the scepter as a *virga* in his reply to Symmachus.²⁶ For Hermes, the *caduceus* is more of an accessory; in the images of Christ it is a physical tool.

III. Jesus the Magician: The Arguments of Morton Smith, Thomas Mathews, and Paul Corby Finney

It appears irresistible for viewers to quickly assume that Christ wielding a wand-like staff is an intentional evocation of Jesus as a magician.²⁷ Christ's pointing his staff and working wonders evokes an image of a magician or wizard wielding a wand. Three contemporary scholars have commented on the topic of Jesus the magician. Morton Smith and Thomas Mathews both generally agree that there was a Christian conception of Jesus as a magician. Paul Corby Finney provides a rebuttal to their views, particularly as it relates to the image of Christ in art.

One must be cautious when delving into a discussion of magic in early Christianity and the images of Christ wielding a staff. While the textual evidence exhibited a strong disdain of magic, scholars such as Morton Smith revealed that the actual sentiment on the

²⁵ See De Waele's chapter on Hermes for any analysis of his scepter, *The Magic Staff*, 29-75. His instrument (*kerukeion* in Greek) is decidedly different in appearance and function, as even the author points out Hermes appears in some examples with the *caduceus* and what appears to be a wand, 64, fig. 3. De Waele concludes that the smooth instrument of Hermes was believed to procure riches, referenced by Epictetus (*Diss.* 3.20.12). However, it may recall Circe's smooth wand from Homer. Its limited appearance makes it unlikely as an influence to Christ's wand.

²⁶ Prudentius, *Against Symmachus* 1.89-91.

²⁷ A leap that Mathews takes, and one that in the words of Paul Corby Finney, is the wrong leap, in "Do You Think God is a Magician?" in *Akten des Symposiums frühchristliche Sarkophage*, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, (1999), 106.

ground may have been much more complicated. Morton Smith made the connection between Apollonius of Tyana and Jesus by claiming that both were magicians, were persecuted for their use of magic, and taught an inner circle of disciples.²⁸ Smith claimed that Philostratus and the gospel writers' defense of Apollonius and Jesus implicate both figures as magicians. Even in light of his defense, by including miracles and exorcisms Philostratus leaves his hero open to suspicion as a magician. Smith argued that the gospel writers attempted to minimize Jesus' magical attributes; however, the miracles were the marks of the magician.²⁹ Smith claimed that the Matthean nativity story of the visitation of the magi was influenced by a visit of magi to the emperor Nero. The travel of the magi in Matthew to visit the Christ child exhibits the submission of all magicians to Christ in the realization that he is the supreme magus.³⁰ Smith understood that early Christians indeed lambasted magicians but believes they were only attacking the lowest common denominator of magicians.³¹ He argued that there were different levels of magicians, and the Christians were just ridiculing the lowest form.³² The evidence Smith provided for an early Christian distinction amongst the world of magic is not entirely compelling.³³ Apuleius attempted to distinguish between levels of magic when he is accused of using sorcery to marry a widow. The accusation and trial of Apuleius reveal the wider perception of magic in the ancient

²⁸ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1978), 85.

²⁹ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 87-93.

³⁰ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 96, and also *Life of Apollonius* 1.31, Philostratus depicts an interesting scene where Apollonius sacrifices using the element of frankincense. See Mathews, 85-86, he claims the magi are acknowledging the power of a magician whose magic is superior to their own. Also see Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 55.

³¹ See Chapter Two for more detail on Morton Smith's argument, 53-55.

³² Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 84.

³³ Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 112.

world.³⁴ Levels of distinction in magic only profited magicians themselves. To all outsiders and observers, magic was equally condemned. The patristic evidence ridiculing magic is fairly considerable and offers no window into any type of distinction amongst levels of magic.³⁵

For a variety of reasons, Smith's argument of Jesus as a magician is unpersuasive. Smith has been criticized for manipulating gospel citations to his advantage, and disregarding the eschatological implications of his argument, as well as disregarding the difference between Jesus' formulae and magical incantations.³⁶ The chief reason his portrait of Jesus fails is that magic was greatly maligned by Christians in Late Antiquity. Magic, like the Asclepius cult, offered a viable alternative for convalescence in a world where there were few options. Magical incantations were used by people in Late Antiquity, much to the consternation of ecclesial leaders. The church fathers attacked the use of magic and any characterization of Jesus as a magician. Origen's rebuttal against Celsus, pointing out that Jesus did not use magical incantations, could work just as well against Smith.³⁷ Origen, Augustine, and Chrysostom all advocated for magic's banishment but found it persistent in Christian communities despite their vociferous attacks.³⁸ From the comments of the church

³⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia*, 90, and see 54ff in Chapter Two.

³⁵ As presented earlier in the Introduction, 8-9, and Chapter Two, 35. See Justin, *1 Apol.* 26 (PG 6, 368A); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.13, 2.31.2. Also see Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 56; Origen, *Cels.* 1.68; Magic as the work of demons, Tertullian, *The Soul* 57.7; Eusebius, *Against Hierocles*, 26.

³⁶ Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 153. Kee points out the inconsistent use of the gospel accounts by Smith, such as leaving out the eschatological implications, and ridicules his argument as based upon his "eclectic personal preferences," in *Medicine*, 114. Spells were usually spoken softly and guarded securely in order to prevent theft, see Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 64. Bernd Kollmann catalogues the various viewpoints on Jesus the Magician in his, *Jesus und die Christen als Wundertäter: Studien zu Magie, Medizin und Schamanismus in Antike und Christentum*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 36-38.

³⁷ Origen, *Cels.* 68.

fathers, it appears that the hatred of magic and refusal to distinguish amongst levels of magic comes from the top down, not the ground up.³⁹ Publicly, Christian leaders denounced magic, but privately magic was possibly practiced by individuals to meet certain ends who felt it was their only alternative.

Thomas Mathews' argues that Jesus is characterized as a magician in Christian art.⁴⁰ Jesus is appropriating traits of the magician, draping himself as the supreme magus performing real miracles and healings. Mathews argues that the reason Christian images of Jesus' healings and miracles are so prominent is due to the interest and predominance of magic.⁴¹ He claims that showing Jesus with a "wand" indicates that he was understood as a magician. In the context of healing, performing miracles, and carrying a wand, Jesus has been made into a magician in visual art⁴²

Magic was not the power base early Christians were intimately concerned with, and Mathews overestimates its importance and underestimates the repugnance it generated. Local magicians posed less of a threat than established structures and figures. A singular figure that has the power of an institution behind it was much more dangerous than

³⁸ Chrysostom among other things ridiculed the wearing of amulets to little avail, see *Homily on Colossians*, 8.5. See N. Brox, "Magie und Aberglaube an den Anfängen des Christentums," *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift*, 83 (1974), 157-80; A.A. Barb, "The Survival of Magical Arts," in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (ed. A. Momigliano; Oxford, 1963).

³⁹ There likely is a class element to the message expressed in the art. Patrons that could afford sarcophagi were likely middle to upper-middle class citizens (see Finney, "Do You..." 107), while adherents to magic were among the lower, uneducated classes. It seems logical that magical use would be associated with the poor. The relative accessibility of spells made it a viable alternative. Pliny noted the use of herbal remedies with the magi, claiming Pythagoras and Democritus borrowed from their treatments (*Natural History* 24.99-10 and in Christian Late Antiquity see Jerome, *Life of Hilarion*, 21 for the use of a love spell). Sarcophagi art is also a genre that allows the patron to express outwardly noble qualities and beliefs, religious and self-serving, and magic would not fit into that sphere.

⁴⁰ See Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 54-89.

⁴¹ Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 66.

⁴² Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 59. Mathews points out that this motif in art has been little discussed, and Grabar even eschewed all discussion of miracle imagery in favor of imperial motifs, see *The Beginnings of Christian Art*.

scattered magicians. Early Christians were indeed “fighting fire with fire,” Mathews just misidentified the major threatening figures.⁴³ Asclepius represented the formidable cult of healing, and Moses was the patriarch that threatened the formation of a purely Christian identity at a time when Jews and Christians were separated by porous border lines. The miracle images do not exhibit a predominant interest in magic. They do show that early Christians were less interested in magical threats and more interested in threats associated with idolatry that could potentially impede their newfound establishment in the church.

Paul Corby Finney responded to the allegations of Smith and Mathews, claiming that any depiction of Jesus as a magician is invalid. The reason for this is simple: magic and sorcery were held in low esteem in Late Antiquity by Christians and pagans alike. “Magic” and “sorcery” were pejorative terms in the empire through Late Antiquity.⁴⁴ Finney specifically rebuts the charges of Mathews concerning the representations of Jesus in Christian art. Finney simply answers that a tradition does not exist in Late Antique art of depicting a magician doing his job.⁴⁵ Images of purported magicians possibly existed; however there were no known images of a magician in the act of exercising his trade.⁴⁶ The images of “famous magicians” arguably placed them on a higher plane, in the category of respected theurgist or miracle man, and above an ordinary magician working in the marketplace. Therefore an early Christian would never confuse an image of Christ’s healings

⁴³ Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 65.

⁴⁴ For instance, from Sulla’s *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* against *maleficia magica* in 81 BCE to the accusations against Apuleius in the second century CE (*Apologia*, 90). There is no evidence there was an increase in magical practice in Late Antiquity. Its practice, and the polemic attacking it, remained rather undisturbed. See Peter Brown, Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity,” in *Witchcraft: Confessions and Accusations* (ed. by M. Douglas; London, 1970), 20-21.

⁴⁵ See Finney, “Do You...,” 107.

⁴⁶ Such as Alexander Severus’ bust of Apollonius in his domestic shrine, although the *Historia Augusta* is a widely criticized source. However, even this mention warrants some consideration since it treats the existence of imagery; *Historia Augusta, Life of Severus Alexander* 29.

and miracles with a magician. There was no precedent for such an image, and the association would be offensive. If Jesus actually was being portrayed as a magician, he would be performing exorcisms, or providing love spells and incantations. None of these images, even gospel scenes of Jesus performing exorcisms, were in widespread existence.⁴⁷

In addition to Finney's argument, a second reason to discredit early Christians confusing Christ with a magician is that no evidence in any remnant of the papyri mentions or specifies the use of a wand or any other instrument. No magician in Late Antiquity used a wand. Exorcisms, certain healings, and love spells were the tasks of the day for the ordinary magician. These tasks focused on proper vocalization and technique, not the use of an external tool like a wand. The wand does not reveal Jesus as a magician since the wand did not exist for the magician in Late Antiquity. Certain spells in the papyri prescribed holding sprigs of laurel or an ebony staff, however the laurel must be leafy, and the staff must be shifted from hand to hand while properly saying the spell.⁴⁸ Even when sprigs or accessories are mentioned in the papyri, they are not tools that procure the magical effect.⁴⁹ The instruments do not play a primary role; the primary role in magic is always correct repetition and vocalization.

In the art, the touch of the staff effects the miracle, or at least plays a strong role in its procurement. In actuality, no type of staff that Jesus, Moses, or Peter wields was used in the practice of magic. Instead Jesus appears in text and art as a figure that derives his

⁴⁷ The nearest example is a fifth-century ivory in the Louvre depicting Jesus casting the evil spirit into the pigs from Mark 5, see Finney, "Do You...", fig. 40.2. Also see 138 in Chapter Four.

⁴⁸ *PGM*, I.262-347. Philostratus, *Life*. 1.2. Similarly, Philostratus rebutted any accusation of magic against Apollonius by listing the charges against him, revealing no indication of wand use. See Lucian's description of a proper incantation in *Lover of Lies* 16. The "Syrian" is not Christ, but likely a contemporary of Lucian's. Also see Graf, *Magic*, 78-79.

⁴⁹ Wormwood or myrtle branches are also mentioned in the papyri (*PGM* II.22; I.73 but they are recipes of the spell either ground up or shaken, and are not similar to the wand use attached to Circe or captured in the Christian art.

abilities directly from God not from any subservient power.⁵⁰ The staff is not meant to recall or be associated with magic. It represents something different, something possibly more threatening and pertinent to Christians than the practice of magic.

Amongst the populace of Christians and non-Christians, there existed a distinction between magic that was commonly practiced as described in the Greek Magical Papyri, and the existence of “miracles,” “wonder works” or to use a better term, “theurgy,” what some Greeks connoted as “white magic” as opposed to “black.”⁵¹ *Theurgia* does not have as negative a connotation since it was translated as “working things divine.” “Theurgy” was associated with a person and often defined as “wonder works” or the more contemporary term, “miracles.” Persons such as Moses and Apollonius were popularly categorized as “wonder workers” or “theurgists,” and the moniker of the fourth-century wonder worker Gregory Thaumaturgus is a derivative of the term “theurgy.”⁵² Thus, “theurgy” does not bear as severe a negative stain as the term “magic.”

The practice of “black” magic in Late Antiquity is defined and catalogued in the papyri as utilizing spells, incantations, and methods that require flawlessness in execution to administer the proper effect. “Theurgy,” or miracle working, was the mark of a special individual, one that is not besmirched with the stain of practicing magic. Instead, the theurgist’s brand of white magic was associated with their particular philosophy. The young Julian, the future apostate emperor, was fascinated by the theurgic methods of Iamblichus and Maximus. Iamblichus and Maximus were neoplatonic philosophers who also utilized

⁵⁰ See Géza Vermès, *Jesus the Jew* (London: Collins, 1973), 64-69. Vermès believes Jesus’ healing command is certainly distinct from magic.

⁵¹ See Barb, “The Survival of...,” 101. *Goes* and *goetia* were eventually known as “black magic,” or sorcery, spells and magic used to manipulate or harm. Barb outlines the history of the distinction between magic and theurgy on 108.

⁵² See note 68 below.

herbs, salves and other elements to extract oracles.⁵³ The white magic these figures practiced was inextricably tied with their teachings and how they lived their lives. The use of material such as herbs is similar to spells in the papyri, however magic focused on a spell, while theurgy focused on a person or what that person embodied. The end result was attributed to the person or his brand of philosophy, not a spell. Philostratus attempted to characterize Apollonius of Tyana as such a figure, and early Christians described Moses as well as Christ in such terms. Their miracles were not dependent upon spells and proper execution, and their miracles were a reality. To live as a Late Antique Christian was to acknowledge the veracity of Christ's miracles, although that did not mean they would advocate a visual association that conflated Christ's miracles with the practice of magic.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit and the world of magic are viewed as separate and possibly competing entities in the confrontation with the Jewish magician Bar-Jesus in Acts 13 and the burning of magical books after a successful conversion in Acts 19. In Acts 8:14, Simon Magus witnesses Peter and John completing the rite of baptism by bestowing the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands, and offers to pay them money in order to obtain this power. Peter rebukes him for his wickedness, distinguishing the power of the Holy Spirit from the work of magicians. There is Christian "magic" like the Holy Spirit, and then there is the remainder of the realm; it does not seem likely early Christians would advocate a higher form of magic and ridicule another. The accusation persisted, and the church fathers were faced with delving into extant and non-scriptural sources to definitively distinguish "theurgy" from magic, and eradicate any trace of magical practice from the person of Christ. While "theurgy" will be discussed below, it appears conclusive

⁵³ Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (2nd ed.; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 167.

that the staff of Jesus, Moses and Peter is in no way associated or meant to connote the practice of magic.

IV. Theurgy and Philosophy

In the fifth century, Augustine, out of concern for anyone in his congregation engaging in supernatural activity, erased any distinction between magic and wonder working. Every act of superstition was magic for Augustine:

Those miracles and many others of the same kind – it would take too long to mention them all – were intended to support the worship of the one true God, and to prevent the cult of many false deities. They were achieved by simple faith and devout confidence, not by spells and charms composed according to the rules of criminal superstition, the craft which is called magic, or sorcery – a name of detestation – or by the more honorable title of “theurgy.” For people attempt to make some sort of distinction between practitioners of illicit arts, who are to be condemned, classing these as “sorcerers” (the popular name for this kind of thing is “black magic”) and others whom they are prepared to regard as praiseworthy, attributing to them the practice of “theurgy.” In fact, both types are engaged in the fraudulent rites of demons, wrongly called angels.⁵⁴

In his attack against both types of superstition, Augustine revealed the soft designation of “theurgy” or “wonder working” that early Christians found more receptive. Magic and sorcery were considered illicit, “black magic,” while theurgy was “more honorable,” and its practitioners were more esteemed. Even in his attack, Augustine’s comments display the early Christian understanding of theurgy and its difference with magic. Augustine understandably did not want local congregations to raise any theurgist that could possibly threaten Christ, however most figures occupying the title of theurgist in the fourth and fifth centuries were saints working in the name of Christ.⁵⁵ The notable practitioners of

⁵⁴ Augustine, *City of God* 10.9 (CSEL 40.460; Bettenson).

⁵⁵ Such as Martin of Tours and Gregory Thaumaturgus, see below.

theurgy were well-known, much more so than an ordinary magician. As detailed in scripture and hagiography, the most famous theurgists included Moses, Apollinius of Tyana, and Christ.

In a letter distinguishing the miraculous works of Christ, Augustine revealed the popular sentiment surrounding the theurgy of Moses.⁵⁶ Augustine replied that it is natural for Christ to perform similar miracles as Moses did before him:

We read that the magicians of the Egyptians, men most skilled in these arts, were surpassed by Moses, the servant of God, for, when they produced certain wonders by their wicked arts, he simply called upon God and destroyed all their devices. But Moses himself and the rest of the most truthful prophets foretold Christ the Lord and gave great glory to him. They announced beforehand that he would come, not as someone equal to themselves, nor as someone superior in the same power of working wonders, but clearly as the Lord, the God of all, and as having become a man for the sake of human beings. He himself afterwards chose to work such miracles so that it would not seem strange if he did not do in person what he had done through them. But he ought also, nonetheless, to have done some things singularly his own: to be born of a virgin, to rise from the dead, to ascend into heaven.⁵⁷

As in his comments in *City of God*, Augustine in his letter was differentiating magic and theurgy, between magicians and previous theurgists such as Moses. Jesus was not equal to Moses and not like any other theurgist for he was a true product of the divine, a mark that set him apart even if his actions resemble those of others. In his letter, Augustine stated that Jesus was superior in the realm of working wonders, but is distinct in his divinity and chose to work miracles to prove to eyewitnesses of his connection to Moses and his special status. The real evidence of Christ's superiority was in the miracle of his virgin birth, his death, and resurrection; in essence, the fact that he was the Son of God.⁵⁸ Augustine delineated a

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Ep.* 136.1. Marcellinus forwards Volusian's queries to Augustine in this letter, requesting a lengthy response.

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Ep.* 137.13 (Teske).

⁵⁸ As Augustine utilized Hebrew prophets to solidify Christ's position as superior to any spurious magician, other church fathers began to look towards pagan oracles and texts to buttress their claims about Christ.

distinction between theurgy, such as the works of Moses that Augustine described in his letter, and the work of magicians, elements that attract only the soft-headed and weak-spirited. Theurgists are different from magicians. Augustine's *City of God* effectively described the early Christian audience as open to figures that designated themselves as theurgists. In their receptivity, early Christians left the door open for non-Christian figures to manipulate the title of theurgist. Augustine made sure that the title applied only to figures in the canon of scripture, while the followers of Apollonius of Tyana thought otherwise. The distinction between theurgy and magic set figures such as Moses and Apollonius apart from common magicians, and it definitively casts the figure of Jesus, in text and art, separate from the realm of magic.

IV.1. Jesus the Philosopher

While theurgy and magic are distinct, theurgy bears an association with philosophy. Most recently, Pope Benedict XVI referred to the staff in early Christian relief sculpture in the papal encyclical *Spe Salvi*. In this document, Benedict identifies two consistent themes that appear in Christian sarcophagi: the Good Shepherd, and in his words, the philosopher:

The figure of Christ is interpreted on ancient sarcophagi principally by two images: the philosopher and the shepherd... Towards the end of the third century, on the sarcophagus of a child in Rome, we find for the first time, in the context of the resurrection of Lazarus, the figure of Christ as the true philosopher, holding the Gospel in one hand and the philosopher's traveling staff in the other. With his staff, he conquers death; the Gospel brings the truth that itinerant philosophers had searched for in vain. In this image, which then became a common feature of sarcophagus art for a long time, we see clearly what both educated and simple people

Lactantius would overtly reach into texts of the pagan past such as the Sibylline Oracles and the writings of Hermes Trismegistus to foreshadow the coming of Christ. For Hermes Trismegistus, see *Hermetica* (trans. by Brian Copenhaver; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Also see *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (ed. by B.C. McGing; New York: Routledge, 1988). See Augustine, *Against Faustus* 13.1-2 (CSEL 25.378-379): "Sibyllae de Christo praesagia aut Hermetis, quem dicunt Trismegistum, aut Orpheo aliorumque in gentilitate uatem, haec nos aliquanto ad fidem iuuare poterunt, qui ex gentibus efficitur christiani..." Augustine was also fully aware of the writings of Hermes and was much less friendly to the corpus in his *City of God* than Lactantius.

found in Christ: he tells us who man truly is and what a man must do in order to be truly human. He shows us the way, and this way is the truth. He himself is both the way and the truth, and therefore he is also the life which all of us are seeking. He also shows us the way beyond death; only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life.⁵⁹

Benedict classifies the staff in these early depictions of Christ as the “staff” of the philosopher. Christ is therefore represented as the true philosopher, exhibiting the proper mode of life, and is the teacher of the future resurrection.

Benedict’s statement surmises that the early images of Christ were influenced by the iconography and the importance of philosophers in Late Antiquity.⁶⁰ There was a tradition within early Christian art of depicting Christ as a philosopher. By depicting Christ as a philosopher, Christianity and its chief deity are placed in an honored tradition, thus legitimizing Christianity as a philosophy instead of a maligned superstition. Christ seated surrounded by disciples, or Christ standing holding a scroll in the gesture of speech all are meant to portray Christ as a teacher of wisdom.⁶¹ In the scenes of Christ’s miracles, the “philosopher” is not performing a typical action of a rudimentary philosopher, but a very special type of philosopher. Recalling Pope Benedict’s words, Christ is depicted as a philosopher since he teaches humans the truth about life and death, unlike any other ordinary philosopher. Benedict calls the staff Christ uses a “philosopher’s staff” with which he conquers death. From examining the imagery, the figure of Christ is defeating death with the staff in the raising of the dead, but he is performing other tasks as well. If Christ is

⁵⁹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Sahi*, 6. November 30, 2007.

⁶⁰ The stick indicates the peripatetic lifestyle of the philosopher; however it does not clearly represent what school the figure is meant to evoke. In fact, on philosopher sarcophagi it is not uncommon to find several schools represented on the same sarcophagus, sending a message of respect and admiration of all schools rather than specific association. Zanker, *Mask of Socrates*, 273. He cites the sarcophagus of the soldier Peregrinus, fig. 147. Zanker calls the instrument the “Cynic’s club” and associates it with a purported depiction of a philosopher in the manner of Apollonius on 265, however this is clearly uncertain.

⁶¹ See Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 44-46; and *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 44.

meant to be interpreted as a philosopher then the images of his healings and miracles exhibit him as a philosopher far from ordinary.

Christ is thus being portrayed not just as any philosopher as on earlier Roman sarcophagi, but as a philosopher with special power. Christ is portrayed as a theurgist. Theurgists were considered extraordinary philosophers that heal and perform miracles, legitimating their teachings and gaining followers. Philosophers merely teach; these special philosophers perform actions that indicate their attunement with the divine as credit to their special wisdom. Origen commented on this matter in his remarks against Celsus:

...even philosophers who have sometimes been taken in by it (magic) may read what has been written by Moiragenes of the memoirs of Apollonius of Tyana, the magician and philosopher. In them the author, who is not a Christian but a philosopher, observed that some not undistinguished philosophers were convinced by the magic of Apollonius, although when they went to him they regarded him merely as a charlatan.⁶²

Origen was recalling the work of Moiragenes who regarded Apollonius as a magician, and Philostratus' biography that depicted Apollonius as a wonder worker and philosopher, not a common magician but a theurgist.⁶³ Origen pointed out that it was not uncommon for philosophers to recognize magicians such as Apollonius as figures that walk the line between philosophy and magic. Upon close inspection, Origen claimed philosophers found Apollonius' tricks to be the work of a charlatan.⁶⁴ As discussed in Chapter Two, Philostratus attempted to brand Apollonius as a philosopher, at one point utilizing the words of Vespasian who referred to Apollonius as an esteemed philosopher.⁶⁵ There seems to be a distinction between the works of wonder performed by a described "philosopher" as

⁶² Origen, *Cels.* 6.41 (Chadwick).

⁶³ Philostratus attacks Moiragenes' characterization of Apollonius in *Life.* 1.3; 3.41.

⁶⁴ True philosophers were deemed immune to magic, as Plotinus stated that the wise man is "incapable of being affected in his soul by enchantment, and his rational part would not be affected, Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4.4.43.

⁶⁵ Philostratus, *Life.* 8.7, and Chapter Two, 51.

Philostratus deems Apollonius, and the incantations of a common magician.⁶⁶ It is the realm of theurgy where these special philosophers exist. As described above, theurgy was the opposite of “black magic,” and was acceptable by like-minded Christians and pagans alike in Late Antiquity, even though Augustine expressed his words of caution towards both practices. The theurgy of figures like Apollonius and Moses are congruent with their status as philosophers. In Late Antiquity, a theurgist can still be considered a philosopher and vice versa.

Recalling Alexander Severus’ description of imagery in his domestic sanctuary, Apollonius and Christ occupied the same space.⁶⁷ They were philosophers no doubt, but it was not their most defining characteristic. Their ability to heal and work miracles was. The designation of theurgist occupied a place in the hierarchy above magicians and at least co-mingling with philosophers. Theurgy contained elements of philosophy, and it appears that theurgists while similar to philosophers and magicians were a fairly exclusive group. The category of theurgy was extended to include other Christian figures such as Martin of Tours and Gregory Thaumaturgus whose legends included miracles and healings. In the fourth-century, Severus’ *Life of Martin* and Nyssa’s *Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus*, make it apparent that these figures who worked miracles and healings in their lives were distinct miracle men, connected with Christian philosophy, yet in a category that distinguished them from any ordinary teachers. Nyssa called Gregory the “Teacher” as his ability as a philosopher was consistently recorded, and his name “Thaumaturgus” is a derivative of “theurgy” and translates as “wonder worker.” Gregory is not described as an ordinary philosopher; he is

⁶⁶ See Apuleius’ defense discussed earlier in Chapter Two, 54. It should be noted that Philostratus’ efforts to cloak Apollonius as a philosopher was largely unsuccessful. He was thought of as a magician by other magicians, and as a wonder worker, but not as a definitive philosopher. The papyri indicated that magicians invoked Apollonius in *PGM XIa*.

⁶⁷ *Historia Augusta, Life of Severus Alexander* 29.

Moses was known as a Jewish wonder worker in Late Antiquity, a status conferred on him by figures such as Pliny and Celsus. Eusebius even went so far as to call Moses a contributor to the Isis cult, emphasizing his wonder working ability.⁷⁰ Moses was also referenced in several places in the magical papyri. In one incantation, the magician was supposed to take on the persona of Moses, saying “I am Moses your prophet to whom you have transmitted your mysteries, celebrated by Israel.”⁷¹ In another the author credited Moses as an author of a secret book of spells, “The Eighth Book of Moses,” exhibiting Moses as a model for all magicians.⁷² Moses was considered a supernatural figure, as Origen claimed: “There have been two men who have come to visit the human race of whom supernatural miracles have been recorded; I mean Moses, your lawgiver...and Jesus.”⁷³

Moses was a wonder worker of such esteem that Christians attempted to connect important figures to Moses in order to appropriate his wondrous attributes. Nyssa’s *Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus* accomplished the appropriation of Moses, as Gregory was depicted performing similar miracles and was considered greater than the Jewish patriarch.⁷⁴ Instead of the crossing of the Red Sea, Gregory was described drying up a marsh, a feat “worthy of Moses mover the water, not dividing the depths in two parts by a blow of his staff, but drying up the whole thing altogether.”⁷⁵ Nyssa portrayed Gregory’s miracle as greater by

⁷⁰ See Pliny, *Natural History* 30.11; Origen cited Celsus’ claim concerning the Jews, “they worship angels and are addicted to sorcery of which Moses was their teacher,” (*Cels.* 26); Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.27.30, see *La preparation évangélique*, SC (ed. by G. Schroeder and É des Places; Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1991). Also see John Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972) and notes 74, 82 in addition to Nyssa’s references below of Moses’ ability .

⁷¹ PGM V.110 (Betz).

⁷² PGM XIII.1-343 (Betz).

⁷³ Origen, *Cels.* 1.45 (Chadwick).

⁷⁴ See *Life of Gregory*, PG 46.908D. Another Nyssa considered Gregory greater than Moses was that Moses married, and Gregory’s only consort was God.

comparison since the entire area was dried up and did not involve a staff. However, Gregory did indeed perform a miracle using a staff in a direct attempt to replicate Moses. Nyssa's recorded Gregory's miracle of curtailing the flow of a river by plunging his staff deep into the ground, and leaving it there where it sprung into a tree.⁷⁶ The works of Moses as well as his instrument struck a chord with Christians. In early Christian art, the appropriation of Moses' staff is limited to two figures: Jesus and Peter, while patristic texts record figures such as Gregory commandeering Moses' staff in an attempt to appropriate and supplant Moses.

The staff of Moses, occasionally referred to as a "rod," is recognized as an important accessory that accentuates the miracle working nature of the patriarch. In the Pentateuch, Moses works wonders with the instrument of the staff, including the crossing of the Red Sea and the striking of the rock. The church fathers noticed the staff of Moses as a vital component of Moses' theurgy. While Moses was undoubtedly a worker of wonders, the staff plays a vital role in his miraculous works. Ambrose catalogued the uses of Moses' rod in *On the Mysteries*. The relationship between Moses' miracles and water allow Ambrose to mine these references as significant to the rite of baptism:

Moses was holding a rod, he cast it down and it became a serpent (Exodus 4.3-4). Again, he took hold of the tail of the serpent and it returned to the nature of a rod. You see that by virtue of the prophetic office there were two changes, of the nature both of the serpent and of the rod...The people of the Hebrews were shut in on every side, hemmed in on the one hand by the Egyptians, on the other by the sea; Moses lifted up his rod, the water divided and hardened like walls, and a way for the feet appeared between the waves (Exodus 14:21ff). Jordan being turned back, returned, contrary to nature, to the source of its stream (Joshua 3:16). Is it not clear that the nature of the waves of the sea and of the river stream was changed? The people of the fathers thirsted, Moses touched the rock, and water flowed out of the rock (Exodus 17:6). Did not grace work a result contrary to nature, so that the rock poured forth water, which by nature it did not contain? Marsh was a most bitter

⁷⁵ *Life of Gregory*, PG 46.928A (Slusser).

⁷⁶ *Life of Gregory*, PG 46.932B-C.

stream, so that the thirsting people could not drink. Moses cast wood into the water, and the water lost its bitterness, which grace of a sudden tempered (Exodus 15:25).⁷⁷

In Christian art, the crossing of the Red Sea and the striking of the rock are the most prominent scenes that depict Moses' use of the rod. In Christian representations, the rod of Moses is reed-like and flexible as depicted in the striking of the Red Sea at the catacomb of Via Latina. In several examples of relief sculpture, Moses is captured in the crossing of the Red Sea in a different motion with the rod. Instead of striking the river, he leans on the rod as the river unfolds and separates next to him (See Figure 34). The striking of the rock incorporates a similar manner of rod use (See Figure 26). Moses touches the rock with his staff while representations of the Israelites kneel below to catch the water. It is apparent in text and art that the rod of Moses is an inextricable component of his wonder working action in these scenes.

Ambrose described a story involving Moses' rod use in *On the Mysteries*, as he recalled the moment from Exodus 4 when God provides Moses with instructions on how to persuade Pharaoh to believe him. God tells Moses to throw down his rod and it will become a serpent. During the actual confrontation with Pharaoh in Exodus 7, it is Aaron that actually throws down the rod after Moses tells him what to do. Aaron competes with the magicians of Pharaoh and it is the Hebrew act of wonder that wins the day. The text emphasizes that Moses is certainly greater than any magician; just as Apollonius, he belongs in the ranks of an esteemed theurgist. The text contains a compelling inclusion of the image of the serpent. Just as the serpent was a notable motif in the cult of Asclepius, its appearance here is an interesting addition to the recognizable examples of Moses' rod. Following the Lord's sign of the rod in Exodus 4:3, God provides Moses with another sign

⁷⁷ Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 9.51 (NPNF 2.10.324).

to perform. God tells Moses to put his hand in his cloak, “and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow. ‘Now put it back into your cloak,’ he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.” Moses’ wonder working ability is also physically restorative; his hand was damaged and then healed. The command Moses exhibits over the serpent and over healing provides fecund material to juxtapose Moses with the cult of Asclepius. As Christ is the fulfillment of Moses, early Christians explored this avenue of thought in art and imagery.

V.1. The Brazen Serpent

Moses’ rod use in Exodus is not the only rod and serpent material that early Christians manipulated. The pericope of Numbers 21:6 is referred to as the “brazen serpent” episode. In the text, Moses is leading the Israelites towards the Promised Land, but due to their persistent complaining: “the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, ‘We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’ So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.” In John’s gospel, the author referred directly to the text in Numbers, connecting the serpent of Moses to the passion of Jesus: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14).⁷⁸

⁷⁸ John’s text provided the moniker “the brazen serpent” to Moses’ story. As seen in the following chapters, the serpent of Moses appears in many instances of early Christian art, and becomes a popular theme in

The significance of the Numbers text drew comments by patristic authors such as Justin Martyr. Justin was aware of what the serpent represented. He excoriated it as a symbol of pagan religion, “and along with each of those whom you esteem gods there is painted a serpent, a great symbol and mystery.” Justin characterized the serpent as the devil: “For among us the prince of the wicked spirits is called the serpent, and Satan.”⁷⁹ Justin may have been referring to the serpent as a symbol of the healing cult of Asclepius; however it is more likely the serpent symbolized pagan religion in general. Later in his apology, he depicted the brazen serpent incident from Numbers as a victory of Christ over the serpent: “when the Israelites went out of Egypt and were in the wilderness, they fell in with poisonous beasts, both vipers and asps, and every kind of serpent, which slew the people; and that Moses, by the inspiration and influence of God, took brass, and made it into the figure of a cross, and set it in the holy tabernacle, and said to the people, ‘If you look to this figure, and believe, you shall be saved thereby.’”⁸⁰ Justin may be taking the allegory from Numbers and juxtaposing Christ with the serpents. Instead of healing the people, they inflict them with pain and disease, recalling the duplicitous serpent in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. Moses takes the serpent and fashions it into a cross, the symbol of Christian victory, and when the Israelites gaze upon it they are healed.

With the mention of serpents in the context of healing, it is possible the brazen serpent recalls Asclepius. In imagery, Asclepius was represented with a snake-entwined staff, not unlike the snake-entwined cross.⁸¹ Like the philosopher’s peripatetic staff, it is an

Renaissance painting, including a depiction in Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel, and Tintoretto, Poussin, and Rubens all include representations of it in their repertoire

⁷⁹ Justin, *1 Apol* 27-28. Also see Chapter Three, 103.

⁸⁰ Justin, *1 Apol*. 60.

⁸¹ Apuleius described Asclepius’ staff as an un-planed branch of a tree in his work, *The Golden Ass*: “the staff of the Doctor God, Asclepius, the staff that he carries with him, the one with the knots and the knobs where the

identifiable characteristic that marks Asclepius as Asclepius.⁸² However, it is more likely the serpent represents outside threats to Christianity that perhaps include Asclepius. While the staff of Moses or Christ bears no direct relation to the staff of Asclepius, it does not mean that the scenes of Christ's miracles and healings are not evocative of Asclepius. The context of healing suggests such an evocation. The serpent episode symbolizes Christian victory over pagan threats that include Asclepius, but the episode does not suggest Asclepius as the primary rival as it does not identify Asclepius specifically. Moreover, Moses' use of his staff is not intended to recall Asclepius.

In Christian art, the brazen serpent is represented often. The scene appears on a panel of the wooden doors of the church of Santa Sabina in Rome, erected around 432 CE. The relief panels include scenes from the Old and New Testament, featuring one of the oldest known representations of the crucifixion. The doors of Santa Sabina have been restored and not only have some been lost but the original order of the panels has been altered given the lack of chronology in the scenes represented.

One of the relief panels depicts scenes from Exodus including the crossing of the Red Sea. At the bottom of the panel is an enigmatic image of Moses wielding the staff in front of another individual with two snakes separating the figures (see Figure 35). This has been interpreted as a scene of the "brazen serpent" from Numbers; however it can easily be

branches have been cut off short Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 1.4: "dei medici baculo, quod ramulis semiamputatis nodosum gerit..."

⁸² The staff is directly related to the tree it derives from, the cypress tree. In a letter ascribed to Hippocrates, the author detailed a great festival that takes place on the island of Kos, a place with a rich affiliation with medicine and the cult of Asclepius. Letter XI in É. Littré's edition of Hippocrates works, vol. IX of *Oeuvres d'Hippocrates* (Paris, 1861), 327. It was a symbolic ritual that emphasized the return to the sacred heritage of Asclepius. Apollo, Asclepius' father, was connected to the cypress, as was the son. The cypress was revered for its greenery and longevity, attaining the symbolism of eternal life. On Kos, the heritage of Asclepius was celebrated in this pilgrimage to the cypress grove, and his staff is a visual reminder of the longevity, infallibility, and power of the god. Also see C. Kerényi, *Asklepios: Archetypal Images of the Physician's Existence* (New York: Pantheon, 1959), 52-55. See Asklepios 211 and 42 from Glyptothèque Ny Carlsberg, Copenhagen and the Museo Archeologico in Venice (LIMC).

the scene of the rod turning into a serpent from Exodus.⁸³ What is notable is that not far from this panel, is a panel of Christ performing the miracle at Cana, the division of the loaves, and the raising of Lazarus, all with a staff (Figure 36). The staff that Christ uses is the same instrument that Moses uses in his panel. While this evidence does not prove that the brazen serpent is meant to evoke Christ's victory over Asclepius, it tightens the association between Moses and Christ and the instrument they both wield.

The brazen serpent appears on the reliquary casket of Brescia in a similar manner as on the doors of Santa Sabina. In this instance, the scene of Moses and the serpent is smaller than the scenes of Christ working miracles, but the staff they both utilize is unmistakably the same instrument. On the late fourth-century casket, the serpent is entwined around a rod while Moses is depicted next to it, gesturing toward the serpent with his staff. Some scholars speculate that this image may recall Daniel poisoning the Babylonian dragon, depicted as a serpent raised up on a rod.⁸⁴ Daniel uses no instrument in his poisoning as captured in scripture. Moses is undeniably connected to the staff and has been depicted in the act of using it multiple times up to the date of the Brescia Casket. The evidence suggests that the brazen serpent represents Moses instead of Daniel.

The staff of Jesus is meant to recall the staff Moses utilizes in the performance of his miracles. The iconography confirms the intention by sight, and the textual references reveal the motivation to connect the wonders of Moses to the miracles of Jesus. Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* was perhaps the most explicit:

⁸³ Hugo Brandenburg, *Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 175-176. Brandenburg only identifies it as a scene from Exodus.

⁸⁴ From Daniel 14:23 (Bel and the Dragon). See Catherine Brown Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket: Typology and the Early Christian Imagination* (Paris: University of Notre Dame Press; Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 2001), 86. Her interpretation is influenced by W.F. Volbach who reached the same conclusion in his *Early Christian Art*, 328. Interpreting it as a paradox to Christ's victory over death on the cross is far-fetched. There is no strong precedent for including this image from Daniel in Christian art.

When Moses was sent with a rod to deliver the people, he held it in his hands at their head, and he divided the sea in two. With this rod he touched the rock and saw water gush forth. And, by throwing a tree into the bitter waters of Marah, he made them sweet. By placing rods in their drinking-places, Jacob caused the sheep of his mother's brother to conceive... Aaron's rod, by blossoming, proved him to be the high priest. Isaiah, indeed, foretold that Christ would come forth as a rod from the root of Jesse.⁸⁵

According to Justin, Christ will come as a "rod." His miracle working power is connected to the wonders of Moses. The rod became a common element tying the two figures together. It is no accident that the staff of Jesus is stylistically similar to the rod of Moses. The motivation of depicting Christ wielding a staff is to depict him as a wonder worker similar yet superior to Moses. The staff marks him as a prophecy fulfilled: He is the rod from the root of Jesse, and his staff and effective miracles prove it to be so. The staff of Moses was a remarkable and tangible attribute that is useful to endow Christian figures with the traits of Moses, and remind viewers of the Christian fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. This usage of Moses' staff is not limited to the person of Christ; it also occurs in Christian art with the figure of Peter.

VI. The Staff of Peter

Peter wields the staff of Christ in multiple scenes on early Christian relief sculpture (Figure 37).⁸⁶ Most notably the staff appears in the rock striking scene, recalling the legend

⁸⁵ Justin, *Dial.* 86.1-4 (Falls). Centuries later, John of Damascus calls the rod of Moses akin to the "cross" of Jesus: "The rod of Moses which smote the sea with the form of a cross and saved Israel...the bitter water made sweet by a tree, and the rock being struck and gushing forth streams of water...a serpent raised in triumph upon a tree, as if dead, with the tree preserving those who with faith beheld the dead enemy" (*Orth. Faith*, 4.11; Chase). Moses is connected to Christ with the rod/tree as a common element, foreshadowing Christ's death on a "tree," and in the fourth-fifth century, the tree/true cross performed as many healings and wonders as Moses did.

⁸⁶ Deichmann numbers the Moses Striking the Rock examples on Roman sarcophagi at a little over 22; he identifies Peter in cognate scenes around 56 times (see Deichmann, *Ikongraphisches Register*, Band I, 124; the

of Peter baptizing his Roman jailers prior to his martyrdom by striking the walls of his cell.⁸⁷ The scene of Peter striking the rock is not from the gospels, but from the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*. The story describes Peter performing a similar water miracle as Moses performed in Exodus in order to baptize the Roman converts, Processus and Martinianus.⁸⁸

In the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, the apostle was portrayed as a formidable theurgist. The text including Peter striking the rock is difficult to date, as it was preserved in a Latin version narrated by Pseudo-Linus and inserted in the narrative prior to Peter's martyrdom.⁸⁹ The date of the text was likely late fourth-century, however the story and legend of Peter striking the rock was probably much older, preserved in oral tradition. The stories of Peter's miracles and abilities, compiled in the *Acts of Peter*, were possibly well-told tales. In some memorable instances, he out-dueled Simon Magus, made a dog speak, and even brought smoked herring back to life.⁹⁰ All recorded instances of Peter striking the rock on relief sculpture begin appearing in the second quarter of the fourth century.⁹¹ The dating of the

Gallic and North African material is similarly conflated, see Band III, 302). The problem is how to identify true Moses scenes and true Peter scenes, however the evidence of the jailers and other symbols on the relief sculpture points towards a larger number of Peter scenes than Moses scenes.

⁸⁷ *Acts of Peter*, 5 (Linus text). For further reading see Jensen, "Moses Imagery in Jewish and Christian Art," *SBLSP* (1992) 395-398. The *Acts of Peter* is difficult to date as it incorporates several strains. The text that includes the water miracle was narrated by Pseudo-Linus, and dates from the mid fourth century (see note 88 below). For the Latin text see Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 1, 1-22; for the text and transmission see Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* II, 285.

⁸⁸ *Acts of Peter*, 5 (Linus text). The text certainly depicts Peter as a wonder worker. Processus and Martinianus are so grateful they help Peter escape from jail, whereupon he meets Christ on the road outside Rome and becomes aware of his destiny.

⁸⁹ See Andrew Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 347, and Jensen, "Moses Imagery," 395. The dating of the text is a problematic and complicated issue that can only be briefly noted here. The Linus text possibly dates as late as the sixth century, however Thomas argues for a late fourth-century dating, and also notes (as Jensen does) that the stories in the *Acts of Peter* were passed down through oral tradition, and very well could be as early as the second century. See Christine Thomas, *The Acts of Peter, Gospel Literature, and the Ancient Novel: Rewriting the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 43 and 14. Also see C. Pietri, "Pierre-Moïse et sa communauté," *Roma Christiana* 1 (1976), 336-340.

⁹⁰ *Acts of Peter*, 12-14.

⁹¹ This is confirmed by Deichmann, Band I, pt. 2, 86-87.

visual art suggests that Christians knew the story of Peter striking the rock well enough to portray it frequently.

In Christian art, the way Peter is depicted in this scene is analogous to Moses striking the rock. They both are standing next to a rock, striking it with the staff, as a stream of water is depicted rushing down the side. In the catacomb images, Moses is portrayed striking the rock for the Israelites, as Moses utilizes his rod to produce the water while one or more figures anxiously await its release. In relief sculpture, Moses is still represented as a major figure, however in the striking of the rock he is often replaced with the figure of Peter.

The conflation between Moses and Peter makes it difficult to interpret who the main character is in the scene of the striking of the rock on Christian relief sculpture. In a fragment from the late fourth century, the figure striking the rock is beardless, very much akin to the shorn Moses in the catacomb paintings of Via Latina (Figure 26). Next to him is a scene of the woman with the issue of blood featuring a bearded Jesus. In an image from the same era, the figure striking the rock is bearded, flanked by a depiction of Christ raising Lazarus portraying a clean-shaven Christ (Figure 39). Whether the figure striking the rock is Moses or Peter especially considering the issue of restoration, this example specifically highlights the difficulty in determining the identification of the figure striking the rock. In both scenes, the figure striking the rock is accompanied by smaller figures awaiting the release of the water, similar to the catacomb images of Moses striking the rock. In the center scene below the central figure in Figure 39, a pastoral scene of lambs is carved. This scene may recall both Moses and Peter as shepherds of the people; just as Moses his flock out of Egypt, Peter leads the flock of the Christian church. Even though all of the familiar symbols of Moses striking the rock are present in each image, the multiple instances of depicting Peter striking the rock in mid fourth-century relief sculpture makes this identification

uncertain. The early Christians were adapting the familiar tradition of depicting Moses striking the rock and carving the apostle in his place. By the fourth century, Peter became the Christian Moses. Thus in many of the mid to late fourth-century fragments that include the striking of the rock with no other discerning factors, Moses is evoked but it is actually Peter. Peter effectively supplants the image of Moses in the eyes of a Christian audience; a move that is more recognizable in examples that including several figures and images.

Some clues aid in determining whether the agent striking the rock is Moses or Peter. When the striking of the rock appears amongst other scenes, it is common for the striking of the rock to occur at one of the ends of the relief. This is perhaps due to carving techniques, as the “water” featured in the scene serves as a border encapsulating the carved scenes. Next to the scene of the striking of the rock, it is common to find the arrest of Peter that occurs in Acts 12. Peter, bearded, is grasped on either side by soldiers, denoted by their short tunics and head coverings, as he clutches his staff (See Figure 37-38). It is also common to find the figure of Peter, similarly bearded, next to these two scenes once again in the striking of the rock and other scenes. Peter is identified by the cock at his feet. When one or more of these Peter scenes occur in conjunction with the striking of the rock, it is fairly conclusive that the agent in the striking of the rock is Peter. Once the staff is associated with Peter in the striking of the rock, the instrument does not go away. The connection with Moses is made clear in the scene of Peter striking of the rock, and the continued presence of the staff in Peter’s arrest is meant to continue the identification of Peter with Moses.⁹²

⁹² In non-funerary art as in the apse mosaic of S. Constanza, Peter is handed the law from Christ bearing a strong resemblance to Moses, and clutching a thin rod that is further meant to associate Peter as Moses. In the Mausoleum of Constanza, built for Constantine’s sister in 350 CE, two opposing apses are decorated in mosaics featuring Peter. For further reading, see Johannes Deckers, “Constantine the Great and Early Christian Art,” in *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (ed. by Jeffrey Spier; New Haven, CT: Yale

It is curious why Christians would be interested in replacing a frequently depicted scene of Moses from the catacombs with a scene of Peter. Even if the story of Peter baptizing his jailers was popular, there were several examples of Peter baptizing in the Acts of the Apostles that would seem more likely candidates for early Christians to portray.⁹³ The apocryphal selection was chosen since it firmly places Peter in the guise of Moses the patriarch. The staff is the key visual element that connects Peter to Moses, and by inserting Peter into the narrative, he assumes the place of Moses in Christian art. Not only is Peter the new Moses, the shepherd of the new church just as Moses was shepherd of the Israelites, Peter is inserted into a scene connoting baptism. Peter is portrayed as the first bishop of the church, endowed to perform Christ's holy sacrament.

The apocryphal text was chosen due to its portrayal of Peter as Moses within the context of baptism. No other baptismal scene in Acts has the apostle wielding an instrument releasing water from the rock as in Exodus 17, and appearing as the Jewish patriarch. Baptism is symbolized in the catacombs when Moses is the agent in the image, however on the Christian sarcophagi the patriarchal role Moses occupied has been transferred to Peter. The catacomb images with Christ wielding a similar instrument as Moses' rod similarly insist upon Christ as the New Moses. In the relief sculpture, Christ wields the staff as well; however Peter is associated with Moses due to his inclusion in the striking of the rock. The Jewish patriarch becomes the Christian patriarch, as the inclusion of the apocryphal scene makes clear; Peter is a theurgist on par with Moses.

The baptismal stories involving Peter were not the only influential texts that exhibited the wonder working ability of Peter. There were also stories of Peter's remarkable

University Press, 2007), 95, and Hugo Brandenburg, *Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 82-86.

⁹³ Acts 2:40 and 10:48, reports on baptism to the church at 11:15.

ability as a healer. The first half of Acts of the Apostles includes several notable accounts of Peter's ability as a healer. He healed the lame with his touch, and with his voice in the name of Jesus, and even raised Tabitha/Dorcas back to life.⁹⁴ Peter not only healed directly, but as Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood indirectly, Peter's shadow healed in Acts 5:15: "so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by." The accounts involving Peter in Acts demonstrate the many options early Christians could consider when depicting Peter in art. Granted, carving an image of Peter's shadow healing men and women would be difficult. Instead of selecting from Acts, the early Christians relied upon a rather obscure instance of Peter baptizing his jailers to decorate their funerary monuments, and deliberately show Peter as Moses.

While Christ is continually portrayed as a healer and miracle worker, Peter's most frequent miracle depiction is the striking of the rock. Other miracles involving Peter are rare in early Christian art.⁹⁵ Moses' staff, mentioned in the texts and realized in early Jewish and Christian art, was appropriated by Christ in the performance of his healings and miracles. In the relief sculpture, the staff is handed down to Peter (Figure 37-38). This does not mean that Christ is bereft of his staff completely in early Christian art. Christ still performs miracles with the staff, often on the same frontals as Peter striking the rock with the staff

⁹⁴ Acts 3, Peter heals a crippled beggar, heals Aeneas in the name of Jesus at Acts 9.32, resurrects Tabitha/Dorcas at 9.41.

⁹⁵ See Herbert Kessler, "Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles on Some Early Christian Ivories," in *Gesta*, vol. 18, no. 1 (November 1977-February 1978), 111-112. On a late fourth-century ivory that is in the British Museum in London, below a depiction of Peter striking the rock is a scene of Peter raising Tabitha from Acts 9:36-42. On the Brescia Casket, a reliquary that includes Jesus raising Lazarus with the staff, Peter is included in a large frontal in a scene of Ananias and Sapphira. Peter confronts Sapphira while men carry the dead body of Ananias away. Peter in this scene is not depicted giving life but taking it away. The scene of Ananias and Sapphira occurs more often after the fifth century with Peter's role as heir to Christ and head of the church secure. The scene is included to emphasize the power Christ's scion had over life and death, and that Peter should be feared as God should be feared.

(See Figures 16-17). The art indicates that the staff is in the act of being appropriated by Peter. Peter is now depicted as the New Moses, as evidenced by the inclusion of the apocryphal scene of the striking of the rock, and his continued presence with the staff in his arrest.

In surrounding scenes of the arrest of Peter and Peter's betrayal, the apostle is shown clutching the staff in his hand. Although the staff is not an integral part of the action as in the striking of the rock, the art exhibits the Christian desire to associate Peter with Moses by including this visual attribute with Peter. The staff is enmeshed with the person and miracle working action of Moses. Thus, it seems that in Christian art, the staff itself recalls Moses.

Conclusion

The staff in Christ's hand, touching Lazarus' tomb for example, implies both Moses and Asclepius in a context of healing. The staff is not an empty symbol, an example of the influence of pagan artists and workshops. The staff's persistence inclusion in the art and imagery of the early Christians demands an explanation. The staff has forced some to draw the conclusion that it is meant to cast Jesus as a magician, or as a philosopher. As demonstrated, those conclusions are largely unsatisfactory. No Late Antique magicians used such an instrument in practice, and philosophers also are not described using a wand or staff in their act of performance. The miracles of Christ resided in the realm of theurgy, a positive conception of wonder working that bore an association with philosophy. The theurgists Apollonius of Tyana and Moses likely posed the closest threat to Christ in terms of miracle working ability. Apollonius is also never characterized as using a staff in the performance of his wonders. That leaves Moses. The staff of Christ is more than just a symbol of power; it is an indication of his miracle working and restorative ability.

While the staff is meant to display Jesus' miracle working ability, his hand is meant to recall his healing ability. The staff of Jesus evokes Moses, but the action taking place in the raising the dead reflects an attention to Asclepius. Healing scenes obviously recall Asclepius, however the influence of Asclepius can be seen in the resurrection scenes as well. Christ performing a successful resurrection recalls Asclepius' lack of divine authority. In addition to witnessing the Johannine Christ in a scene of the raising of Lazarus, the early Christians would also recognize the power of Christ over any competitor, including Asclepius. By exhibiting his divine authority and completing a resurrection with the touch of the staff, Christ exhibits a power over death that Asclepius the god of healing could not claim. On fourth-century relief sculpture with images of healings intermingled with the raising of the dead, Christ is clearly demonstrated as the physician of body and soul to the point that Christ can bring the soul back from death. The healing and resurrecting power of Christ that is on display with both hand and staff is meant to exhibit Christ as uniquely divine, comparable to no other deity.

The significance of the staff reveals an environment of religious competition in Late Antiquity. The staff's connection with Moses illustrates that early Christians were utilizing the visual medium to exude the portrait of Christ as the superior theurgist. The staff defines the consistent desire to portray Christ with a familiar stylistic accessory that places Moses in the minds of their viewers in order that Jesus will be viewed not only as the fulfillment of prophecy but greater than Moses. The examples of the staff in relief sculpture may bear a special significance. In the catacombs the association between Moses and Christ is fairly clear due to the proximity in location of the images. Jesus with the staff obviously recalls Moses' rod that is portrayed nearby as in the Red Cubiculum of the catacomb of Domitilla.

In the fourth century, Peter is included in the exclusive cast of staff-bearers, effectively replacing Moses.

In the relief sculpture, Peter takes Moses' place and the staff also takes on a different valence. The staff is bequeathed to Peter in the effort to cast him as the New Moses. The staff is still omnipresent in the miracles of Christ. While Peter is intentionally cast as Moses in an easily recognizable scene, Christ can take on a different mantle. The staff characterizes Christ as the supreme miracle worker; however, with the majority of scenes deriving from the gospel of John, such as the Cana miracle and the raising of Lazarus, it is the Divine Logos that is meant to be defined by his miracle working ability (see Figure 32). Christ can include Peter as a staff-bearer and still be recognized as the supreme miracle worker since Christ is the pre-existent Logos that came before Peter and Moses. Thus, Christ is the primordial bearer of the staff, not Moses, just as he is the preeminent wonder worker. With the strict attention given to the Johannine narrative, Christ can be displayed with the staff as the Logos who came before Moses. With the inclusion of Peter in the imagery, Christ allows Peter, the leader of his church, to inherit the symbol of his ability and carry the tradition forward. Similarly, in the same time frame as these late fourth-century examples of relief sculpture, the reported healings of Martin of Tours and wonders of Gregory Thaumaturgus solidify the title of theurgist as under the aegis of Christianity. Just as Peter is displayed as inheritor of the title in art, these figures embody the title in the minds of Christians.

The staff that occurs on numerous occasions in the fourth and fifth centuries does not entirely disappear after the fifth century although its appearance certainly dissipates. The miracles and healings of Christ are portrayed with less frequency after the fifth century with only the requisite miracles such as the raising of Lazarus remaining the most depicted in

circulation.⁹⁶ The staff of Christ the Miracle Worker is left to the era when Christ's miracles and healings were deemed most important. For the established church, the staff was an unnecessary accoutrement, written out of the art and replaced with a cross, a hand or nothing at all.

Following the fourth and fifth centuries, the staff of Jesus is not usually depicted for its depiction is not necessary. To repeatedly assert Jesus as the supreme miracle worker and healer is inessential when that supremacy has long been established. The primordial steps of the church's establishment required such a reminder in the dusk of a pluralistic environment of the fourth and fifth centuries. That reminder was needed no longer as the staff evolved and eventually fell out of the art. In most representations of the raising of Lazarus from the early medieval era onward it is the auricular power of Jesus' voice and gesture that are the mark of his miracle working abilities. In the Rossano Gospels, Jesus merely gestures with his hand towards the *aediculum* bearing Lazarus. In medieval representations by Duccio and Giotto, Jesus' voice and hand gesture are emphasized while Lazarus wrapped in the linen cloth gains facial and bodily characteristics. In Rembrandt's depiction from 1630, Lazarus emerges from his tomb as Jesus stands over him with a raised hand like a puppet master, raising the body of Lazarus on a string. When Jesus is depicted performing healings and miracles after the fifth century, a much declined motif than ever before, he emphatically demonstrates his divine power without paraphernalia.

⁹⁶ In later depictions, the staff of Jesus evolves into a cross. On the fifth-century Andrews diptych, the staff is still present, however on an ivory diptych in Ravenna from just a century later, the staff has visibly transitioned into a cross, as Christ gesticulates with his hand towards the *aediculum* with a newly discernable Lazarus, see Volbach, *Early Christian Art*, pl. 223.

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST THE MIRACLE WORKER

I. The Role of Healing and Miracles into the Early Medieval Era

After the fifth century, as the “health care” system shifted into a focus upon the relics of the saints, healing and miracle imagery was still prevalent but the person of Christ was not the pivotal actor in the drama. The miracle working agency of the apostles and the saints was emphasized. Whether concentrating on Peter, Paul, Stephen or local martyrs, Christ as the primary miracle worker was replaced in favor of the saints. The shift reflected the attention and devotion to the cult and relics of the saints. Chronic ailments and plagues continued in early medieval Europe, requiring the divine healing the relics provided, filling the role once occupied by the pagan healing cult.¹ Images of the apostles on caskets, reliquary boxes and objects signified the divine source of the miracles and their efficacy. The material culture of the period may also reflect a continuing competition with the practice of magic.²

Theurgy, the work of the wonder worker, continued to be distinguished against magic into the early medieval period. The great miracle worker in Christ, however, was not as omnipresent in text and art as in the third and fourth centuries. Martin of Tours, Gregory of Tours, and Gregory Thaumaturgus became renowned and beloved in the Christian West as miracle workers *par excellence*. The power of their miracle working nature was divine,

¹ Katherine Park calls early medieval Europe a “universe of disease” in “Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe, 500-1500,” in *Medicine in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 60.

² See Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2004), 116 and A.A. Barb, “The Survival of the Magic Arts,” in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (ed. A. Momigliano; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 100.

except not in the same way as Christ. Their miracle working power was manifested through their material remains. The transference of power regarding relics has Acts 19:11 in mind: “And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.”

Material objects that came in contact with the saints have the ability to work miracles. Augustine dealt with this burgeoning trend in Hippo with the advent of Stephen’s relics. In Gaul, the cult of Martin of Tours was undoubtedly the most prominent, although several others existed in Gaul including the cult of Hilary in Poitiers and the cult of Julian in Brioude. Martin of Tours’ popularity was unsurpassed given that he was a miracle worker in his own lifetime. In the late fourth century, people would gather any object his hand may have graced to use as a healing relic. Although Martin died in 397, his hagiographer (and Paulinus of Nola’s close friend) Sulpicius Severus completed a collection of his miracles in Martin’s own lifetime.³ Over a century later, Gregory of Tours continued Martin’s legacy, and chronicled his healings through the use of assorted paraphernalia. Gregory’s brother was cured of an illness by dust at the tomb of Julian at Brioude, and Gregory himself was healed at the tomb of Martin. Gregory used Martin’s relics for protection as well as curing various people in his episcopate.⁴

Gregory Thaumaturgus’ healings included the use of paraphernalia. In one account recorded by Nyssa, Gregory heals an afflicted boy by breathing on a linen cloth and

³ See Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 112; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 55. Brown does not underestimate Severus’ or Paulinus’ importance, as he calls Paulinus a founder, along with Augustine, of Latin Christian piety. In the *Life of Martin*, a woman thought she was blinded because of her sins, and a man believed his paralysis was due to his own actions, Severus, *Life of Martin* 2.28; 2.40. Martin’s sixth-century successor, Gregory of Tours effectively marketed the life and relics of Martin as healing implements. See Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 50.

⁴ See Gregory’s *Life of Martin* 1.32-33, 36; 2.2, in Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 199.

throwing it over the boy.⁵ Following the tradition of *brandea*, the material that comes into direct contact even with the living saint can produce miraculous cures. During the late sixth-century pontificate of Gregory the Great, the prominence of *brandea* was firmly established and widely known. Gregory received requests from the Byzantine empress Constantina for the head of the apostle Paul or some part of Paul's body. Gregory rejected the empress' request and replied that the bodies of Paul and Peter were so powerful that "one cannot even go to pray there without great fear." He reported that the monks involved in an excavation project encountered the remains of St. Lawrence and died shortly afterwards.⁶ Relics were considered too powerful for any person, especially a layperson, to directly encounter. As an afterthought, Gregory offered to send her *brandea*, a box of cloths that came in contact with the saint, or the filings from the chains of Peter.

In this context, images of miracles were not necessarily confined to a catacomb wall or a sarcophagus frontal.⁷ Material culture effected miracles, transmitting the power of Christ through his emissaries, the saints. Just as Peter was endowed with the staff in fourth-century relief sculpture, marking his authority as the Christian Moses, the relics of the saints also marked the authority of Christ's church. The relics provided a greater legacy to add to the saints' earthly accomplishments. Miraculous healings of the saints asserted the authority of the church.⁸ In Gregory's Tours, healings usually consisted of confession, forgiveness

⁵ See *Life of Gregory*, (PG 46.941D-944A).

⁶ See Gregory the Great, *Ep.* 4.30 (NPNF 2.12.155-156; CCSL 140.248-50), and Dennis Trout's "Damasus and the Invention of Early Christian Rome," in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33.3 (2003), 528. He claims at the end of his letter that the ease of removing the filings is due in part to the faith or worthiness of the supplicant. Sometimes the filings come off quickly, but if Constantina is not worthy, it may take a while.

⁷ Miracle images do continue. There were a group of ivories produced in Italy just after 400, featuring the healings and miracles of Christ including the Carrand diptych. Also note the fifth-century Andrews diptych depicted in Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, fig. 48, and images of Santa Sabina (Figures 35-36) from 432-435 CE. See Kessler, "Scenes from the Acts of the Apostles," 112 for further reading on the ivories.

and reconciliation and were public events. In an era when relics proliferated, towns competed over whose relics were most efficacious, and Gregory promoted Martin at the expense of any rival communities. While many people were purportedly cured of their ailments, the miracles reflected “care” more than “cure.” Miracles of the saints did not restore a suffering life to perfection; that would come in the future life. Instead, miracles offered opportunities for a brief respite in an already embittered existence while fostering faith in Christ. Moreover, healing miracles were events that the entire public could observe and reap their spiritual benefit. The images of Christ the Miracle Worker dissipated in this context, however, healings and miracles were still on the forefront of most believers’ minds.

II. Assessment of Preceding Analysis

The significance of Christ the Miracle Worker in early Christian art is demonstrated by the multiple appearances it makes in catacomb art and relief sculpture, as well as the manifold references in texts and sermons of the church fathers. Life, death, and life after death are all motifs that are present in Christian funerary art. Images of Adam and Eve, Jonah, Daniel, even Orpheus and Hercules indicate an interest in the life beyond in catacomb wall paintings and relief sculpture. Images of Christ function in a similar manner. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker reveals an interest in the pertinent themes of rebirth and resurrection; they also exhibit a specific intention in the portrayal of Christ.

Christ had competitors in Late Antiquity. In the second, third and fourth centuries, Aristides and Julian touted the healing god Asclepius as a healer of body and soul while Philostratus advanced the notion of the special divinity of Apollonius of Tyana. The church

⁸ See Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 89-91. Moreover, relics could hurt transgressors and were a way to assert episcopal authority and control. Gregory notes those afflicted for not observing saints’ days (192).

fathers combated the threats to Christianity by focusing on the person of Christ. In treatises and sermons, the church fathers painted Christ as a dominant healer, the true physician of body and soul, as well as an unrivaled miracle worker. Miracles held special value in fourth-century congregations. Augustine's changing attitude towards the present reality of miracles demonstrated their popularity in the minds of his followers. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker comforted the Christian believers who desired some hope for physical cure and comfort in a context where healing methods were consistently entwined with religion and the supernatural. The preached image of Christ the healer and worker of miracles parallels the popularity of the portrayal of Christ in art, as well as foreshadowing the age of the relics of the saints. Christian art reflects the popularity and desire of early Christians to witness Jesus as the supreme worker of miracles.

From the beginning of Christian art, Christ was depicted as a healer and worker of miracles. In the earliest catacombs of the third century through the later catacombs of the fourth century, Christ's healings were emphasized as well as his miracles, particularly the raising of Lazarus. The relief sculpture of the mid-fourth century reveals a transition from the earlier examples. Christ's healings and miracles are not only more ubiquitous, they reflect an influence from the Gospel of John. The images of Lazarus and the Cana miracle are exclusively from John, while the paralytic and the healing of the blind man overlap with the synoptic gospels. By emphasizing on John's gospel, the imagery suggests a Christ that is the Divine Logos, pre-existent to creation and comparable to no other figure. In appearing as the Logos, Jesus can supplant any notion of Moses or Asclepius as a competitor since he is a being outside of time while his rivals walked the earth at specific moments in time. Christ performing successful healings suggests a competition with Asclepius, as Christ is rendered physically interacting with the recipients of his power, an action the healing god

could not claim. Moreover, by focusing on Jesus performing a successful resurrection, Christ demonstrates his divine authority while Asclepius was killed for performing a similar action. In the artistic context of healing and working miracles, the healing cult of Asclepius is recalled, and the attention to the Gospel of John portrays a Jesus that is incomparably divine.

However, the transition that is revealed in the fourth-century relief sculpture also centers upon the stylistic element of the staff. The staff that Jesus utilizes in the performance of his healings and miracles illustrates a specific connection to Moses. In the catacomb art, the raising of Lazarus with the staff is often juxtaposed with Moses striking the rock, suggesting a parallel between the wonders of Moses and the wonders of Christ. In the relief sculpture, Christ utilizes his staff while Moses is replaced with the figure of Peter. Peter inherits the wonder working staff in a deliberate attempt to cast Peter as the new Moses and patriarch of the emerging Christian church. With Peter rendered as the new Moses, Christ is witnessed as something different; the Christ as the Divine Logos from John.

The staff has been misunderstood as an attribute denoting Jesus as a magician. Instead of representing Jesus as a magician, the staff expresses the wonder working ability of Moses. Moses was labeled a wonder worker by Christian and non-Christian authors in Late Antiquity, as was Apollonius of Tyana. They were not understood as magicians and instead occupied the rarefied arena of theurgy that bore a relationship with philosophy. Christ was depicted in the vein of the theurgist Moses with the inclusion of the staff. A theurgist was an exceptional miracle working individual, and not associated with wandering magicians or ordinary philosophers. In the visual art, the mantle of theurgy is passed along to the figure of Peter by portraying him with the staff. Theurgy was more acceptable than magic, however the figures associated with theurgy, Moses and Apollonius, could still threaten

Christ. In the art, Christ is perceived as a theurgist, working healings and miracles including the power to raise the dead. With Peter inheriting the mantle of theurgist, Christ can be observed in the art as distinct from Moses and as no ordinary theurgist. His command over the natural world in his healing and miracles show him as the Divine Word.

Before Constantine when Christianity was in its initial development, representing Christ as a superior healer and miracle worker, greater than Asclepius, Moses, or Apollonius, is understandable. Christianity was not accepted by the empire and faced struggles in a pluralistic environment. The material evidence, specifically the fourth and fifth-century relief sculpture, reveals an increase in portrayals of Christ the Miracle Worker during a time when a decrease would seem more likely. In an age of Christian acceptance, the image of Christ the Miracle Worker greatly proliferated rather than in the earlier age of Christian persecution. It is quite possible to interpret the image of Christ the Miracle Worker as a triumphal image. However Christ performing healings and miracles appears to reflect more of a competition with religious rivals as the images continually assert Christ as the greater healer and miracle worker than any other. The numerous instances of Christ the Miracle Worker reveal that Christianity was still attentive to Christ's opponents. The nascent church also did not desire any recidivism in its members. Christians were tempted with lingering pagan cults as well as partaking in familiar customs and feasts of their neighbors.⁹ Church leaders could not allow any small fracture in their congregations turn into a wider chasm, and combated any opponents by focusing on their chosen deity in Christ. The textual references to Christ the Physician and miracle worker in the works of Ambrose and Augustine imply this attitude.

⁹ Consider John Chrysostom's sermons against the Judaizers in Antioch, although he certainly was not the first patristic author to vociferously argue for strong boundaries between Christians and Jews. Melito, Justin and other authors of the second century are most interested in creating a Christian self-identity. Tertullian ardently exoriated his listeners to abandon Jewish lustration practices as well as what he deemed other heretical rituals in *On Baptism* 15. More recently see Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

In order to secure Christian ascendancy in Late Antiquity, all threats, past and present, must be addressed. The Lazarus scene and the nature miracles specify the superior attributes of Jesus against any competitors. The Gospel of John mentions that Jesus has the authority to raise the dead, setting him apart from any figure like Asclepius or Apollonius (5:21). This Jesus, wielding a staff, has the power to raise the dead, to alter forces in the natural world as in the Cana miracle and the division of the loaves, and has the ability to restore people's health. The image of Christ the Miracle Worker reflecting the Christ of John consistently appeared within the Christian populace in word and image. Notably, church leaders were not necessarily selecting these images to be placed on funerary monuments, individual Christians were. Individual Christian patrons were likely choosing images they were inundated with in their church communities. The choice of Christ the Miracle Worker by patrons was a result of the effect of the church fathers' message. Their choice also illustrates the special role miracles had in the life of the Christian populace. They likely found comfort in an image of Christ resurrecting Lazarus as it served as a reminder of the future resurrection.

The evidence shows that the image of Christ the Miracle Worker remained popular in the fourth and fifth centuries when the visibility of Christ's rivals was fading. An additional explanation to the image's frequent appearance lies in the platform visual art provided. Visual art represented a common and effective frame to present the importance and superiority of Christianity that can speak to educated elite and uneducated commoner alike. The fifth-century bishop of Pontus, Asterius of Amasea richly depicted the luxurious garments that some of the rich in his congregation chose to wear: "having picked out the story of the Gospels, have handed it over to the weavers – I mean our Christ together with all his disciples, and each one of the miracles the way it is related. You may see the wedding

of Galilee with the water jars, the paralytic carrying his bed on his shoulders, the blind man healed by means of clay, the woman with an issue of blood seizing Christ's hem, the sinful woman falling at the feet of Jesus, Lazarus coming back to life from his tomb."¹⁰ The Victoria and Albert Museum in London preserves a fifth-century textile illustrating the same miracles Asterius describes.¹¹

Asterius' remarks list nearly every image captured in the scenes of Christ in the catacombs and relief sculpture. Asterius' congregants were wealthy enough to commission such garments, and found the healing and miracle scenes important enough to wear. They desired to put on the miracles of Christ. Asterius' comments demonstrate the significant position images of Christ the Miracle Worker played in Christian Late Antiquity. The material culture of Late Antiquity clearly illustrates that early Christian piety largely consisted of sincere devotion to the miracles of Christ. Thus, early Christians surrounded themselves with this emphasis on miracles in their visual language, and especially in funerary art. The images served several purposes. They provided a message of hope and comfort as well as served as a reminder of Christian unity. The images themselves provide a platform and an opportunity to examine how early Christians conceived this person called Christ. Instead of recognizing him as a magician, a philosopher, or a theurgist akin to Moses, the early Christians understood Christ how the art renders him: as the inimitable Word of God.

¹⁰ Asterius of Amasea, *Homily I: On the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus*, collected in *Homilies I-XIV* (text, introduction and notes by C. Datema; Leiden: Brill, 1970).

¹¹ See Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 59, and pl. 40 for the textile.

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