The Shepherd of Sheep, The Shepherd of Souls:

Funereal Iconography of the Good Shepherd

And Christianization of Hermes Psychopompos

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To my most beloved husband, ever supportive, ever encouraging;

To my family and to those who have become my family;

And to those who believe. May your souls be borne into the ever-after.

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"iamque opus exegi"
— Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 15, 871

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INTRODUCTION

"The religious images a culture produces are themselves dependent on how that culture conceives its religion."[1]

Since the rediscovery of the Christian catacombs by Giovanni Battista de Rossi in the 19th century, extensive research has been conducted on the iconography depicted within the catacombs.[2] The iconography within the network of catacombs excavated beneath Rome speaks to religious and communal beliefs and provides evidence on which early Christian identity was formed. Jaś Elsner reminds us of the importance of art in understanding identity formation, saying, "The excellent literature on the development of communal and cultural identity in the east needs to be supplemented with an emphasis on visual culture as a prime signifier of identity."[3] Much of Early Christian visual culture is found as decorative art within the catacombs, spaces devoted to the dead. My thesis will examine this art *in situ* to elucidate ideas held by early Christian communities that contributed to their religious, communal, and personal identity. Bas ter Haar Romeny says of the importance of art within communities,

> An even more obvious function, in terms of providing symbols of identity, is fulfilled by works of art…. Art can be seen as a means of expressing the identity of a group, especially where religious art is concerned. The ultimate consequence of identity formation is the creation of a conceptual universe expressing what one believes or who one believes one is. From this standpoint, religious art cries out

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[1] Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge [England] ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1995), 190.

[2] For more on the rediscovery of the catacombs, see Rossi, Giovanni Battista de, James Spencer Northcote, and W. R. Brownlow. *Roma Sotterranea*. London: Longmans, Green Reader and Dyer, 1869.

[3] Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality & Subjectivity in Art & Text* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 228.

> identity. Christian art is a visual realization of doctrines, veneration, and celebration, and can be both traditional and innovative. It tells what Christians believe, and communicates with the faithful allowing them to identify themselves with the saints it depicts, or to take lessons from illustrative narrative scenes.[4]

Looking to specific examples within the catacombs, we are able to interpret meaning and argue that the artistic depictions contributed to fundamental beliefs that Christians held as markers of identity.[5]

The image of the Good Shepherd, as one prolific example of Early Christian art, has been much pored over in scholarship, and this thesis will add to the present state of scholarship through a re-evaluation of this image. Instead of merely looking at this image in the traditional approach, wherein the Good Shepherd is only interpreted in light of its relationship to Biblical exegesis, we will keep an eye to the Greco-Roman roots that this image employs with the understanding that "the origins of Christian art appear to have been motivated by visual competition with the symbolic arts of the other cults."[6] Through attention to the process of cultural appropriation that the artists of this image utilized, this thesis concludes that the Good Shepherd was imbued with Greco-Roman significance that spoke to inherited notions of the afterlife and the role of the divine in the journey to

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[4] R.B. ter Haar Romeny, "The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," In *Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East*, ed. R.B. ter Haar Romeny (Boson: Brill, 2010), 12.

[5] For more on the degree of personal faith as a marker of identity emphasized within the Christian belief system, Jaś Elsner speaks on the otherness of mystery cults (including Christianity), saying, "Such religions, in particular the mystery cults, given their much more defined ethnic roots, more complex initiatory systems, and insistence on a stronger degree of personal faith than the imperial cult, had the potential for generating much more powerful systems of symbolic meaning, belief, and commitment—founded on complex salvific iconographies of the Other World—than did the loosely inclusive participation in state religion, which was much more rooted in broadly accepted social norms." Elsner argues that visual culture is a means by which we are able to elucidate the nuanced beliefs of religious communities. Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 245-46.

[6] Elsner, *Roman Eyes,* 228.

said afterlife. Ultimately this thesis argues for an interpretation of the Good Shepherd wherein the utilization of Greco-Roman iconography promoted his role as psychopomp, soul-bearer. The pagan cultural inheritance that the image of the Good Shepherd was imbued with greatly expanded the understanding of the role of the Good Shepherd from that of its presentation within the New Testament, so that iconographic representations of the Good Shepherd were representative of beliefs that were fundamental to early Christian identity formation.

BRIEF SURVEY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ART

Before delving into interpretation of the image of the Good Shepherd itself, it is necessary to present a brief survey of Early Christian art in order to uncover how we are able to understand this art within its provenance, the catacombs. Scholarly consensus on dating the earliest Christian art remains contentious. While some argue for art that is definitively Christian dating to the second century, others argue that the methodology for dating these iconographic depictions is not consistent and should be reevaluated, contending that the current state of methodology does not lend itself to agreement regarding dating.[7] The earliest extant art often lacks narrative, and some art historians

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[7]Mary Charles-Murray, "The Emergence of Christian Art," in *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art*, ed. Jeffrey Spier. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 51. Regarding dating Early Christian Art, Charles-Murray says, "Christian art emerged as a post- New Testament development within the Church, and it came comparatively late. No recognizably Christian art can be securely dated earlier than 200, when it appears suddenly."
For discussion on the problems of dating and the lack of scholarly consensus regarding criteria for dating see Steven Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes toward Images* (Rollingsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004), 178-179.

have relegated it to the sphere of the crude, arguing that it is representative of a devolution of art.[8] Despite the pejorative language espoused by some art historians, these artistic representations find importance "in the fact that they represent the passage from the idea or tale to the depiction."[9] Ultimately, the importance of this art is found in what it communicates to the viewer. It is crucial because it communicates aspects of systems of beliefs held by the earliest Christian communities, as the art is "the projection on the pictorial plane of the person of Christ, of the Virgin and of the Apostles and martyrs."[10] Though the artistic forms in and of themselves are interesting, the beliefs imbued within the art are perhaps more relevant for discussions of identity formation within early Christian communities. Art historians argue that fundamentally the importance of Christian art can be understood through interpretation of the iconography, where the art speaks to systems of beliefs. Jaś Elsner distinguishes Christian art from Roman art, saying,

> In the Roman state cult, a sculpted relief of a sheep in a sacrificial procession has a direct and literal meaning. It represents the sacrificial animal being led to slaughter. Of course that will not be its *only* meaning. The metaphoric connotations of sheep are broad in most cultures. But the range of meaning implied by a sheep in a Roman sacrificial relief will always be constrained by the inevitable reference to the act of killing sheep. Art imitates actuality. However, in Christianity an image of the lamb does not have a literal or direct significance relating to wool or mutton; rather it refers its Christian viewer to a world of symbolic and dogmatic meanings far removed from the killing of sheep. If Christian viewers understood Christian imagery in the same way as Roman viewers looked at Roman art, theirs would be a religion of slaughtering lambs and human sacrifice. In fact Christianity is such a religion, but not—emphatically and constitutively not—in any *literal* sense.[11]

[8] Pierre Du Bourguet, *Early Christian Painting* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 3.
[9] Ibid., 5.
[10] Ibid., 5.
[11] Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 191.

Thus, this thesis will look to the earliest art to communicate specific beliefs held by those who commissioned the art and those that would have interacted with the art.

The peace of the Church in the fourth century and the subsequent Christianization of the empire following the imperial edicts of Constantine can account for the shift that occurs within Early Christian art.[12] Until this period, "the earliest Christian art on the present state of the evidence is basically funerary, and most of it comes from Rome."[13] Imperial Christianity brought about grand ecclesiastical art, much of which remains extant. With this shift in environment for Christian art, we see a shift in themes within the iconography. Until the time of imperial Christianization, the most popular motifs within early Christian iconographic depictions were the Good Shepherd and scenes of Jonah.[14] After the peace of the Church though, more elaborate narratives within ecclesiastical settings slowly replace these images.[15] The edicts allowing for the legalization of Christianity permitted for the birth of a "large-scale Christian art."[16] Though the art emerging within this period of Late Antiquity is representative of a shift in themes within Christian art, it does not yet represent the Byzantine style that is indicative of art that is "distinctively Christian."[17] Greco-Roman influence is still detected within this late-

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[12] André Grabar, *Early Christian Art; from the Rise of Christianity to the Death of Theodosius* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1969), 4.
[13] Charles- Murray, "The Emergence," 52.
[14] Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 71.
[15] Charles- Murray, "The Emergence," 52.
Regarding the replacement of iconography during Christianization of the empire, Charles-Murray says, "From the times of the peace of the Church under Constantine, however, and throughout the fourth century, increasing artistic confidence develops. The symbolic and pastoral elements give way to more obviously biblical and Christian narrative themes, rendered with expressive pictorial effects."
[16] Grabar, *Early Christian Art*, 4.
[17] Charles- Murray, "The Emergence," 54.

antique art despite the shift that occurs within iconographic programs under imperial Christianity.[18] Analyzing the continuity between Christian artistic depictions in the second and third centuries and those from the period of imperial Christianity enables us to draw conclusions about steadfast beliefs held *ante-pacem* and *post-pacem*.

In much the same way that analysis of the continuity of iconographic themes in Christian art over generations can contribute to understanding of important beliefs espoused over time, analysis of iconographic continuity across religious lines can speak to the development of beliefs relating to religious identity formation in Late Antiquity. The earliest Christian art was imbued with significance through the appropriation of Greco-Roman iconography.[19] The appropriation of non-Christian art for Christian purposes enables the viewer to understand significance through the association of images with which they are already familiar. While making use of an iconographic vocabulary that would have been familiar to viewers, the borrowing of art and artistic elements also enables the viewer to experience art in familiar ways and allows for beliefs to be conveyed through familiar representations.[20] Regarding the appropriation of pagan imagery for Christian reuse, Jaś Elsner argues,

> For the worship, cultivation, and visionary experience of Christian sacred images have their roots in the extraordinary and generally neglected culture of image-worship, pilgrimage, and sacred art generated by the polytheism of the Roman east; and the eventual triumph of Christianity, in many ways (including in its

[18] André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: a Study of its Origins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 27.
Regarding Greco-Roman influence on Christian art, Grabar places Christian imagery within the Greco-Roman cultural perspective as the most likely framework for interpretation.
[19] For more on the appropriation of Roman artistic symbols by Christians see Graydon F. Snyder, *Inculturation of the Jesus tradition: the Impact of Jesus on Jewish and Roman Cultures* (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1999) 91-98.
[20] Jensen, *Early Christian Art*, 32.

> eccentricities) a typical eastern cult, was prepared by the ascendance of the eastern cults in the later Roman world, propagated through images and rituals.[21]

Thus, the appropriation of Greco-Roman iconography acts as useful means to convey beliefs while safeguarding Christians in times of persecution through the ability of this early art to be interpreted "in a pagan sense."[22] This meant that the beliefs conveyed via this familiar art necessarily conveyed beliefs that were not strictly Christian. The artistic vocabulary would have been imbued with significance that did not necessarily correlate to or corroborate any Christian beliefs evident in early writings of the Church fathers.[23] In this way, the art of the earliest Christian communities is evident of developing beliefs that have been overlooked.[24] Exegesis of Biblical narratives and of the Church fathers' writings has served to elucidate communal and individual beliefs of ancient Christians, but art should be exegeted in a similar manner to bring to light beliefs that are not discussed by those authorities in the Church.[25] Regarding the importance of exegeting art in a similar manner to that of the writings of the Church fathers, Robin Jensen states,

> With careful and close observation of both text and image, the results should be both illuminating and at least edging toward a more complete picture of the ways that early Christians understood their faith and enacted it. Images played a

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[21] Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 227.
[22] Peter Murray and Linda Murray, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: New York, 1996), 94.
[23] For a discussion on the Early Church and views of art see Sister Charles Murray, "Art and the Early Church," in *Art, Archaeology, and Architecture of Early Christianity*, ed. Paul Corby Finney. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 215-259.
[24]For an overview of the authority of the early Church Fathers and the development of clerical authority look to Ralph Martin Novak. *Christianity and the Roman Empire: Background Texts* (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2001), 101-138.
With the development of ecclesiastical clerical authority and the departure from elected church officials, standard interpretations are promulgated on behalf of the Catholic Church, quelling nuanced beliefs that the art can arguably better speak to.
[25] For a discussion on Early Christian Exegesis, see Jensen, *Early Christian Art*, 73-78.

> profound role in shaping the Christian imagination, especially as it encountered, considered, interpreted, and transmitted the stories from scripture.[26]

Jaś Elsner echoes Jensen's stance on the exegetical nature of Early Christian art, saying,

> In essence, the imagery of official Roman religion has a literal and imitative relationship with its subject-matter and with religious practice, whereas the images of a mystery cult (such as Mithraism or pre-Constantinian Christianity) have a symbolic or exegetic relationship with what they represent.[27]

The very nature of Early Christian art is such that it must be interpreted through a symbolic or exegetical lens. Not only does this illuminate the beliefs lurking behind iconographic depictions, but it also further marks boundary lines between Greco-Roman identity and Christian identity. Where art of the state religion functions in a literal way, art of the Early Christian community functions in a symbolic way, speaking to the belief system behind the art.

As previously noted, the earliest extant Christian art is found primarily within funerary contexts. Understanding that the location of this art is crucial to their importance and significance, we must interpret the iconographic representations found within these contexts with consideration to their provenance. Stanley Stowers says of religion in the ancient world,

> The religion of household and family, located primarily in the home and at the family tomb, is the ultimate religion of place. The place of domestic religion is "here" because it is not "there." "There" is the religion of public, civic, and state religion epitomized by the temple.[28]

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[26] Robin M. Jensen, "Early Christian Images and Exegesis," in *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art*, ed. Jeffrey Spier. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 78.
[27] Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 190.
[28] Stanley K. Stowers, "Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Families," In *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. by John P. Bodel and Saul M. Olyan (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub. Ltd, 2008), 11.
For more on the distinction of public and private religious space, see Bowes, Kimberly Diane. *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Religious artistic depictions within the domestic and funerary sphere are inherently different from those within the public sphere and they function in a different manner. They are allowed to speak to individual and familial beliefs in a way that art within the public sphere is not. That the earliest Christian art is found mostly within catacombs contributes to our understanding of what Christians of this period were concerned with, namely death, the afterlife, and immortality. In order to better understand specific examples of art found within the catacombs, an overview of the beliefs concerning death and the afterlife espoused by Christian communities from the earliest years after the death of Christ through the period of Late Antiquity is necessary. It will reveal the meaning of images like the Good Shepherd, a ubiquitous image within the collection of catacomb art.

EARLY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS REGARDING DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE AND THEIR IMPORTANCE WITHIN VISUAL CULTURE

Fundamentally Christians differed from their Greco-Roman counterparts in that they were other-worldly focused. James Rives says of religious affiliation in antiquity: “To belong to a community in the Graeco-Roman world meant to worship the deities of that community and to participate in its rituals, especially sacrifice and the accompanying meal.”[29] The core of Christian belief is founded upon the notion of Christ’s death and subsequent resurrection, “viewing his death and resurrection as representative of the

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[29] James B. Rives. *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 128.

death and future hope of all people."[30] The earliest Christian communities began forming identities based on firm beliefs regarding afterlife, something that put them in stark contrast to adherents of Greco-Roman religion. While Christians came to hold the crux of their identity on specific beliefs regarding the immortal nature of the soul, "the official state cult did not particularly emphasize the fate of the individual after death, or urge a particular view of the afterlife."[31] This thesis has examined sources from the first few centuries during the emergence of early Christian communities to parse out specific beliefs held as fundamental to Christian religious identity. Regarding the fundamentality of beliefs about death and the afterlife within Christian community, Terence Nichols says, "For the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached, was and is the whole goal of Christian life *and* life. *Heaven* is nothing more than the full presence of the kingdom of God, which begins here on earth and is completed and consummated in the afterlife."[32] Excerpts from the New Testament assure the steadfastness of the Christian desire for entry into the Kingdom of God.[33]

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[30] Douglas James Davies. *Death, Ritual, and Belief: the Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*. (London: Cassell, 1997), 125.
[31] Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (2 vols.; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1:89.
[32] Terence L. Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2010), 35.
[33] All Biblical citations included in this thesis have been taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

John 11:25-26

From this small selection of excerpts from the New Testament canon, we see that the belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is paramount for Christian identity and that it not only provides hope for this life but belief in the resurrection provides hope for the next life (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). As a distinguishing factor that separates Christians from others, the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is also a marker of religious identity. In John 11 we are told the benefit of such a belief and identification with a Christian community: those that believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus will live, even after death. Thus, immortality is the reward for the discriminating belief in Jesus Christ. We are also told that the immortality afforded those who believe in the

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Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

1 Corinthians 15:42-44
So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

John 14: 1-2:
Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

Romans 14:8
If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18
Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

death and resurrection of Jesus enables a rejoining with him in the afterlife (John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18). We can look outside of the New Testament canon to help corroborate the seeming importance placed on the discussion of death and the afterlife within Christian communities during the Early Christian period. The oldest Christian prayer extant that would have been recited over the corpse of someone belonging to a Christian community comes from the prayerbook of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis and dates to the mid fourth century:[34]

> God, you who have the power of life and death, God of the spirits and lord of all flesh, God, you who kill and you who bring to life, you who lead down to the gate of Hell and lead back up, you who create the spirit of man within and receive and refresh the souls of the saints, you who change and transform and transfigure your creatures, as is right and proper, being yourself alone incorruptible, immutable, and eternal, we pray to you for the repose and rest of this, your servant or this your handmaiden: refresh her soul and spirit in pastures, in chambers of rest with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all your saints, and raise up the body on the proper day, in accordance with your trustworthy promises, that you may render to it also its fitting inheritances in your holy pastures. Do not remember her transgressions and sins; enable her going forth to be prepared and blessed; heal the griefs of those outliving her with the spirit of consolation; and give to us all a good end through your only-begotten Jesus Christ, through whom to you are glory and power in the Holy Spirit for ever and ever, Amen.[35]

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[34] Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: the Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 22.

[35] Franz Xaver Funk. *Didascalia et constitutiones Apostolorum* (2 vols.: Paderbonae: F. Schoeningh, 1905), 2:193-194. My translation.
"Deus, qui vitae et mortis potestatem habes, Deus spirituum et dominus omnis carnis, Deus, qui mortificas et vivificas, qui deducis ad portas inferorum et reduces, qui creas spiritum hominis in ipso et suscipis sanctorum animas ac recreas, qui mutas ac transformas et transfigures creaturas tuas, prout iustum et utile est, cum ipse solus incorruptibilis et immutabilis et aeternus sis; oramus te pro dormitione et requie huius servi tui vel huius servae tuae: animan et spiritum eius recrea in locis pascuae, in cubilibus recreationis cum Abraham et Isaac et Iacob et omnibus sanctis tuis; corpus vero resuscita in die, quam definisti secundum promissiones tuas haud dubias, ut et hereditates ei convenientes retribuas in sanctis tuis pascuis. Delictorum eius ac peccatorum ne memineris; exitum eius fac paratum et benedictum esse; tristitias superstitum spiritu consolationis sana et nobis omnibus finem bonum dona per unigenitum tuum Iesum Christum, per quem tibi Gloria et imperium in sancto spiritu in saecula saeculorum, amen."

Each of these New Testament excerpts emphasizes the fate of the soul after death, so that we can understand the importance early Christians placed on the soul's journey upon the death of the physical body. The post-mortem prayer from Late Antiquity further emphasizes the power of Christian beliefs regarding death and the afterlife, while also showing the progression and evolution within the belief system from the time of the New Testament writings. Peter Jupp says of the importance of Christian beliefs about the afterlife, "Their seriousness about funeral rites sprang from their conviction that Christ's death and resurrection had supreme consequences for the individual, a hope of life free from guilt and from the fear of death and regularly sustained by the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, in which the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection were both symbolized and imparted."[36] The early Christian focus on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and on individual immortality of the soul manifested itself not only within Christian writings and prayers, but also within the sphere of the funerary.

Profound beliefs regarding death led to resulting changes in burial practice, which allowed for more funerary decoration.[37] Thus, Christian beliefs about death and notions of the afterlife and immortality did not just have insular effect within the Christian ecclesiastical community.[38] Rather, Christian beliefs regarding death had effects on

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[36] Peter C. Jupp, *Death our Future: Christian Theology and Funeral Practice* (London: Epworth, 2008), 68.

[37] For more on the discussion on changes in burial pattern coterminous with the rise of Christianity, see Arthur Darby Nock, "Cremation and burial in the Roman Empire," *The Harvard Theological Review* 25 (1932): 321-359.

[38] For further discussion on how the Christianization of Rome's city populace resulted in the construction of catacombs. See Leonard Victor Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 51.

Roman culture. Regarding these effects, Jon Davies says, "The advent of Christianity, slowly but surely, became obvious in the funerary architecture and burial ecology of the cities and villages of the Roman Empire."[39] Through this developing system of beliefs we see a distinguishable Christian identity taking root, which calls for a distancing away from Greco-Roman cultural inheritances. This is epitomized in the Emperor Constantine's choice regarding his own death. Upon his death in 337, Constantine "was buried rather than cremated," forgoing the traditional funeral pyre and successive apotheosis for "Christian burial rites conducted by the clergy."[40] This would have been an affront to Roman tradition and mores, which would have not only been familiar with the idea of immortality of the emperor, but would have called for imperial apotheosis.[41]

An identifiable Christian identity was not only manifesting itself within imperial ranks, but communities of Christians were exerting their new-found belief system through visual culture in a way that emphasized their separation from Greco-Roman culture. Verity Platt emphasizes that the pagan culture that the Christian community would have been living in espoused beliefs concerning death that contrasted starkly those of Christian belief. She says, "Given the multifarious and often ambiguous nature of Roman attitudes to death and the afterlife, this concern to downplay the influence of eschatological allegory or specific cultic affiliations upon sarcophagus iconography is surely legitimate." The Christians, unlike the Greco-Roman cultural milieu from which they came, espoused very specific beliefs about the afterlife that contributed to shaping

[39] Jon Davies. *Death, Burial, and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999) 191.
[40] Davies, *Death, Ritual, and Belief* , 130.
[41] For more on imperial apotheosis, see Eugénie Strong, *Apotheosis and After Life; Three Lectures on Certain Phases of Art and Religion in the Roman Empire* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969) 60-75.

their religious identity. Jaś Elsner, while discussing the appropriation of Christianity by the Roman world, emphasizes the differences in belief between Christianity and the pagan religions of the Mediterranean, saying, "But Christianity, by being monotheist and exclusive, was unlike anything generated within the broad and pluralist aegis of Greco-Roman polytheism."[42] In effect, the visual culture produced by this community did not connote a "multifarious and ambiguous" nature regarding beliefs about the afterlife. Instead, the funereal iconography that we are concerned with here speaks to developing steadfast beliefs that were fundamental to Christian religious affiliation, opposed to the pagan religious milieu from which it came.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY VIA USE OF THE CATACOMBS

The catacombs themselves are evidence of the development of a strict Christian identity. Christian and Jewish catacombs developed alongside one another. Though these two sets of catacombs appear to be identical, the Jewish catacombs lack the decoration of the Christian catacombs.[43] This is further evidence of the development of a distinguishable Christian self-identity in the first four centuries after the death of Christ, while emphasizing the "multicultural system" in which Christianity was emerging and developing.[44] Ann Marie Yasin says of the developing use of catacombs:

[42] Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 252.
[43] Rutgers, *The Jews*, 58.
[44] Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 21.

> It seems, therefore, that as early as the late second-early third century, some Jews and Christians used collective burial to express their identity as part of a larger community of coreligionists.[45]

Despite the fact that in many ways the "Christian attitude toward death was in some ways a radical break with the past," it was also functioning within a multicultural and multifaceted cultural milieu, so that it could not break completely with the culture from which it came.[46]

In spite of the lack of a complete break from Greco-Roman culture, Christians were developing their own sense of identity, as evidenced by use of the catacombs. The catacombs, as a direct alternative of burial to that of Greco-Roman custom, were representative of the exclusive nature of the Christian religious community. Instead of cremation or street-lined tombs, the catacombs offered a strictly Christian burial ground that allowed for Christians to take part in burials reflecting ideas of community and Christian identity.[47] In this way, the burial place of early Christians reflected their beliefs about the afterlife. Communal burial suggested notions that Christians would be joined collectively in the immortal afterlife. The catacombs were a link between the mundane ecclesiastical community and the promise of a celestial, immortal realm. The important role that the funerary sphere played within the visual world of Early Christian art is exemplified in Verity Platt's work wherein she says,

> In antiquity death itself is often figured as a moment of epiphany, whether abduction (such as Hades' rape of Persephone) or joyous union (such as

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[45] Ann Marie Yasin, "Funerary Monuments and Collective Identity: from Roman Family to Christian Community," *The Art Bulletin* 87 (2005): 440.
[46] Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 21.
[47] Ibid. See Yasin for more discussion on notions of Christian identity and burial. Yasin emphasizes that Christian catacombs would have been made for Christian burial and would have been frequented by visiting Christian family members. Thus, Christian catacombs would have strictly been used by a Christian community.

> Dionysus' discovery of Ariadne on Naxos, or Selene's nocturnal visits to Endymion). It should not be surprising, then, that our largest and best preserved corpus of visual evidence exploring the phenomenon of epiphany in the second and third centuries CE comes from the funerary sphere, where the relationship between death and divine manifestation was thematised.[48]

Thus, the funerary sphere is the most fitting residence for the union of death and the divine, where pictorial depictions aid in the union of the mortal and immortal realms. This interpretation of the role of the catacombs is strongest before the rise of the power of the Church. Burial in the third and fourth centuries was the responsibility of the family, and the Church did not yet have obligation for burial practice or ritual.[49] Regarding this, Eric Rebillard argues that

> Le cimetière avec la notion d'une communauté des défunts et sa prise en charge par l'Eglise, représente donc, a mon sens, une rupture importante par rapport au christianisme tardo-antique et est le fruit d'une évolution longue et complexe.[50]

The management of Christian burials by the Church marks a cultural break within Late Antiquity in which the family no longer has the express role of funeral conductor. Arguably this speaks to a change within identity formation. No longer is religious identity necessarily enacted by and reflected by actions performed by the family of coreligionists, but the Church takes on these roles and effectively becomes the family. Thus we see that burial and funerary practices are crucial for identity formation within the earliest period after the death of Christ to the latter years of Late Antiquity. The development of the catacombs, in effect, speaks to important thoughts regarding the afterlife and immortality that Christians held as fundamental beliefs of their religious identity.

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[48] Platt, Verity J. *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 337.
[49] Éric Rebillard, "Église et Sépulture Dans l'Antiquité Tardive (Occident Latin, IIIe-VIe Siècles)," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 54e (1999): 1043-1044.
[50] Ibid., 1044.

Understanding the importance of the catacombs, we can turn to catacomb art to elucidate specific beliefs related to the themes of the afterlife and immortality held by early Christians. As previously mentioned, we see most often within the art of the catacombs depictions of Jonah and of the Good Shepherd.[51] Much work has been done on both of these images, but an in depth examination of the Good Shepherd as the figure of Psychopompos is still wanting. This thesis will add to the present state of scholarship through the examination of images of the Good Shepherd and interpretation of this iconography as having the role of psychopomp, emphasizing what beliefs this depiction would have been representing and how this interpretation would have contributed to identity formation in the early years of the establishment of the Christian community. With an eye to the Greco-Roman roots that this image employs, I will argue that this image was imbued with cultural significance that greatly expanded the role of the Good Shepherd within the canon of the New Testament. This image, through appropriation from the greater Greco-Roman cultural milieu, spoke to inherited notions of a soul-bearer that were not present within contemporary Christian writings. The image of the Good Shepherd in this light enabled the viewer to interpret meaning in familiar artistic form and allows us to attribute beliefs to the early Christian communities that so frequently made use of this image within funereal iconography.

We can look at the shift in art in the fourth century and the disappearance of the ubiquity of this image by the fifth century as representative of the larger shift taking place

[51] For further analysis of the types of Biblical scenes and narratives present with catacomb iconography, see Theodor Klauser, "Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der christlichen Kunst: IV," in *Art, Archaeology, and Architecture of Early Christianity*, ed. Paul Corby Finney. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 145-146.

with the establishment of Church authority.[52] Ecclesiastical art replaced funereal art and the themes spoke to beliefs that were no longer reliant upon artistic vocabulary present within depictions of Greco-Roman mythology.[53] Christ was elevated to that of the imperial and celestial realm, and his importance was found within the appropriation of other roles.[54] Emphasis on death, the afterlife, and immortality was subsumed in pictorial representation with artistic depictions of the eschaton, which revealed newly emphasized focus within the Church.[55]

THE IMAGE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The image of the Good Shepherd was a multivalent image. As such, it allowed the viewers to "apply their own meanings and values, making precise interpretation impossible."[56] The Good Shepherd image is most often a depiction of a male shepherd,

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[52] On the popularity of the image of the Good Shepherd, see Jensen, *Early Christian Art*, 32.
For further study of ecclesiastical art of the fourth century and the shift to representations of Christ through an imperial lens, look to the introduction of Geir Hellemo, *Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in 4th-century Apses and Catecheses* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), xvii-xxiv.
On the disappearance of this image in the 5th century due to fears of animal worship, see Murray and Murray, *The Oxford Companion*, 487-488.

[53] For discussion on the shift in artistic depiction that occurs in the fourth century see, Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: a Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-22.
He emphasizes that a war of the gods occurred during this time in which the pagan gods lost out to the iconography of the Christian God, which resulted in a new artistic vocabulary.

[54] Geir Hellemo, *Adventus Domini*, 18-89. Look at chapter two for interpretation on Christ as "Christ as Sovereign", "King of the Church", "King of the World", and look to chapter three for interpretation on "Christ as Lawgiver among the Apostle Princes".

[55] Ibid., 63-64.

[56] Jensen, *Early Christian Art*, 32.

carrying a sheep or ram over his shoulders, often shown with additional sheep or rams at his feet (Figure 1, 2, 3). "Usually youthful and beardless," he "wears a short belted tunic and boots," sometimes carrying "a shepherd's purse, a set of pipes, or a bucket of milk."[57] This image, though it alludes to certain Biblical references, it is not a depiction strictly based on any one textual reference, which again allows for broad interpretation of the image.[58] A Christian who would have seen the image of the Good Shepherd might have identified with it for a variety of reasons. A survey of relevant Biblical citations allows us to put this image within the framework of interpretation that any member of the early Christian community might have identified it within.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD WITHIN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Christ is recognized as the Good Shepherd within the New Testament. He is explicitly called by this title in John 10:1-16. Looking at a selection of the verses from this passage will make clear Christ's defined role as the Good Shepherd:

> So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep… I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them…I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep."

Within this passage, not only do we see a clear appellation bestowed upon Christ, but we also see theological notions at work behind this title. Jesus, as shepherd, is responsible for

[57] Ibid., 37.
[58] Ibid.

the community of Christians, his flock. As shepherd, he has given his life for this congregation so that they would obtain life. The life spoken of in this passage does not merely refer to life in the mundane realm, but this passage speaks to life in the heavenly realm, an immortal life. Abundant life is obtainable by the flock of Christians through the sacrifice of their shepherd, Christ. A Christian viewer of an image such as that of Figure 1, 2, or 3 would identify with the lamb being carried by the Good Shepherd. This image would have visually conveyed what they conceived of spiritually of one of the roles of Christ.

Hebrews 13:20 further speaks to what might have been theologically mirrored in Christian interpretation of the image of the Good Shepherd:

> Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will.

Again, we see that Christ is identified as the Good Shepherd, and here we have an explicit reference to the blood of the covenant between Christians and their God. The resurrection of Christ is noteworthy within this selection from the New Testament, as a viewer who would identify the Good Shepherd as Christ would be keenly aware of the death and resurrection of their Lord. As discussed previously, this belief was fundamental to Christian dogmata. Just as this passage mentions the immortality of the Good Shepherd, the previous selection mentions the immortality of the flock of Christians. The images of the Good Shepherd in the catacombs would have been imbued with such significance. Aware of the significance of these iconographic depictions' locations within the networks of the city of the dead, this thesis postulates that interpretations focusing on the immortality of both the shepherd and of the sheep within the artistic depiction would

have been popular amongst the viewers of this image. This is especially true when we consider the relationship between art and the viewer in antiquity. Jaś Elsner says, "The viewer is of course never an objective or distanced observer—he or she is always a participant, or potential participant, in the ritual."[59] The Christians viewing images of the Good Shepherd within the catacombs would not have only been interacting with the visual display through viewership, but they would have had a participatory experience, wherein the image evoked their systems of belief. Not only might the viewer think of the life and death of the deceased they might be visiting within the catacombs, but the image might have brought about reflection of one's own life and death and subsequently one's own religious identity as it pertains to beliefs concerning immortality and the afterlife.

We can look to one more New Testament passage from 1 Peter 2:25 as evidence for what Christian interpretation of an image of the Good Shepherd might have relied upon: "For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." This expounds further on the passages that we have already examined. Christ, as shepherd, is responsible for the salvation of his flock through his own sacrifice and resurrection, but we also see here that he is wholly responsible for the souls of his flock of Christians. Like a shepherd herds his flock, Christ herds the souls of his Christian community. Christians familiar with this text would have thought of this as they looked upon images of the Good Shepherd within the catacombs. Particularly significant within a funereal context in which concern of the soul was considered, an image of the Good Shepherd imbued with immortal significance would have contributed to understanding of the iconography, wherein a viewer of this image within a funerary

[59] Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 197.

space would have identified their own immortal soul with the depiction of the sheep and would have recognized the shepherd as Jesus.

The fundamental Christian belief of immortality of the soul would have contributed greatly to how Christians viewed funereal iconography, in effect making traditional iconography personal. Not only would reliance upon an afterlife and continuity of the soul have been corroborated in the relationship of the image of the Good Shepherd and the viewer, but viewer participation with the image of the Good Shepherd would have been theophanic. Though the image of the Good Shepherd is definitively not a portrait of Jesus Christ, the identification of Jesus with the archetype of the shepherd would have personalized the iconography within funereal space, enabling an adherent to the Christian religion to visualize their own future journey to the immortal afterlife with Jesus as their guide.

The image of the Good Shepherd interpreted within light of this verse allows us to think of the shepherd in terms that are associated with Greco-Roman religion. As protector of the souls of his sheep, the shepherd took on a role with a nuanced difference than just as protector or herdsman. This thesis analyzed the selection from John 10 wherein the shepherd is a gate, allowing the saved to pass through to find pasture. Both 1 Peter 2:25 and the passage from John 10 elaborate on the tasks and role of the shepherd. Christ as shepherd is protector, but he is also the gate, ἡ θύρα, by which Christians are able to access the pasture, νομὴν, and he is guardian of the Christians' souls. Thus the role of shepherd is nuanced within the New Testament, emphasizing Christ's role not only as the way in which a sheep, namely a soul, enters the pasture, but transforming the shepherd into the very vessel that allows entrance into this pasture. Verity Platt, when

discussing the notorious difficulty of relating iconographic choices "within the tomb to either cult practice in the world of the living or specific notions of the soul's fate after death" emphasizes that "a secularizing drive to neutralise the presence of sacred iconography in funerary contexts by proclaiming it mere metaphor or self-conscious erudition risks draining such objects of their full cultural resonance and misrepresenting the conditions under which they were viewed."[60] Christ as shepherd within early Christian iconography is not merely a metaphor or a representation of Scripture allegorized via pictorial representation, but the Good Shepherd would have been viewed with the religious significances discussed so that the resulting encounter with the viewer would have been a powerful epiphany.

GRECO-ROMAN ICONOGRAPHIC COMPARANDA

This nuanced role of the Good Shepherd can be compared to Greco-Roman counterparts to draw conclusions about meaning in this image. Often the image of the Good Shepherd is compared to images of Hermes Kriophoros, Hermes the Ram-Bearer, protector of cattle and sheep.[61] Hermes is given the epithet κριοφόρος in a story recounted by Pausanius in his *Description of* Greece,

> There are sanctuaries of Hermes Ram-bearer and of Hermes called Champion. They account for the former surname by a story that Hermes averted a pestilence

[60] Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 342.
[61] Parker Lesley, "An Early Christian Sarcophagus," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit* 18 (1938): 9.

> from the city by carrying a ram round the walls; to commemorate this Calamis made an image of Hermes carrying a ram upon his shoulders. (9.22.1)[62]

The depiction of Hermes Kriophoros is very similar in iconographic form to that of the image of the Good Shepherd (Compare Figures 1, 2, and 3 to Figure 4). Not only did this provide a model for Christians to appropriate and make use of, but it also allowed for ambiguity during times of persecution.[63] Annemarie Kaufmann-Heinimann discusses the scholarly consensus that "images of myths were not tied to one specific interpretation but could be interpreted in different ways according to the personal experiences and situations of their viewers."[64] The nature of the image lent itself to a broad interpretation, so that it could be read by Christians as a symbol of Christ, while being read by polytheists as merely an image of Hermes Kriophoros. Hermes was not just given the epithet of κριοφόρος, but he was also given the divine task of shepherding the flocks of the world. This could have contributed to the viewers' interpretation of an image of Hermes Kriophoros, as New Testament accounts of Jesus as Shepherd could have contributed to iconographic interpretation by Christians. The anonymous Homeric hymns include in their *Hymn to Hermes* a doling out of tasks to the divinity, reading,

> So he (Zeus) spake. And from heaven father Zeus himself gave confirmation to his words, and commanded that glorious Hermes should be lord over all birds of omen and grim-eyed lions, and boars with gleaming tusks, and over dogs and all flocks that the wide earth nourishes, and over all sheep; also that he only should

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[62] Pausanius, *Description of Greece: In Four Volumes with a Companion Volume Containing Maps, Plans and Indices*, (Cambridge (Mass.); London: Harvard University Press ; W. Heinemann, 1988), 9.22.1.
[63] Peter Murray, Linda Murray, and Tom Devonshire Jones, *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art & Architecture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[64] Annemarie Kaufmann-Heinimann, "Religion in the House," in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 190.

> be the appointed messenger to Hades, who, though he takes no gift, shall give him no mean prize.[65]

Hermes as a divine figure within the Greco-Roman pantheon was assigned the role of shepherd over all of the flocks of the earth, including sheep.

In addition to this role, Hermes was given the unique power as messenger to Hades. Thus, Hermes' iconographic representation as ram or sheep bearer is loaded with meaning taken from textual sources. While his Kriophoros image evokes the role he played in clearing a town of pestilence via his apotropaic use of a lamb around his neck, this image also evokes his role as shepherd of the sheep and is evocative of his divine role as shepherd between the mundane realm and the chthonic realm. Thus this image proved to be multivalent even before it was appropriated for Christian use.

Association with the image of Hermes Kriophoros does not find its whole significance in the ability to safeguard Christians, but the association with Hermes enables the art to convey specific beliefs about the afterlife. Hermes was not merely a god with shepherding qualities, but he was also given the attribution of psychopomp, soul-bearer. As a messenger to the pantheon of gods, Hermes held a powerful role in his ability to easily maneuver between the mundane realm and the celestial realm. Not only did Hermes ferry messages between the two worlds, but within Greco-Roman mythology he also ferried souls between them. Book 24 of the *Odyssey* illuminates Hermes' role as psychopomp:

> Hermes, meanwhile, was calling forth the ghosts of the suitors. He held the wand he uses to charm mortal eyes to sleep and make sleepers awake; and with this beautiful, golden wand he marshaled the ghosts, who followed along squeaking

[65] Hesiod, and Hugh G Evelyn-White, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica,* (London; New York: W. Heinemann; Macmillan, 1959), 568a-570.

> and gibbering… So too these ghosts, as Hermes led them down the cold, dank ways, past the streams of Ocean, past the White Rock, past the Gates of the Sun and the Land of Dreams, until they came to the Meadow of Asphodel, where the spirits of the dead dwell, phantoms of men outworn.[66]

Hermes' role is further explicated in Plato's *Phaedo*:

> We are told that when each person dies, the guardian spirit who was allotted to him in life proceeds to lead him to a certain place, whence those who have been gathered together there must, after being judged, proceed to the underworld with the guide who has been appointed to lead them thither from there. Having there undergone what they must and stayed there the appointed time, they are led back here by another guide after long periods of time. The journey is not as Aeschylus' Telephus describes it. He says that only one single path leads to Hades, but I think it is neither one nor simple, for then there would be no need of guides; one could not make any mistake if there were but one path. As it is, it is likely to have many forks and crossroads; and I base this judgment on the sacred rites and customs here.[67]

From these passages, we see that Hermes' role as shepherd of souls is defined for centuries before Christianity emerged, and we can posit that images of Hermes would have been imbued with significance related to this role. We can look to images with iconographic depictions of Hermes Psychopompos, soul-bearer, as illustrating the importance of his role within Greco-Roman culture and within funerary art. Figures 5 and 6 are examples of sarcophagi on which Hermes Psychopompos is depicted. Iconographically the images of Hermes Kriophoros and Hermes Psychopompos differ. While both Hermes Kriophoros and Hermes Psychopompos are most often depicted clothed with a chlamys, Hermes Kriophoros is always accompanied by a sheep and Hermes Psychopompos is always depicted with a caduceus. Despite the differences

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[66] Homer and Stanley Lombardo, *The Essential Homer: Selections from the Iliad and the Odyssey*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 466.
[67] Plato, John M. Cooper, and D. S. Hutchinson, *Complete Works*, (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub, 1997), 92.

between the images of Hermes Psychopompos and those of Hermes Kriophoros and the Good Shepherd, we are able to clearly see the importance that the iconographic depiction of Hermes held within funereal contexts. Verity Platt notes,

> While tombs were designed to define practical and metaphorical boundaries, their interior decoration often sought to challenge them. The tomb comprised a liminal space in which the realms of the living and the dead were made contiguous; the rituals that activated sepulchral space were designed to communicate across the divide, while the figural details of its decorative interior often alluded to the passage between life and death.[68]

As the god responsible for ferrying the souls to the afterlife, Hermes held an important role within funerary art, a role that would have been inseparable from any interpretation of an iconographic depiction of him, so that when a viewer saw his image as Kriophoros they must have also identified the image with his role as Psychopompos. As such, Hermes Kriophoros was not simply a ram-bearer, but he can be identified as the protector of the lamb, much in the same way that the Good Shepherd is protector of his flock. Further, Hermes Psychopompos can be seen as the protector of souls, ushering them from one world to the next, solely responsible for their safety along the journey. This interpretation enables viewers to attribute more significance to the image of the Good Shepherd because of its appropriation of already established Greco-Roman iconography.

CONCLUSION

The appropriation of Hermetic iconography associated with the role of the Good Shepherd as ψυχοπομπός is not unusual within Greco-Roman art. Throughout antiquity

[68] Verity Platt, "Framing the dead on Roman sarcophagi," *RES* 61/62 (2012): 217.

Mediterranean gods and goddesses are associated with the role of shepherd of souls for varying reasons and connote a variety of beliefs. The reliance upon the image of Hermes Kriophoros for the iconography of the Good Shepherd not only enables the viewer to make connections between Christ as Shepherd and the Greco-Roman god Hermes as shepherd, but it allows the viewer to make connections between other roles that Hermes held to roles that Christ held. Hermes, as psychopomp, can be identified with the images of the Good Shepherd within funereal art, emphasizing the role of Christ as shepherd of souls into paradise. As John 10 identifies Christ as the gate, the allusion to Hermes Psychopompos within the image of the Good Shepherd corroborates this identification. Christ, as the Good Shepherd and as the ἡ θύρα between this realm and the celestial νομὴν, acts as a psychopomp figure. He is the vessel by which his flock is able to enter the pastures of paradise. We can thus interpret the sheep around the Good Shepherd's neck as one of the souls being carried across the limen into the afterlife. The lack of an actual threshold in Good Shepherd iconography can be attributed to the appellation, ἡ θύρα, bestowed upon Christ within the New Testament. No door is needed to identify Christ as a Psychopompos, as it is for Hermes (Figures 5 and 6), because Christ is the very door through which paradise is accessed. This interpretation would have been amenable to the provenance of much of these iconographic depictions of the Good Shepherd within the burial places of the dead.

Hopes for the afterlife, on which Christians based much of their religious and communal identity, were expressed through the powerful image of the Good Shepherd. Imbued with mythological importance that enhances the meaning of the image within Christian programs of art, the image of the Good Shepherd interpreted not only through

traditional Biblical exegesis, but through exegesis of artistic influence, comes to bear much significance for early Christian communities. Interpretation of funereal depictions of the Good Shepherd benefits from analysis of the utilization of this standard Greco-Roman image before its Christianization. Understanding the multivalent nature of this image contributes to the understanding of the Christianized image used by the early Christian communities within catacomb art. Whereas Biblical exegesis contributes to a limited understanding of Christ's role as shepherd, exegesis of the Greco-Roman mythologized iconography of the image of the Good Shepherd enables the viewer to understand the image within the context that it came, fully imbued with the rich cultural inheritances from pagan religion.

Interpreting a seemingly Christian image within light of its history of appropriation would have enabled the viewer to understand the multivalent nature of the image. While the image of the Good Shepherd refers to the passages from the New Testament, it goes beyond just this, referencing literary and artistic works in place within Greco-Roman society long before the appearance of Christianity within the Mediterranean. Moreover, the appropriation of iconography makes artistic associations that allow for beliefs to be alluded to and consequently promulgated through their appropriation. Thus, Christian identity explored with the artistic depiction of the Good Shepherd is reliant upon a long history of polytheistic use, and is consequently imbued with meaning that contributes to the basis of the Christian belief system regarding death, the afterlife, and immortality of the soul.

Figure 1. Catacomb of Domitilla: Fresco with the Good Shepherd. (*Picturing the Bible*, 189)

Figure 2. Good Shepherd from a small Early Christian sarcophagus that was probably made for a child. (Walters Art Museum)

Figure 3. Engraved Gem with the Good Shepherd, in a Ring. Late 3rd Century. (*Picturing the Bible*, 193)

Figure 4. Table support (*trapezorhoron*) in the Form of a Youthful Ram Carrier (Kriophoros). Mid-4th century. (*Transition to Christianity*, 151)

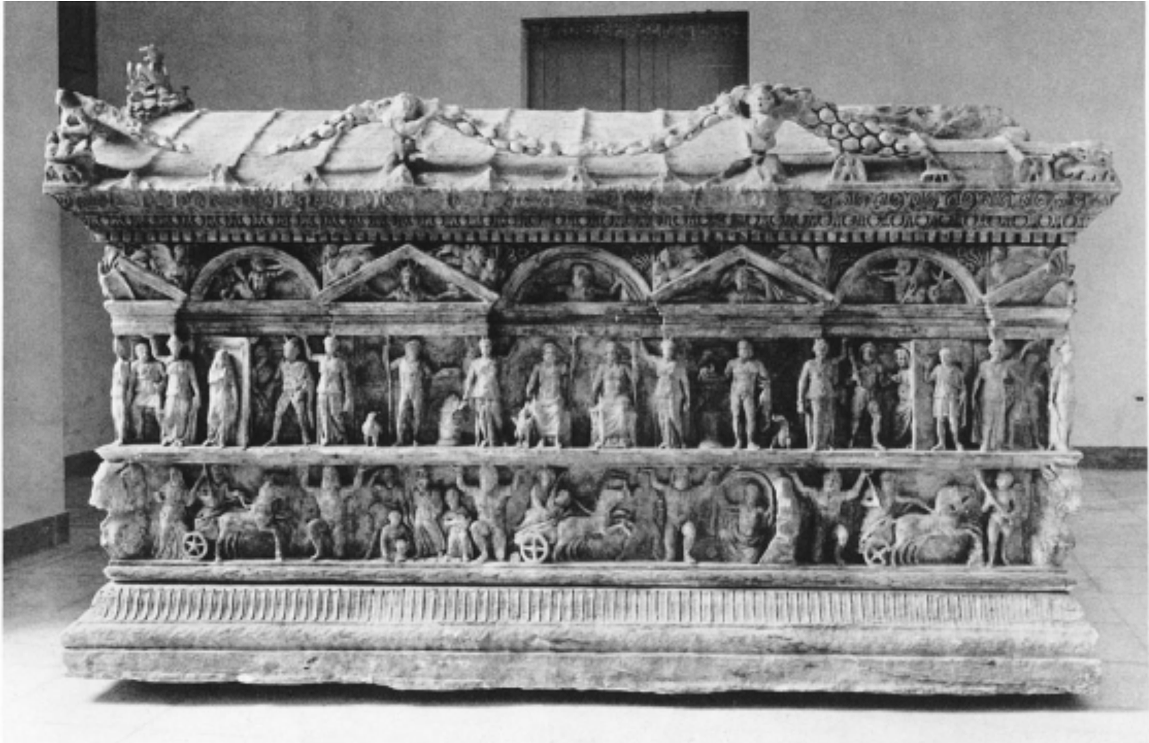

Figure 5. Front of Velletri Sarcophagus ("The Velletri Sarcophagus," Plate 45)

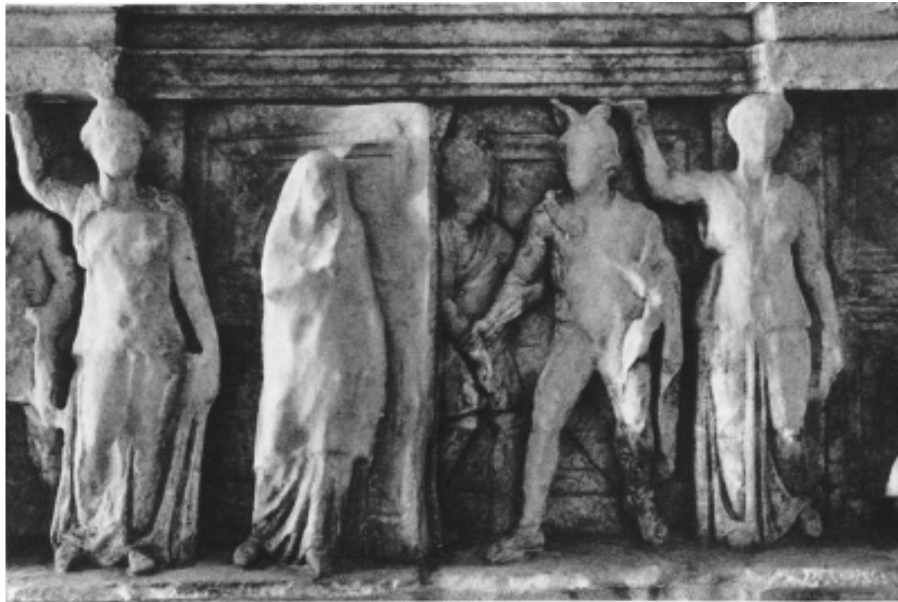

Figure 5a. Hermes Psychopompos leading Laodamia to Protesilaos ("The Velletri Sarcophagus," Plate 48)

Figure 6. Sarcophagus with Hermes Psychopompos emerging from a central doorway, c. 200-50 CE. (*Facing the Gods*, 346)

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