Late Antiquity: Jewish and Early Christian Art

3rd – 5th c.
Europe and the Near East in Late Antiquity
Samuel anointing David.
Dura Europos Synagogue.
Syria, 3rd c. CE
Comparison: Fourth Style wall paintings from the House of the Vettii, Pompeii, Italy, ca. 70–79 CE.

Samuel anointing David.
Dura Europos Synagogue. Syria, 3rd c. CE
The Finding of the Infant Moses by Pharaoh's Daughter.
Dura Europos Synagogue. Syria, 3rd c. CE
Moses and the Burning Bush
Dura Europos Synagogue
Syria, 3rd c. CE
Cycle of Ezekiel. Dura Europos Synagogue. Syria, 3rd c. CE
The Holy Ark, the Menorah and the “binding of Isaac”
Dura Europos Synagogue. Syria, 3rd c. CE
Restored cutaway view of the **Christian community house**
Dura-Europos, Syria, ca. 240–256. Capacity - 70 people
Reconstruction of the Christian community house at Dura-Europos, Syria, ca. 240–256.
**Catacombs:** cemeteries of the early Christians and contemporary Jews, arranged in extensive subterranean vaults and galleries. Besides serving as places of burial, the catacombs were used as hiding places from persecution, as shrines to saints and martyrs, and for funeral feasts.
Adam & Eve from the Catacomb of St. Piretro and St. Marcellion. Rome. 3rd Century, Fresco.
Iconography
(literally “describing images”)
The identification, description and interpretation of subject matter in art (including symbols or references, people, events, etc.) Requires knowledge of a specific time, beliefs or culture.

Noah and the Dove

Catacombs wall paintings
4th c. CE.
Noah and the Dove

Catacombs wall paintings
4th c. CE.

Orant: A figure with both arms raised in the ancient gesture of prayer.
Daniel in the Lions' Den

Catacomb of Saints
Marcellinus and Peter
Rome, Italy, early fourth century.
The Good Shepherd, the story of Jonah, and orants, painted ceiling of a cubiculum (small room) in the Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, Italy, early fourth century.
The Good Shepherd, the story of Jonah, and orants, painted ceiling of a cubiculum in the Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, Italy, early fourth century.
**Prefiguration**: The depiction of Old Testament persons and events as prophetic forerunners of Christ and New Testament events.
Jonah Marbles. Jonah swallowed and cast out. c. 270-280 CE. Asia Minor, probably Phrygia (Central Turkey), about AD 270-280. Cleveland Museum of Art
Comparison: Illisus, a river god of Athens
Acropolis, Parthenon, W Pediment: 447-432 BCE.

Jonah under the gourd vine.
“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep”
John 10:11

Jonah Marbles. The Good Shepherd. c. 270-280 CE. Asia Minor, probably Phrygia (Central Turkey), about 270-280 CE

Comparison: Calf Bearer from the Acropolis Athens, Greece, ca. 560 BCE. Marble.
Sarcophagus with philosopher, orant, and Old and New Testament scenes
Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, Italy, ca. 270. Marble, 1’ 11 1/4” X 7’ 2”.
Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, from Rome, Italy, ca. 359. Marble, 3’ 10 1/2” X 8’.

Comparison: Asiatic sarcophagus Rapolla, Italy (manufactured in Asia Minor), ca. 165–170 CE. Marble, approx. 5’ 7” high.

What visual characteristics of earlier pagan funerary art are seen in Christian art from this period? Does the context change?
Caelus (The Roman sky god)

Comparison: Sarcophagus of a philosopher, ca. 270–280 CE. Marble, approx. 4’ 11” high. Vatican Museums, Rome.
Christ seated, from Civita Latina, Italy, ca. 350–375. Marble, approx. 2’ 4 1/2” high. Museo Nazionale Romano—Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome.
Early Christian Architecture and Mosaics
The central plan was used primarily for baptisteries and mausoleums.
Comparison: Basilica Ulpia
Rome, Italy, 112 CE

Basilica-plan church
St. Peter

In church tradition, Peter is said to have founded the church in Rome (with Paul), served as its bishop, authored two epistles, and then met martyrdom there.

Relics: body parts, clothing or objects associated with a saint or Christ

Old Saint Peter’s. Restored view (a), plan (b), and section (c) Rome, Italy. Built ca. 320 CE and was demolished in the 16th c.
The custom of locating the apse and altar in the eastern extremity of the church was the rule. Yet the great Basilicas in Rome as well as the Basilica of the Resurrection in Jerusalem and the basilicas of Tyre and Antioch, reversed this rule by placing the apse in the western extremity.
Santa Costanza. Longitudinal section (top) and plan (bottom), Rome, Italy, ca. 337–351.
**Mausoleum:** a monumental tomb; especially: a building with places for entombment of the dead above ground

**Interior of Santa Costanza** (possibly was built for Constantina, daughter of Constantine) Rome, Italy, ca. 337–351.
Early Christian Mosaics

- The tesserae (small cubes) are usually made of glass, which reflects light and make the surface sparkle.
- Simplified patterns and glittering texture instead of Roman naturalism.
- For mosaics situated high on the ceiling large tesserae were used instead of Roman tiny tesserae seen on floors and walls.
Santa Costanza
ambulatory vault
Santa Costanza, Detail of vault mosaic in the ambulatory, Rome, Italy, ca. 337–351
Santa Costanza, Detail of vault mosaic in the ambulatory, Rome, Italy, ca. 337–351
Santa Costanza, Detail of vault mosaic in the ambulatory. Two oxen pulling cart with grapes
Santa Costanza, Ambulatory vault Mosaics. Decorative roundels with putti and birds
Christ as Sol Invictus (Unconquered Sun), detail of a vault mosaic in the Mausoleum of the Julii, Rome, Italy, late third century.
Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 425.

380: Christianity becomes the state religion
402: Capital move from Milano to Ravenna
476: Fall of the Western Roman Empire
Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 425.
Christ as the Good Shepherd, mosaic from the entrance wall of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 425.
Early Christian mosaicist set the tesserae unevenly so that their surface could catch and reflect the light.
**Codex (pl. codices):** a manuscript book especially of Scripture (sacred texts), classics, or ancient annals

---

**Martyrdom of St. Lawrence.** Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 425
Miracle of the loaves and fishes, mosaic from the top register of the nave wall (above the clerestory windows) of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 504.
Comparison: Christ as the Good Shepherd, mosaic from the entrance wall of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 425.

Miracle of the loaves and fishes, mosaic from Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 504.
Discussion Question

Compare the changes in the representation of Christ. Discuss how the changes reflect the spread of Christianity and its acceptance by the Romans.
Luxury Arts:
Illuminated Manuscripts and Ivory Carving
**Illuminate**: to decorate with gold or silver or brilliant colors or with often elaborate designs or miniature pictures.

**Illuminated manuscript**: luxurious hand-made book with painted illustration and decoration

**Parchment and Vellum**: Processed skins of certain animals (chiefly sheep, goats, and calves) that have been prepared for the purpose of writing on them.

**Rebecca and Eliezer at the well**. Vienna Genesis, early sixth century. Tempera, gold, and silver on purple vellum, approx. 1’ 1/4” X 9 1/4”.

![Image of Rebecca and Eliezer at the well]
Rebecca and Eliezer at the well. Vienna Genesis, early sixth century. Tempera, gold, and silver on purple vellum, approx. 1’ 1/4” X 9 1/4”. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.
Suicide of Judas and Crucifixion of Christ, plaque from a box, ca. 420. Ivory, 3” X 3 7/8”. British Museum, London.
**Diptych:**

An ancient Roman, Early Christian or Byzantine hinged writing tablet, often of ivory and carved on the external sides.

(Also, a two-paneled painting or altarpiece.)

The panel shows a priestess taking corns of incense from a box to sprinkle on the fire. Her head is bound with ivy, the plant of Bacchus, and she stands beneath an oak tree, sacred to Jupiter. Before her stands a boy who holds up a wine jar and a bowl of fruit or nuts.

**Comparison (pagan): Woman sacrificing at an altar,**
right leaf of the Diptych of the Nicomachi and the Symmachi (two aristocratic Roman families), ca. 400. Ivory, 11 3/4” X 5 1/2”. 
Comparison: Portrait of a husband and wife, wall painting from Pompeii, Italy, ca. 70–79 CE. Approx. 1’ 11” x 1’ 8 1/2”. Museo Nazionale, Naples.
Suicide of Judas and Crucifixion of Christ, plaque from a box, ca. 420. Ivory, 3” X 3 7/8”. British Museum, London.

Comparison: Woman sacrificing at an altar, right leaf of the Diptych of the Nicomachi and the Symmachii, ca. 400. Ivory, 11 3/4” X 5 1/2”.