Late Antiquity

Time of transition: from Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages
ca. 2\textsuperscript{rd}-7\textsuperscript{th} c AD

Early Christian, Medieval and/or Byzantine
Late Antiquity

• Was a period when the Mediterranean world changed dramatically. Many of the ideas and institutions important to the Middle Ages were formed in this period.
  – *Marked by acceptance of Christianity as state religion; paganism begins to decline.*
    • Christian religious traditions grow with mixtures of Roman and other ideologies mixing in it in different ways. Continuity or Syncretism?
  – *Increasing border troubles in west and east create fragmentation in the Roman Empire and eventually the grand solution of dividing the empire into two halves.*
  – *The rise of new politics*
  – *The emergence of Islam (632 A.D.)*

• *Overlaps with Late Roman History, Medieval & Byzantine.*
  – *Medieval: western events/arts, etc*
  – *Byzantine: eastern events/arts, etc*
World in Late Antiquity

"barbarians"
Era of Persecution

- Christians had to worship in secret so they worshipped in private homes and catacombs.
  - **Catacombs** - underground burial place. Had chambers called *cubicula* that served as chapels.
  - The ceiling of the subterranean chapel usually featured a **cross** inscribed in a circle, symbols of Christian faith and eternity.
    - **Lunettes** - half moon shapes at the end of the cross.
    - **Orant(s)** - figures with outstretched arms in an attitude of prayer that stand in-between the lunettes.
- The early Christian **iconography** was developed and derived on a mixture of Pagan symbols, Jewish subjects, and events from the life of Jesus
  - its followers sought ways to express and practice their religious beliefs in visual terms and in suitable architectural spaces.
Iconography

- Greek – “writing of images”
- The study of the symbolic, often religious, meaning of objects, persons, or events depicted in works of art.
- Can refer to both the content or subject.

(Glossary, pg. 400)

From this point on in history and forward, iconography will be important in the recognition and understanding of religious imagery. It will be a key component to helping you – the student – recognize and decipher what the image is telling us.
Dura-Europos

oldest Jewish painting’s anywhere

Interior of the synagogue, Dura-Europos, Syria, with wall paintings of Old Testament themes, ca.245–256. (Reconstruction)
Samuel anoints David, detail of the mural paintings in the synagogue, Dura-Europos, Syria, ca. 245–256

**David** – 2nd king of Israel, ancestor of Jesus

**Samuel** – prophet (intermediary)
This new cult attracted all classes, promising equality in the judgments of an afterlife.

Restored cutaway view of the Christian community house, Dura-Europos, Syria, ca. 240–256. (1) former courtyard of private house, (2) meeting hall, (3) baptistery.
Healing of the Paralytic, baptismal chamber, Christian House, Dura-Europos, ca. 235

These are considered the earliest images of Christ. Christ as Teacher.
Catacombs

underground cemeteries for Christians, and other persecuted sects

Christ as Good Shepherd

orants

Jonah w/sea monster

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 4th century.

Jonah thrown from his ship
Existing Imagery, New Meaning....

Sheep are symbolic of????

Calf-bearer (Moschophoros), ca. 560 B.C. Athens
Above: Cubiculum Leonis, Catacomb of Commodilla, Via Ostiense, Rome, Italy, ca. 370–385

Right: Cubiculum N, Via Dino Compagni Catacomb, Via Latina, Rome, Italy, ca. 320–360

Peacock = immortality

Christ with a halo
Sarcophagus with philosopher, *orants*, and Old and New Testament scenes, ca. 270. Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome

- **Orants:** Praying individual
- **Seated Philosopher:** Greco-Roman origin. Eventually develops into the iconography used for the Apostles
- **Jesus as the Good Shepherd:** usually depicted as a Good Shepherd or Teacher
- **Jonah thrown into the sea:** Classical influence

These are all non-Christian images that have been adopted and reworked into Christian iconography.
Era of Recognition

• Constantine adopted Christianity as the faith of the Roman Empire in 325 @ Council of Nicaea
  – Christians started building places of worship. They were often on top of or in close proximity of already existent buildings (i.e. catacombs)

• One of the first and most important church of the Early Christian Period was Old St. Peter’s Cathedral.
  – It is based on the design of a Roman basilica.

• Christ’s imagery changes and becomes more authoritarian. He gains the halo, purple robe, throne, and a beard to indicate adulthood
  – Crucifixion starts ca. 5th c
Both these scenes insert Christ into existing Roman imperial iconographies. The first an enthroned Emperor portrait, like that of Constantine; the second resembles the mounted emperor portrait like that of Marcus Aurelius.
Distribution of largess, detail of the north frieze of the Arch of Constantine, Rome, ca. 312-315

Equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, from Rome, Italy, ca. 175 CE
Scenes from the Passion of Christ, Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome, mid-4th c.

Imagery is no longer discreet, Christian symbols are prominently displayed.
Jesus Christ

Left: Christ as the Good Shepherd, ca. 300–350

Right: Christ seated, from Civita Latina, Italy, ca. 350–375 philosopher iconography
Old St. Peter’s
most hallowed spot in Christendom

Cutaway of Old St. Peter’s. Construction began ca. 319, held up to 4,000 people. Took 30 years to complete.
Interior of Santa Sabina, Rome, Italy, 422–432
Interior (top) & plan (right) of Santa Costanza, Rome, Italy, ca. 337–351
Detail of vault mosaic in the ambulatory of Santa Costanza, Rome, Italy, ca. 337–351.
Syncretism

• Greek – “union”
• the combination of different systems of philosophical or religious belief or practice
• often takes place when foreign beliefs are introduced to an indigenous belief system and the teachings are blended

Christ as Sol Invictus, mosaic in the vault of the Mausoleum of the Julii (tomb M), Vatican Necropolis, Rome, Italy, late 3rd century

The earliest known mosaic of explicitly Christian content
History

• In 404 the Visigoths (Eastern Germanic tribes) under Alaric invaded Italy from the north
• Alaric took, and sacked, Rome in 410. This leads to the “fall” of the Western Roman Empire; the East continues to thrive.
• When Honorious (Emperor of the West) died in 423 his sister Galla Placidia, took the throne as Regent (for her son), ruling from 425 to 440.
Mausoleum of Galla Placidia

Interior (left) & exterior (above) of the 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.
History

• In 476 the Visigoths (western Goths), under Odoacer, finally took control of the entirety of the Italian peninsula from the Romans, with the capture of Ravenna.

• In 493 Theodoric the Ostrogoth (eastern Goths) took Ravenna from him.
  – By then, the Ostrogoths had been Christians for some time, though they were unorthodox Christians who followed Arianism—believed Jesus Christ and God the father to be separate beings.
Sant’Apollinare Nuovo
Manuscript Illumination

• Drawing and painting on fragile fabrics, usually parchment (lambskin) and vellum (calfskin) to create the earliest books.

• Our book illustrates an Egyptian papyrus scroll from 1290-1280 BCE, but little else has survived before the early Christian manuscripts we are about to consider, for their illustrations.

The old farmer Corycus, Vatican Vergil, ca. 400-420.
Christ before Pilate, *Rossano Gospels*, early 6th century

Rebecca and Eliezer at the well, *Vienna Genesis*, early sixth century
Suicide of Judas and Crucifixion of Christ, plaque from a box, ca. 420
Roman continuity...

Woman sacrificing at an altar, right leaf of the diptych of the Nicomachi and the Symmachi, ca. 400
In context....

• In Late Antiquity, we have a lot of different cultural pools overlapping.

• Rome was a highly diverse multicultural society: social, ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious differences.

• Our last chapter focused on the *pagan* Roman world. But during the Late Roman Empire (or Early Christian era) a rapidly growing number of people rejected the emperors’ polytheism (belief in multiple gods) in favor of the worship of a single all-powerful god.

  • *The emphasis will now be placed on Jewish and (mainly) Christian art.*