

Dieter Korol, *Die frühchristlichen Wandmalereien aus den Grabbauten in Cimitile/Nola*. Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 13. Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Münster 1987. 195 Seiten, Anhang mit 3 Tabellen, 34 Abbildungen, 56 Tafeln.

A dramatic renewal of the study of Early Christian sepulchral painting during the past two decades has taken shape both in thorough publications of the monuments (for example, U. FASOLA, *Le catacombe di S. Gennaro a Capodimonte* [1974]; A. NESTORI, *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane* [1975]; J. G. DECKERS *et al.*, *Die Katakombe Santi Marcellino e Pietro* [1986]) and in analytical studies (L. KÖTZSCHE-BREITENBRUCH, *Die Neue Katakombe an der Via Latina in Rom*. Jahrb. f. Antike u. Christentum, Ergbd. 4 [1976]; H. BRANDENBURG, *Überlegungen zum Ursprung der frühchristlichen Bildkunst*, in: *Atti IX Congr. Internaz. di Archeologia Cristiana*, Roma 1975 [1978] 331 ff.; C. MURRAY, *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art*. BAR Internat. Ser. 100 [1981]; W. TRONZO, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth-Century Roman Painting* [1986]). Dieter Korol's book on fragmentary frescoes at Cimitile (outside Naples) combines both forms: It provides complete archaeological and art-historical documentation – including meticulous descriptions, good color and black and white photographs, and extensive survey drawings and reconstructions; and it offers a precise analysis of the paintings' implications for the history of Christian art (see also KOROL's summary in Italian, *Il cimitero paleocristiano e gli edifici soprastati le tombe dei Santi Felice e Paolino a Cimitile/Nola* [1988]). While presenting every aspect of a restricted and very difficult body of material, *Die frühchristlichen Wandmalereien aus den Grabbauten in Cimitile/Nola* also offers a far-reaching re-evaluation of traditional ideas about the origins of Christian imagery.

Following an introduction that traces the history of scholarship on Cimitile and provides a historical and topographical overview of the site, Korol devotes his study to the fresco remains in burial chambers 13 and 14. The central structure of six tombs, chamber 13 has arcosolia decorated with depictions of Adam and Eve and Jonah, themes well known from other funereal contexts. These Korol places in the second half of the third century. Constructed later, chamber 14 was richly adorned with numerous biblical scenes arranged in two (originally possibly three) tiers, according to Korol's new dating at the beginning of the fifth century. Despite the differences in time of origin and physical location, Korol treats the two sets of frescoes as an ensemble, moving back and forth between the buildings as he describes each scene according to its sequence in the biblical account. This is justified by the fact that stories from the beginning of Genesis and from the Jonah legend are distributed in both rooms, but it tends to obscure the special character of the individual chambers and to diminish an important point Korol otherwise stresses, namely that the repertory of Christian imagery was greatly enhanced after the Peace of the Church, at Cimitile through Paulinus of Nola's direct involvement.

The body of the text comprises detailed descriptions and analyses of seven relatively well preserved scenes and four unclear compositions, vestiges of a program that once included at least thirty narrative compositions and possibly more than forty. Among the better preserved, Korol identifies God Admonishing Adam and Eve Not to Eat of the Fruit, Adam and Eve after the Fall, Joseph Swearing an Oath to Jacob, Jacob Blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, Jonah Thrown into the Sea (pictured in both chambers), Jonah Swallowed, and Jonah Disgorged. Among those that barely survive, he very tentatively suggests as subjects: the Drunkenness of Noah, either Jacob Arriving in Egypt or Joseph's Triumph, Samson Killing the Philistines or Ezekiel's Vision of the Resurrection of the Dead, and Moses Addressing the Israelites (Deut. 31, 30 ff.).

Even though no hard evidence for its existence has come down, Korol leaves open the possibility that New Testament imagery was also included, which is not unlikely in view of the fact that other monuments representing New Testament subjects often display a preponderance of Old Testament themes.

Korol's detailed examination of each composition and exhaustive investigation of all relevant textual and pictorial material disclose a striking individuality in the Cimitile paintings. In cases where the fresco is badly preserved, the lack of perfect correspondence with other representations contributes to the uncertainty about the iconography. For example, comparisons with other Early Christian works indicate that one large field may have been devoted to Moses Addressing the Israelites; but an anomaly in the scene leaves this identification uncertain. Where the general subject is clear, disparities with the *comparanda* are even more significant for Korol, suggesting to him that the Cimitile frescoes may not be attached to any established iconographic tradition but are instead local, *ad hoc* inventions. The most important example is the scene of Jacob Blessing Ephraim and Manasseh. Apparent parallels to it are found, not only among the fourth-century frescoes in the Via Latina catacomb in Rome, but also in the mid-third century synagogue at Dura Europos, a fact that introduces the possibility of a Jewish origin for the iconography. Korol's probing comparisons of details, however, demarcate the differences between the Cimitile composition and these, as well as later, representations.

How, then, is the overall – if not specific – parallelism between the frescoes and other representations to be explained? Korol adduces pagan images that share with the biblical scenes the same pictorial structures and he suggests that the manifest similarities among diverse renderings of the same episode may simply reflect independent undertakings to illustrate the Bible text by drawing on the same Late Antique pictorial conventions. That the scene of Adam and Eve after the Fall omits the tree and serpent specified in the biblical account and portrays Adam raising his arm in a gesture unspecified in the narrative, for example, serves Korol as evidence of the imagery's independence from Scripture and strengthens the ties to depictions of the Prometheus story. Even when connections with the Bible and biblical paraphrases seem undeniable, Korol emphasizes the frescoes' fundamental dependence on classical *topoi* rather than on texts. Re-examining features of Jonah imagery that have long puzzled scholars, he argues a basis for them in pre-existing pictorial sources (and in the *Vetus Latina*) not in extra-biblical written sources. While he does conclude that one scene in chamber 14 depicts the unusual episode of God Forbidding Adam and Eve to Eat from the Fruit and stresses the compositional similarity to such later representations of the event as that in the Genesis frontispiece of the ninth-century Grandval Bible, Korol prefers to explain Eve's anachronistic presence in this scene as a vestige of a pagan pictorial model rather than as a reflection of Jewish legends – and this despite the fact that traces of the very same legends can be discovered in other scenes on the Grandval frontispiece (cf. H. KESSLER, *The Illustrated Bibles from Tours* [1977] 29 ff. The special Italian character attributed to the scene is questionable in view of the fact that the episode was almost certainly represented in the Cotton Genesis, a Greek manuscript attributable to fifth-century Egypt; cf. K. WEITZMANN and H. KESSLER, *The Cotton Genesis* [1986] 55).

By giving priority to the pictorial rather than textual foundations of the imagery at Cimitile, Korol separates himself from such scholars as K. Weitzmann and E. Dinkler who, while recognizing the extensive impact of classical formulae on the tradition, have emphasized the literal character of Early Christian art and have maintained the derivation of Christian Old Testament iconography from Jewish manuscript illumination (K. WEITZMANN, *Illustration in Roll and Codex* ²[1970]; but also, *Classical Heritage in Byzantine and Near Eastern Art* [1981]; E. DINKLER, *Abbreviated Representations*, in: K. WEITZMANN (ed.), *Age of Spirituality* [1979] 396). Indeed, in an excursus on the Ephraim and Manasseh iconography, Korol traces the complicated history of Jewish commentaries on that episode and their infiltration into Christian literature and art, concluding that in this composition, as in all others at Cimitile, the impact of Jewish texts can not be ascertained. From this and his other examples, Korol draws a general lesson that the Late Antique picture vocabulary must be considered before Jewish writings are introduced whenever one is seeking the significance of Early Christian imagery. In so doing, he sides with A. Grabar, J. Deckers, H. Brandenburg, Ch. Murray, H. Kaiser-Minn and others who have sought to ground Christian iconography in pagan pictorial traditions (A. GRABAR, *Christian Iconography. A Study of Its Origins* [1968]; J. G. DECKERS, *Der alttestamentliche Zyklus von S. Maria Maggiore in Rom* [1976]; BRANDENBURG *op. cit.*; MURRAY *op. cit.*; H. KAISER-MINN, *Die Erschaffung des Menschen auf den spätantiken Monumenten des 3. und 4. Jahrh. Jahrb. f. Antike u. Christentum*, Ergbd. 6 [1981]).

No one would deny classical art's importance for the formation of Christian iconography. The earliest recorded commentaries on Christian art call upon the faithful to draw selectively from the heathen repertory; and the penetration of the pagan pictorial motifs into Christian iconography was both broad and deep. But Jewish art was formed from the same milieu, so the use of a classical motif in itself does not preclude the possibility of a Jewish source (E. R. GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* [1953–68]; P. C. FINNEY, *Orpheus-David: A Connection in Iconography between Greco-Roman Judaism and Early Christianity?* *Journal of Jewish Art* 5, 1978, 6 ff.; B. NARKISS, *Pagan, Christian, and Jewish Elements in the Art of Ancient Synagogues*, in: L. LEVINE (ed.), *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* [1987] 183 ff.). Adjusted to the accompanying texts, moreover, these motifs also entered manuscript illumination as recent analyses of the Quedlinburg Itala fragments and the Cotton Genesis disclose (I. LEVIN, *The Quedlinburg Itala* [1985]; WEITZMANN and KESSLER *op. cit.*). The Birth of Abel in the latter (as reflected in the mosaics of San Marco), for instance, was patterned after a scene of the birth of Dionysus, which helps explain why Cain is shown bearing a cup and wineskin. But here, too, the possible influence of written commentaries can not be dismissed and the possibility must be considered that written sources, as well as pictorial models, played a role (*ibid.*, pp. 38; 58). Similarly, the Alcestis imagery Korol adduces when making his argument that the Cimitile and Dura depictions of Jacob Blessing Ephraim and Manasseh may have resulted from independent applications of standard motifs to the Bible text does not explain the striking similarity of costumes and poses in the two frescoes. Only a multiplicity of examples can determine the issue and Korol is judicious in leaving open the question of ultimate iconographic sources (for further discussion, cf. K. WEITZMANN and H. KESSLER, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, forthcoming).

History has deprived us of the monuments described in Early Christian sources, such as the biblical cycles described in Prudentius' *Tituli historiarum*, while at the same time leaving almost all surviving works without contemporary commentaries. For all the problems inherent in its poor state of preservation, therefore, Cimitile is a particularly precious witness from the period – a fresco program that not only is actually documented, but one that was, in fact, described by its patron, Paulinus of Nola. In an important separate study, Korol has published a tiny remnant in the 'Aula Feliciana' which he believes survives from a New Testament episode in Paulinus' cycle in the basilica of St. Felix (*Zu den gemalten Architekturdarstellungen des NT-Zyklus und zur Mosaikausstattung der 'Aula' über den Gräbern von Felix und Paulinus in Cimitile/Nola*. *Jahrb. f. Antike u. Christentum* 30, 1987, 156 ff.). In the book under review, he connects the frescoes in chamber 14 to Paulinus' exegetic writings and cautiously links them to the grand fresco cycles described in Paulinus' poems. Korol's most concrete link to Paulinus is the torque Joseph is shown wearing in the Oath scene. Although mentioned in the Bible text (and pictured for instance in the Vienna Genesis [fol. 45]), the torque was specifically singled out by Paulinus in Poem 24 and given a typological reading. The selection of Jacob Blessing Ephraim and Manasseh and the Jonah cycle also fits comfortably what we know of Paulinus' interests. If they do betray the influence of Paulinus' church decorations, the paintings in tomb chamber 14 follow a pattern also discernable in Rome where, during the same period, biblical cycles pictured in the great basilicas effected sepulchral iconography (cf. A. FERRUA, *Le pitture della Nuova Catacomba di Via Latina* [1960] 99 ff.). Cimitile preserves in microcosm, then, the radical transformation of public imagery during the course of the fourth century – from a limited system of symbolic signs appropriate to the funereal context to an expansive narrative tradition embodying interpretations suited to a theologically sophisticated audience (For an overview that includes a discussion of the possible role of manuscript illumination in this transformation, cf. H. KESSLER in: *Pictures as Scripture in Fifth-century Churches*. *Studia Artium Orientalis et Occidentalis* 2 [1985] 17 ff.).

A brief review such as this one can provide but an impression of this book's richness and importance. By working to disclose the complexity and uniqueness of each image rather than to reduce each to commonly-held ideas, Korol confronts essential issues and contributes fundamentally to the on-going discussion about the formation of Early Christian art.