

# ORPHEOS BAKKIKOS – THE MISSING CROSS

FRANCESCO CAROTTA \*

with ARNE EICKENBERG

## ABSTRACT

The tiny *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone, engraved with the representation of a crucifixion, has been lost since World War II. At the beginning of the last century the stone was still regarded as an original, but during the 1920s doubts arose concerning its authenticity due to its classification as early Christian. The dispute continues to this day. In this study we examine previous arguments for and against the artefact's authenticity and conclude that the aporia can be solved not by regarding the stone unilaterally as either Orphic or Christian, but by placing it back into its original historical context. The supporting argumentation leads from the Roman imperial cult via the Athenian *Iobakchoi* of the second century A.D. as well as the Roman poets and *Cultores Liberi* of the Augustan era back to the funeral of Julius Caesar, where his wax effigy, which closely resembled the 'crucified figure' in the *Orpheos Bakkikos* engraving, was affixed to a cruciform *tropaeum* and shown to the people. On these grounds we establish hypotheses that explain both the application of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone as a *crucifixum signum* on the apex of the *flamen Divi Iulii*, which has been preserved on the Papal and Patriarchal headdresses, as well as the origin of the articulated crucifixes, which were handed down from Antiquity and are used during the Holy Week to this day.

The quest for the stone with the inventory number 4939 from the *Early Christian Byzantine Collection I* at the Berlin Bode Museum, the former Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, would be in vain: During World War II the stone vanished from the exhibition, where it had been on display since 1904 after its transfer to the Berlin *Antiquarium* in 1869 as part of Eduard Gerhard's bequest.

Initially it had been embraced as one of the earliest representations of the Crucifixion of Christ—if not as the very first, because the stone had occasionally been dated to the second century.<sup>1</sup> But due to its peculiarity the artefact eluded all attempts at classifying it according to standard iconographic formulae, which hold that *Christus triumphans* came first, followed much later by *Christus patiens*. So the stone was met with some doubts, and to this day the matter has been surrounded by controversy. Are we dealing with a genuine piece from late Antiquity or with a forgery from the seventeenth or eighteenth century? It is presumed that the object's ultimate disappearance was precipitated by the doubts concerning its authenticity insofar, as the prevailing controversy had been the reason for its removal from the exhibition. We would surely recover from the loss of a forgery, but if it was a genuine piece, we would have lost something unique.

In any case, the controversy persists: Although Mastrocinque<sup>2</sup> had painstakingly refuted the arguments made against its authenticity by Zahn, Reil and Maser,<sup>3</sup> and even

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<sup>1</sup> Leclercq 1907–53, 12.2754 (9249) s.v. "Orphée", 6.840 (177) s.v. "Gemmes". Cf. Dölger 1910, 1.324.

<sup>2</sup> Mastrocinque 1993, 16–24; *pro*: M. Herrero de Jáuregui, *Tradición órfica y cristianismo antiguo*, Madrid 2007.

had provided two cognate carnelians bearing a very similar inscription, Spier relegated the artefact to the “forgeries, and uncertain works”.<sup>4</sup>

In order to make his evaluation appear more credible, he declared other pieces as forgeries too, namely all those, which feature either the same posture of the legs, or those which are presented slightly rotated in a three-dimensional perspective, or else bear the same inscription—the relegation of the latter being based solely on a memorandum by a colleague of his from Saint Petersburg, who had informed him that he *felt* (sic!) that a similar carnelian, which apparently exists in Russia, was not ancient.<sup>5</sup> This is accompanied by other, even more grotesque arguments: Since for example the gem is wrought flawlessly, which alone would be an obvious characteristic of a genuine ancient artefact, it is *a fortiori* supposed to be a forgery, because forgers tend to work well (sic!).<sup>6</sup>

A hyperbolic doubt, but in itself surely not unreasonable. When scholars in the mid-seventeenth century initiated the discussion of the *magical gems*, which had been a popular type from the second to the fourth century, trade began to flourish, and newly produced amulets in the ancient tradition were circulated, especially as a motivic supplement to preexisting collections. Since the meaning of the stones, in particular the secrets of the “Gnostic abraxas” (magical gems), could barely be ascertained, the aesthetic forms were preferred. As a consequence a strong skepticism dominated, further strengthened by the forger problem, which was hard to overcome. On the other hand Adolf Furtwängler and Colin G. King called upon future researchers to seek an enhanced understanding of antiquity by investigating these small and still insufficiently examined works of art.<sup>7</sup>

Was the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone rightfully sorted out, or are we dealing with a *desaparecido* phenomenon, a paradoxical antiquarian iconoclasm?

At any rate, only some black-and-white photographs in academic archaeological publications have been handed down.



Fig. 1: Orpheos Bakkikos, full-scale original artefact and cast.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Zahn-Reil 1926, 62–8; Maser 1976, 257–75.

<sup>4</sup> Spier 2007, 178, X94.

<sup>5</sup> Spier 2007, 178, n. 15: “he feels the gem is not ancient”.

<sup>6</sup> Maser 1976, 260 sq., referencing: Zahn 1926, 63, ref.: Dölger 1910, 1.334.

<sup>7</sup> *Der Neue Pauly* 1.15/3.282–9 s.v. “Steinschneidekunst” (S. Michel).

<sup>8</sup> Wulff 1905, 234, #1146, pl. 56.



Figs. 2a, b: Orpheos Bakkikos, magnified cast.<sup>9</sup>

Measuring 9 × 14 millimeters it is a tiny cone frustum of blood-red ferric oxide (hematite), laterally perforated, so that it could be worn as a pendant. Its occasional interpretation as a ‘signet cylinder’ (the “Berlin seal”) can be ruled out, not only because it is not a cylinder, but especially because the inscription on the cast is mirror-inverted. On the original piece the direction of the writing is a standard left-to-right, unlike on seals, which are always inversely embossed. Therefore it was rather considered to be an amulet. However, the lateral longitudinal grooves above and below the perforation holes (fig. 3) as well as the two basal openings at the bottom and at the top (figs. 3, 4) also allow for an alternative fastening technique. Therefore the stone could originally have been utilized in a different fashion.



Figs. 3, 4: Orpheos Bakkikos, drawing and magnified original.<sup>10</sup>

The cut and its technique are flawless, and connoisseurs of gems like Furtwängler, who described the original in 1896, and Robert Zahn voiced no objections. The latter confirmed that due to the form of the letters the piece could not be dated later than approximately to the third century. It would then belong to the series of early depictions of the Crucifixion on gems.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ΟΡ|ΦΕΟC||ΒΑΚ|ΚΙ||Κ|ΟC: Dölger 1910, vol. 3, pl. 36; Hinz 1973, 91, fig. 114.

<sup>10</sup> Furtwängler 1896, 322, #8830; Wulff 1905, pl. 56, #1146.

<sup>11</sup> Leclercq 1907–53, 6.840 (#177); for fig. 6 v.i., n. 77.



Fig. 5: Crucifixion, YXΘVC = IXΘYC (Greek acronym: *Iêsous Christos Theou Yios Sôter*, “Jesus Christ Son of God Savior”, London, British Museum: carnelian. Mid 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Fig. 6: Crucifixion, EHCXO|PECT||O|C (“Jesus Christ”), Rome, *Nott Collection*: gem. 4<sup>th</sup> century.

But both the inscription and the depicted figure leave the specialists puzzled. The fact that Christ appears represented on a cross, but is designated ΟΡΦΕΟΣ ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ—“Bacchic Orpheus”—, is of remarkable singularity in religious history, because Christ has taken the place of Orpheus, and not *vice versa*,<sup>12</sup> as it is well-known from catacomb frescoes, for example with Orpheus as the Good Shepherd.<sup>13</sup> Therefore the artefact would be syncretistic or Orphic, however with an Orpheus subjected to Dionysian suffering like Marsyas at the stake, and not like the Apollonian Orpheus with his *lyra* amidst tamed beasts. *Bakkikos* as an epithet of *Orpheos* is not tautologic, because beside the tradition that (as it seems to be the case here) Orpheus was killed by the enemies of his own following, there was among many others one famous variant, in which Orpheus, after returning from the Hades, abandoned his earlier habit of worshipping Dionysus-Bacchus and turned to Helios-Apollo instead, for which the insulted god had him dismembered by his Maenads.<sup>14</sup> Therefore the designation *Bakkikos* would contrast this Orpheus on the cross from the follower of Apollo and identify him as the founder of the Dionysian Mysteries (see below).<sup>15</sup>

The seven stars surrounding the crescent moon at the top of the cross had at first been intendedly interpreted as the Pleiades, the “Lyre of Orpheus”.<sup>16</sup> However, they were also seen as planets, which we encounter repeatedly, also in conjunction with Orpheus.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly the find entered Otto Kern’s collection *Orphicorum fragmenta* as *Testimonium 150*, a syncretistic Christian artefact.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore Robert Eisler asserted its Orphic-Dionysian origin: Since in legend Dionysus’ enemy Lycurgus was punished with crucifixion,<sup>19</sup> whereas Dionysus himself and some Dionysian heroes (for example Pentheus) were hung from a tree, Eisler presumed that the image on the relief is an isolated

<sup>12</sup> Wulff 1905, 234.

<sup>13</sup> Hinz 1973, 50 sq.

<sup>14</sup> Aesch. *Bacch.*; cf. Ps.-Erat. *Catast.* 24.

<sup>15</sup> Procl. *Comm. Rep.* 1.174.30–175.3.

<sup>16</sup> Eisler 1925, 338 sqq.; Eisler 1921, 54, pl. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. clay lamp (early 3<sup>rd</sup> century) in Wulff 1905, #1224.

<sup>18</sup> *Christiana*: O. Kern (ed.), *Orphicorum fragmenta*, Berlin 1963<sup>2</sup> (1922<sup>1</sup>), 46.

<sup>19</sup> Diod. 3.65.5.



depiction of the crucified and later dismembered Orpheus from a legend that was incidentally not attested in scripture.<sup>20</sup>

“This wording of [Eisler’s] presumption at the same time appears to express its own falsification”,<sup>21</sup> particularly because ancient tradition has recorded neither Orpheus’ nor Dionysus’ crucifixion—Justin<sup>22</sup> tells us that no son of Zeus had ever been crucified<sup>23</sup>—, and yet this interpretation has fascinated many, especially in twentieth and twenty-first century New Age circles: The image of the Orpheos Bakkikos would embellish the book cover of a British bestseller, in which the authors purport that Jesus was originally a ‘pagan mystery god’.<sup>24</sup>

While the media circus covering the attempt to portray Jesus as a pure myth obliterated more serious works like those of Helga Neumann<sup>25</sup> or Paulus Hinz,<sup>26</sup> who had emphasized the connection with the historically evidenced celebrations of the Orphic Mysteries, notably with the cultic confraternity of the *Iobakchoi*,<sup>27</sup> the academic discussion reached a broader public, and meanwhile we can also find more fundamental and professional debates being iterated on the internet.<sup>28</sup>

For already in the 1920s some pundits had taken exception to the position of the legs and pointed out that the Crucified “is represented with his feet nailed on top of each other and with bent knees, i.e. in a type that is not evidenced anywhere else before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and in the style at hand only appears in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>29</sup> Thus was the initial demur at the amulet’s authenticity, to which other pundits assented, in 1926 for instance Robert Zahn, an “expert on gems”, together with pastor Johannes Reil, a “connoisseur of early Christian images of the Crucifixion”.<sup>30</sup>

They drew comparisons “to the earliest [...] depictions, but also to more recent ones like the relief on the door of Santa Sabina in Rome and the ivory plaque in the British Museum”. Zahn could “not understand how such a difference in the representation of the Crucified One was possible in the same period. On said memorials Christ stands in front of the cross on the ground or on a footrest”.

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<sup>20</sup> Eisler 1921, 54; cf. Paget who follows Eisler and even regards the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone as proof both of Orpheus’ crucifixion and of the Christian adoption of the crucifixion from Orphism (R.F. Paget, *In the Footsteps of Orpheus*, London 1967, 79).

<sup>21</sup> Reil 1926, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Just. *Apol.* 1.54–5.

<sup>23</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion. A Study of the Orphic Movement*, London 1952, 265–6 (= *Orphée et la religion grecque*, Paris 1956, 295).

<sup>24</sup> T. Freke, P. Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the “Original Jesus” a Pagan God?*, New York 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Neumann 1968, 22–35.

<sup>26</sup> Hinz 1973, 91, 400 (nn. 22–4).

<sup>27</sup> Maass 1895, 14–71.

<sup>28</sup> I.a. Hannam 2006; Criddle 2006/08; Bermejo 2009.

<sup>29</sup> E. Panofsky 1924, quoted by: J. Leipoldt, editor of *Αγγελοσ*, in: Zahn-Reil 1926, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Zahn-Reil 1926, 62; thereupon Otto Kern, who in his publication *Orphicorum fragmenta* had originally presented the Orpheos Bakkikos as an authentic document, changed his opinion and wrote that it was “most probably” a forgery (cf. O. Kern, “Review of W.K.C. Guthrie’s *Orpheus and Greek Religion*”, *Gnomon*, Berlin 1935, 476).

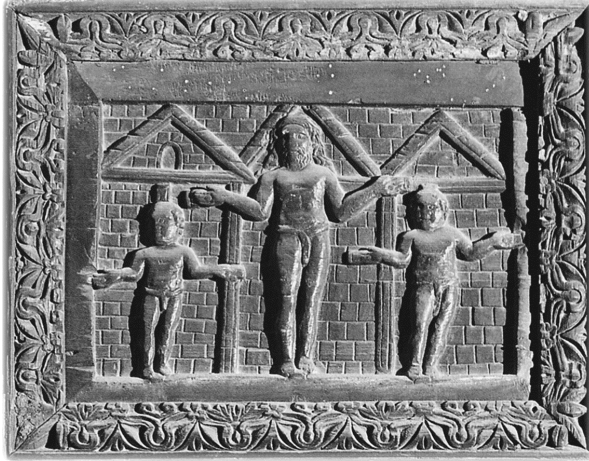


Fig. 7: Crucifixion from the portal of Santa Sabina, Rome: wooden plate. 432 (approx.).

Fig. 8: Crucifixion with Judas, British Museum, London: ivory plaque. 420–430.

He obviously and completely ignored that the Crucified on this ivory plaque (fig. 8) neither stands on the ground nor has a footrest (*suppedaneum*) under his feet. We wonder why. Didn't it fit into Zahn's framework? But this observation would have been important, since no person can hold on to a cross with no footrest and only two nails to carry the body's weight: Therefore it can only be a figure that has been affixed to a cross, and not a factually crucified person—an important distinction, as we will learn later on.

He continues: "The cross is almost completely obscured; specifically the vertical beam protruding high above the head does not exist." His affiliated critic Reil would even reinvent it as a Cross of Tau (T-Cross)—which is of course incorrect, as everyone can easily observe: Above the Crucified's head on the ivory plaque we see the *titulus crucis* with the inscription REX IVD[aeorum] ("King of the Jews") on a plate, which can only hang from a protruding beam that is present, albeit concealed. If instead of a plate a crescent moon is attached to the peak of the cross, the vertical beam will then of course protrude visibly.

"But here [on the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone] Christ hangs flaccidly on the large cross with his legs crossed and his feet superposed, as in much later art", Zahn continues. He does admit that there are other examples—"on a raw stone reproduced in Leclercq [fig. 9] Christ, without a cross, is also presented with slightly bent legs [...]"—, but he further argues that the depiction "vastly differs from the image of our cone". As if objects from different periods and regions as well as from the hands of different artisans can not differ visually for exactly these reasons!

Reil even tightens Zahn's statements. He indeed comments that "the curved arms, of which only the hands rest against the horizontal crossbeam, also appear elsewhere, e.g. on the mock crucifix from Palatine Hill [fig. 10] and on the carnelian from Constantia [Romania] in the British Museum" (fig. 5), but he is astonished by "the sideways and bent position of the legs", of which there were allegedly no further examples from late Antiquity, although he actually mentioned one himself: a jasper of Egyptian magical origin found in Gaza (fig. 11).

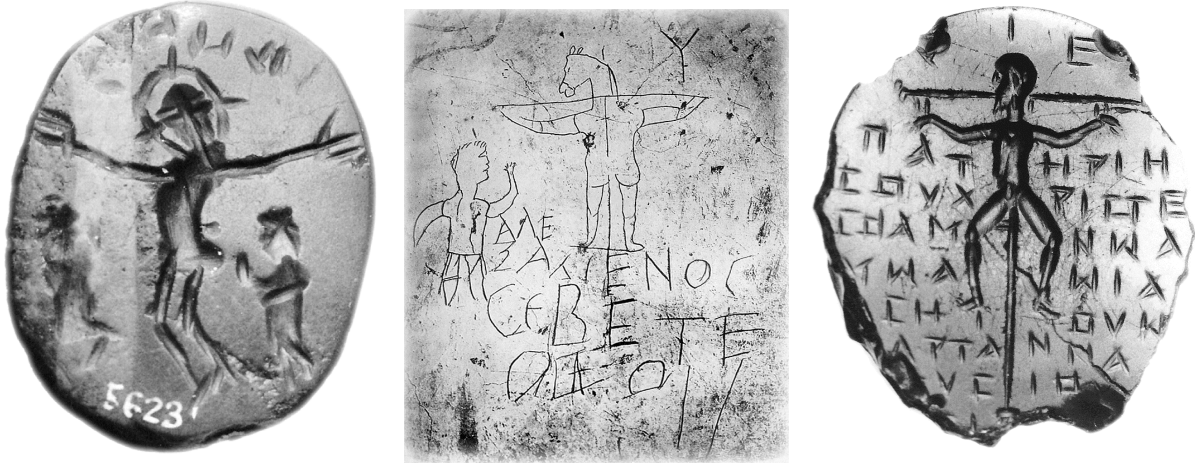


Fig. 9: Crucifixion (Middle Byzantine).<sup>31</sup>

Fig. 10: ‘Mock crucifix’ from Palatine Hill, Rome: Praetorian graffito. Perhaps 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>32</sup>

Fig. 11: Crucifixion (Gaza), Paris, *Pereire Collection*: jasper. Late 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

But Reil rejects the parallel: “Here the posture is not nearly as pronounced as on our stone, and most notably the lower legs and the feet do not lie on top of each other but side by side.” He claims to have observed on the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone that “the feet rest upon each other, as it seems on a small crossbar at the lower end of the beam, which the ends of all three beams exhibit as well. Jesus’ right leg comes to rest on the left, as it is without exception in occidental art since the first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century”.

But it turns out to be a problem that the overall length of the stone conus is just under 14 millimeters, with the miniature of the Crucified being merely 6 millimeters long. On the preserved illustrations the feet, which did not exceed a length of 0.6 millimeters, are indistinct. Only the legs are distinguishable, but not their position. Still, Reil claims to know that they rest on top of each other, the right foot on the left. Assuming that one was able to examine the 1920s original or its casts more thoroughly than on today’s photographic reproductions, then Becker would also have gotten a better impression: In 1921 he produced a drawing for Eisler (fig. 12), which deviates considerably from Reil’s description.

<sup>31</sup> Leclercq 1907–53, 3.3049, fig. 3356; earlier datings are uncertain.

<sup>32</sup> Alias: “Alexamenos graffito” or *graffito blasfemo*; inscription: ΑΛΕ||ΞΑΜΕΝΟC||CΕΒΕΤΕ||ΘΕΟΝ (*Alexamenos sebete theon*, “Alexamenos worships [his] god”); the identification of Alexamenos’ god with Christ is a conjecture based on two assumptions: the interpretation of the depicted horse’s head as that of an ass (*contra*: A. Alföldi, “Der iranische Weltriese auf archäologischen Denkmälern”, in: *Jahrbuch der schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte* 40, 1949/50, 28), and the confusability of early Christians with the Jews, who were reproached with onolatry (*Tert. nat.* 1.11, 1.14).

<sup>33</sup> Beginning of the inscription: ΥΙΕ||ΠΑΤ|ΗΡΙΗ||CΟΥΧ|ΡΙCΤΕ (*Yie Pater Iesou Christe*, “Son Father Jesus Christ”: in grammatically erroneous Greek).



Fig. 12: Orpheos Bakkikos, drawing by A. Becker.<sup>34</sup>

Here the legs are not superposed but side by side: The right foot does not rest on the left one, but the left foot conceals the right, which touches the beam a little higher up, as can be clearly diagnosed from the right knee's elevation and the right leg's acuter angle.

In any case, the earlier investigators were unable to detect a nail through the feet. Nevertheless Reil suggests it indirectly by calling the two thick stakes at the base of the cross 'nails'—which is absurd, because their diameter matches that of the vertical beam of the cross! Combined with his acrobatic iconographical legs-and-feet hallucination he conjures up Panofsky's unsubstantiated contention<sup>35</sup> that the Orpheos Bakkikos represents a three-nail crucifix.

But the hands are not nailed to the crossbeam at all—neither on the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone, nor on the *Ichtys* carnelian (fig. 5), which he mentioned himself. It is rather obvious that the hands are tied to the cross—on the jasper from Gaza we can identify both the wrist and armpit straps, although one of them is obscured by the head in the foreground—, and it would be fallacious to insinuate that tied hands were accompanied by nailed feet. On his own comparative piece, the London ivory plaque, the feet are not transfixed, unlike the hands (fig. 8; idem for Santa Sabina, fig. 7). Before nailed feet appeared in Christian iconography, we also encounter ropes there, as with the co-crucified figure on an ampule from Monza (fig. 13).



Fig. 13: Detailed view of the Co-Crucified, Monza, cathedral treasury: ampule (no. 6). 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Eisler 1921, pl. 31.

<sup>35</sup> V.s., n. 29.

This means that the nail at the feet, which is supposed to prove that this figure cannot have existed prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was projected onto the Orpheos Bakkikos, because the critic was already clinging to a preconception: a case of circular reasoning.

Concerning the legs we can observe that they are indeed stretched evenly on the London ivory plaque (fig. 8) and possibly also on the piece from the *Nott Collection* (fig. 6). But the same cannot be determined for the other examples, particularly for the *Ichtyos* carnelian (fig. 5) and maybe also the Santa Sabina plate (fig. 7).

Because for an artisan, who did not master depictions in three-quarter view (*vue de trois-quarts*), the frontal depiction evidently complicated the representation of legs that are bent at the knees—unless he resorted to dramatic and naïve means, as for example in Egyptian painting. This style can be recognized on the jasper from Gaza (fig. 11), which is not by chance from Egypt, where the artisan arranged the Crucified’s legs into a profile view, analogous to the representation of the head, with each leg spread by 90 degrees to the left and right respectively. In reality his head and limbs probably would have been positioned as on the Orpheos Bakkikos. The argument that the legs are spread because the figure sits on a small seat is a mere projection. No *sedile* is discernible, as the supporters of this hypothesis had to admit themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Photography clarifies that bent legs were barely possible to visualize in a frontal view and that *en face* they will appear to be stretched evenly. Two crucifixes from the era mentioned by Reil will suffice as an example.<sup>37</sup>

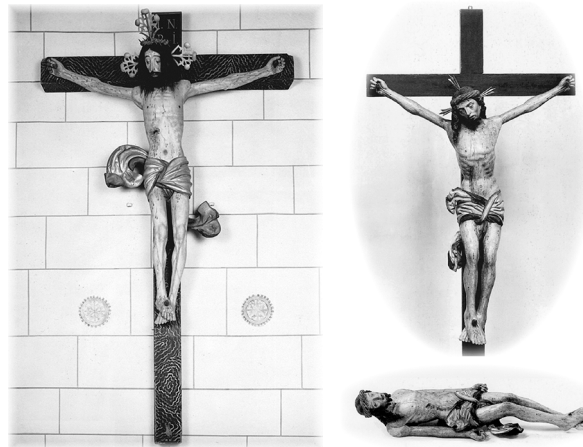


Fig. 14: Detachable crucifix, Bad Wimpfen am Berg, Germany. 1481.

Figs. 15a, b: Detachable crucifix, Memmingen, Germany. 1510.

In the lateral view of the second crucifix (fig. 15b) we can clearly see that the legs bend at the knees, which is not or hardly visible in the frontal view. There we are merely able to detect a slight curve, the hint of a sideways motion—incidentally also on the Santa Sabina portrait (fig. 7), whose Crucified must then and for the same reason also be

<sup>36</sup> P. Derchain, “Die älteste Darstellung des Gekreuzigten auf einer magischen Gemme des 3. (?) Jahrhunderts”, K. Wessel (ed.), *Christentum am Nil*, Recklinghausen 1964, 109–13; abridged translation: “The legs are spread, because he sits on a plate that is not depicted” (sic!); A. Delatte, P. Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes*, Paris 1964, 283–5, #408; Maser 1976, 266.

<sup>37</sup> From: Tripps 1998, figs. 10e, 43a, b.



considered to feature only seemingly stretched legs, but which in reality bend at the knees, if alone because of the distinctly bent arms.

Furthermore none of the critics to date has observed—only a cognitive defect or purposeful blindness?—that the Crucified’s head is situated above the junction of the two cross beams, even though his legs are bent (fig. 2). This is however impossible, neither in reality, if we wanted to depict a real man, nor iconographically, if we classified the piece’s origin after the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For when in Christian iconography the legs begin to bend, the arms simultaneously begin to stretch and acquire a more and more pronounced V-shape. As a consequence the whole body sags, and the head is no longer situated above, but beneath the junction of the cross beams. This can clearly be seen when comparing the above-mentioned crucifixes (figs. 14, 15), but also on four additional paintings, which illustrate the fall of the Crucified in chronological succession.

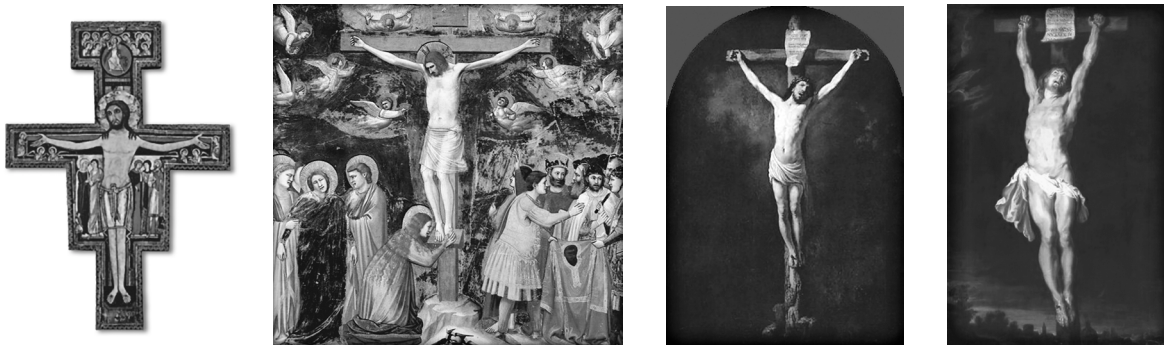


Fig. 16: Crucifix by Saint Francis of Assisi (San Damiano, Assisi, Italy, 12<sup>th</sup> century).

Figs. 17–19: Crucifixion on paintings by Giotto (14<sup>th</sup> cent.), Rembrandt and Rubens (17<sup>th</sup> cent.).

This artistic historical progression signifies a falling motion. From the historical development of iconography it appears that the crucifix was only gradually understood as the representation of a factually crucified man, eventually leading to a more realistic personification and depiction of the Crucifixion: In the course of at least a thousand years Christ was at first occasionally supported by a footrest<sup>38</sup> and a few centuries later allowed to slowly sink down, so that the knees bent further while the body sagged, the arms stretched into a V-shape, and the head moved lower and lower (*Christus patiens*). As a result the original shape of the Cross occasionally got lost as well, and the Y-shaped forked crucifix was introduced instead.

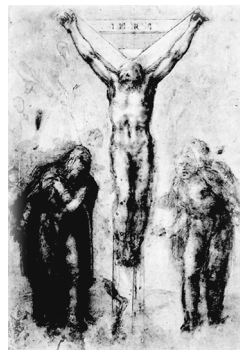


Fig. 20: Forked crucifix, Y-shaped cross (painting by Michelangelo, 16<sup>th</sup> century).

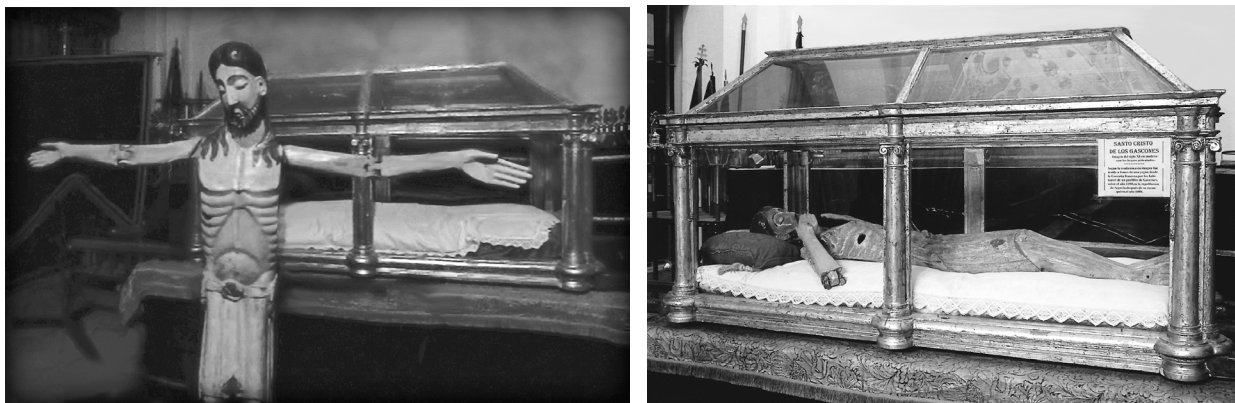
<sup>38</sup> Ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century; it is unclear if the 4<sup>th</sup> century gem (fig. 6) actually displays a footrest (v.i., n. 77).

But in this era of artistic revolution detachable crucifixes also surfaced, which are applied to this day. They are used both as the Crucified and as a tomb figure in order to reenact the Descent from the Cross during the Holy Week. (We have already seen two; cf. figs. 14, 15.) These crucifixes exhibit a peculiarity: They have bent legs, even if the arms are constructed in such a way that they will not assume the later known V-shape of the *patiens* type on the cross.

For in order to stage the Descent from the Cross, such articulated figures need to be held close to the crossbeam with stabilizing fabrics, which are applied below the armpits, while the legs are bent at the knees (figs. 21a–c) and also remain bent after the Christ has been transferred into a resting position (it.: *Cristo giacente*; fig. 22b).



Figs. 21a–c: Descent from the Cross, Bercianos de Aliste.<sup>39</sup>



Figs. 22a, b: Christ of the Gascons (fig. 22a: maximum arm elevation; fig. 22b: in the urn);<sup>40</sup> probably the oldest of the preserved detachable crucifixes, with joints at its shoulders and elbows. 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore Zahn’s guesswork that “the depictions of the Late Mediaeval Age and of the cone in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum rested on artistic imagination” is only valid if we imagine that the maker of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone wanted to depict an actual

<sup>39</sup> Near Zamora, Spain: detachable crucifix; baroque replica of an earlier Christ.

<sup>40</sup> *Cristo de los Gascones*, Church San Justo y Pastor, Segovia, Spain.

crucified person. But if he did not want to depict a living or dying man, but an effigy, a crucifix, for example the resting Christ with articulated arms, which on Good Friday was lifted to and later again descended from the Cross, then the image is absolutely plausible and realistic.

Accordingly, the crescent moon of Orpheos Bakkikos is not situated in the sky above the crucified figure, but on the peak of the cross,<sup>41</sup> because it is not a representation of the real moon but a crucified replica of the moon, maybe of silver, a silent *titulus crucis*, the crescent shape of which already reveals something specific: The moon that in eternal cyclic recurrence first wanes—in other words: dies—and then waxes again—in other words: is reborn—was also regarded as the symbol of resurrection. Thus the secondary interpretation of the seven stars as planets (see above) could make sense as well: Since the weekdays were named after the planets—well recognizable in Latin, whereas sun and moon were included—, the seven planets would then indicate a whole week. Together with the crescent moon they might symbolize the Holy Week—which of course concludes with the Resurrection, followed by the Ascension, because the seven stars were commonly understood to be the *septentriones*,<sup>42</sup> the “seven threshing oxen” of the Cart constellation (Dipper), which trek around the Pole Star and never disappear beneath the horizon to take a bath in the *Oceanus* like other stars.<sup>43</sup> In this region of the Northern sky Venus had her place,<sup>44</sup> there she guided the soul of *Divus Iulius*, her murdered and deified son Julius Caesar,<sup>45</sup> there the resurrected Caesar appeared as a bright comet,<sup>46</sup> and there the souls of the blessed migrated, especially many departed members of the imperial dynasties—demonstrated for example for the deceased and deified juvenescent son of emperor Domitian, *Divus Caesar*,<sup>47</sup> on whose commemorative gold coin the seven stars are arranged in the same way as on the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone (fig. 23).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Cf. J. Cashford, *The Moon: Myth and Image*, London 2002, 202.

<sup>42</sup> The earliest known Roman coin with the *septentriones* motif is a Republican *denarius* by L. Lucretius Trio (76 BCE, Craw 390.1), on which the seven stars form a semicircle and surround the crescent moon, which however faces the obverse sun god Sol as a depiction of the real moon. It is conceivable that Trio chose this iconography simply as a pun on his name—*Trio*, *Trionis* > *septem-triones* > “seven threshing oxen”—and it is unknown if the coin also symbolized a specific catasterism, the “placing of a person among the stars”. Nevertheless the motif was seminal for the celestial iconography of the later imperial era, e.g. on a coin of emperor Hadrian (BMC 463; cf. P. Domenicucci, *Astra Caesarum. Astronomica, astrologica e catasterismo da Cesare a Domiziano*, Pisa 1996, 176 sq.).

<sup>43</sup> Hom. *Il.* 18.487 sqq..

<sup>44</sup> Serv. *ad Verg. Aen.* 8.590.1–6; for the ancient depictions of planets cf. E. Simon, s.v. “Planetæ”, *LIMC* 8, Düsseldorf 1997, 1003–9.

<sup>45</sup> Ov. *Met.* 15.844 sqq.

<sup>46</sup> During Caesar’s *ludi funebres* in July 44 BCE the “Julian star” (*sidus Iulium*) flared up in the sky above Rome, a bright comet regarded by the people as Caesar’s soul in heaven, “accepted among the *numina* of the immortal gods” (Plin. *NH* 94; cf. Dio *HR* 45.6.4–7.1; Suet. *Jul.* 88). Under this star, which appeared *in regione caeli sub septemtrionibus*, his adoptive son Octavian, the later Augustus, was reborn as *Divi filius*, “Son of God” (Octavian in Plin. *N.H.* 2.93–4). On Caesar’s catasterism *septentrione* cf. also Obs. *Prod.* 68; cf. Serv. *Aen.* 8.681 (Thilo-Hagen 2.299.28). Therefore Caesar’s apotheosis provided the original form of the septentrionic catasterisms of the successive imperial dynasties.

<sup>47</sup> Mart. *Epigr.* 4.3.

<sup>48</sup> Syd 213; BMC 62; cf. C.H.V. Sutherland, *Roman Coins*, London 1974, 190 sq.





Fig. 23: *Aureus* of *Divus Caesar* (82–84 CE);<sup>49</sup> cp. the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone (fig. 2b); note that both figures are shown in three-quarter view (v.i.).

But the articulated Christian crucifixes are not documented until the 13<sup>th</sup> or (at the earliest) 12<sup>th</sup> century. So one response could be that the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone as a representation of the Resurrection and therefore the Holy Week would indeed not be a forgery, but could still only originate at the earliest from these times. As a consequence one would have to assume that the ritual of the Holy Week also originated from this era, which is however contradicted by Egeria's report from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, one would also have to declare all other similar miniature craftwork depictions of early Christianity as forgeries, something that seems impossible at least for the *Ichthys* carnelian (fig. 5) and the jasper from Gaza (fig. 11).

Such figures displayed on crosses during the Holy Week are indeed conceivable for early Christianity, because Easter was celebrated from the beginning,<sup>50</sup> but they were not documented. Why not? Was it because they did not exist in ancient times, and instead of the Crucified a relic of the Cross was used, as Egeria seems to report about the rites of Jerusalem? But is this correct?<sup>51</sup> And was it like this everywhere? Could it not be that an older tradition had persisted in some regions and spread again from the 12<sup>th</sup> century on? Apart from the wanton destructions by the iconoclasts, who rejected human representations and realistic images of the Crucifixion and instead propagated the bare cross, could it not be that older figures do not exist because they did not survive? Such

<sup>49</sup> Inscription: DIVVS CAESAR IMP[eratoris] DOMITIANI F[ilius].

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Tert. *de jejun.* 14: *pascha celebramus annuo circulo in mense primo*, i.e. in March.

<sup>51</sup> Tripps 1998, 121; cf. *Itinerarium Egeriae* (approx. 380 CE), *Pars secunda: De operatione singulis diebus in locis sanctis*, *Capitulum XXXVII* (1–4): *Et sic ponitur cathedra episcopo in Golgotha post Crucem, quae stat nunc; residet episcopus in cathedra; ponitur ante eum mensa sublindeata; stant in giro mensa diacones et affertur locus argenteus deauratus, in quo est lignum sanctum crucis, aperitur et profertur, ponitur in mensa tam lignum crucis quam titulus. [...] quia consuetudo est, ut unus et unus omnis populus ueniens, tam fideles quam cathecumini, acclinant<es> se ad mensam osculentur sanctum lignum et pertranseant. [...] At ubi autem sexta hora se fecerit, sic itur ante Crucem [...]*. This report implies that the cross, which already “stood” as a successive station of the *Via Crucis* at the beginning of the ceremony, was not identical to the wooden relic of the True Cross, which was taken from the shrine, placed onto the table together with the *titulus crucis* and kissed by the people in passing. So in principle we cannot exclude the possibility that both a relic of the True Cross and a crucifix on a standing cross for typifying the Lord's Passion were utilized also during the 4<sup>th</sup> century Good Friday liturgy in Jerusalem.

figures needed to be articulated and thus were made of wood or of wax with an internal wooden structure. So they were prone to wood worm infestation and were consequently replaced regularly by the parishes, of course in a contemporary style, whereas the old figures were walled into crypts or simply burnt—as it is documented for the predecessor of the crucifix of Bercianos de Aliste (figs. 21a–c).<sup>52</sup> Restorers know the deplorable state the oldest wooden crucifixes are in.<sup>53</sup> But there is none among them from the early Christian era.

One such articulated wax figure is however historically documented for the first century BCE, namely in the sources on the funeral of Julius Caesar. One could of course believe that this has nothing to do with Christianity, but the influence of the Roman imperial cult on the Christian religion has long been established, and the theologian Ethelbert Stauffer determined already in the 1950s that the Good Friday liturgy does not follow the Gospel, but the funerary ritual of Caesar.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, the Orpheos Bakkikos need not necessarily be Christian—after all, neither is the inscription. Still, most opinions that shed doubt on the stone’s authenticity are based on a *petitio principii*: It is a methodological error to *a priori* declare something potentially non-Christian as Christian and consequently—instead of looking for possible ancient non-Christian precursors—rather postulate a case of forgery, simply because it contradicts a prefabricated Christian evolutionary pattern.

But if we take the above-mentioned *Iobakchoi* into consideration,<sup>55</sup> whose cult of the Orphic Mysteries shows striking parallels to Christian martyr mysticism—which had become common knowledge at the latest since Loisy and explains mysteries like the works of Nonnus, who in the fifth century wrote the *Dionysiaca* together with a paraphrase of the fourth gospel<sup>56</sup>—, we notice that the Dionysian cult societies were traditionally widespread in the Hellenistic region. There they had contributed decisively to the development of the tragedy, and their *technitai* organized theater performances and festive

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<sup>52</sup> Information by Prof. F. Rodríguez Pascual, Pontificia University of Salamanca, Spain.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. Taubert (ed.), *Farbige Skulpturen, Bedeutung–Fassung–Restaurierung*, Munich 1978, 30–7.

<sup>54</sup> E. Stauffer, *Jerusalem und Rom im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, Bern 1957, 21–9; idem, *Christus und die Caesaren*, Hamburg 1952 (latest English edition: *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches*, Eugene 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Thus named after *Iô*, their ritual call to Bacchus (cf. H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos. Histoire du Culte de Bacchus*, Paris 1951, 470, 474–6). For an overview of the communal and structural parallels between the *Iobakchoi* and early Christian parishes cf. M. Öhler, “Iobakchen und Christusverehrer. Das Christentum im Rahmen des antiken Vereinswesens”, R. Klieber, M. Stowasser (edd.), *Inkulturation. Historische Beispiele und theologische Reflexionen zur Flexibilität und Widerständigkeit des Christlichen*, Vienna 2006, 63–86.

<sup>56</sup> Neumann 1968, 12–4, 22–35; cf. A. Loisy, *Les mystères payens et le mystère chrétien*, Paris 1919/1930. Until today it has not been explained why the 5<sup>th</sup> century Greek poet Nonnus wrote his *Dionysiaca* together with a paraphrase (metabola) of the Gospel of John. It was assumed that he converted to Christianity and that the paraphrase belonged to his later work. There is however no evidence supporting this conjecture, the more so as he consistently regarded the Dionysian Mysteries positively. Unlike what we would expect from a convert, he never showed repentance. When observed however from the perspective of Christian mysticism’s many similarities to the Dionysian Mysteries, Nonnus’ position doesn’t astonish us at all. His purported inconsequence would in fact be the adherence of a theologically unyielding poet to the historical origins of Christianity. Something similar can be noted for Ausonius, a Christian, who wrote two epigrams (29, 40) to Liber Pater, or for Apollinaris, who was excommunicated together with his father for listening to recitals of *dionysiaca*, which was only permitted for mystics. However this didn’t prevent Apollinaris from eventually becoming bishop of Laodicea (*Soz. Hist. Eccl.* 6.25; cf. Migne PG 1360 B).

processions, since 493 BCE also in Rome, when a temple of Ceres, Liber and Libera was inaugurated on Aventine Hill. It was also in Rome, where after Caesar's assassination his funeral on the day of the *Liberalia* (see below) became a historical iteration of the Dionysian tragedy, and where a circle of prominent poets—among them Virgil, Horace, Catullus and Tibullus—ranked among the *Cultores Liberi*, the worshippers of Bacchus.<sup>57</sup>

The most important exponent of the *Iobakchoi* in the second century CE was Herodes Atticus, who is mentioned as their priest in the Athenian inscription.<sup>58</sup> Herodes was a famous sophist and politician, consul at Rome, friend of many emperors, rhetorics teacher of Mark Aurel, and married to Annia Regilla, a Roman woman of imperial nobility, who like Caesar traced her ancestry back to Aeneas and Venus and became a priestess of Demeter.<sup>59</sup> His family's imperial career had already begun when one of his ancestors supervised the reconstruction of the Athenian Agora under Caesar's orders. Next to the Eleusinian pair of Demeter and Kore the city especially worshipped Dionysus, whom Caesar himself held in high esteem: He reintroduced the cult of the Roman counterpart Liber Pater, which had originally been proscribed together with the *Bacchanalia*. During the reignited civil war following Caesar's assassination Athens stood consistently on Mark Antony's side, who in the East was hailed as a new Dionysus, gave him the virgin city goddess Athena as a bride together with a dowry of one thousand talents, and offered resistance to Octavian, who described as the new Apollo. Even after his victory over Antony Octavian did not dare to enter the city and only later came to an arrangement with the son of Caesar's procurator, whom he granted additional funds for the completion of the Agora.

Under the Claudian emperors, who descended from Antony's daughters and Octavian's sister, the family of Herodes received Roman citizenship as *Claudii Attici* and since then supplied the high priests of the imperial cult, the exegetes of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the priests of Dionysus. After having fallen from grace under the *Flavii* they subsequently came to wealth again, when they coincidentally found an enormous treasure of unknown origin—Athena's dowry to Antony?—in one of their homes near the Temple of Dionysus, which was never disputed or confiscated, neither by Nerva nor by the Spanish emperors, who also called themselves “New Dionysus”.<sup>60</sup> With his newly acquired wealth Herodes Atticus financed the construction of splendid buildings for the populace. Due to the fame that his beneficence earned him Herodes was often treated with hostility,

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<sup>57</sup> A. Bruhl, *Liber Pater. Origine et expansion du culte dionysiaque à Rome et dans le monde romain*, Paris 1953, 133–44.

<sup>58</sup> *SIG*<sup>3/4</sup> 3.1109, ll. 5–10 (Claudius Herodes), 25–30 (Herodes); cf. Maass 1895, 18 sq., 32–5.

<sup>59</sup> Through her father Appius Annius Gallus, Annia Regilla was related to Annia Galeria Faustina, wife of emperor Antoninus Pius and aunt of Marcus Annius Verus, the future emperor Marc Aurel, who would himself marry a young woman from the same family: Annia Galeria Faustina Minor. So Annia Regilla represented the personal connection between the dynasty of the *Annii* from Ucubi (Espejo) in the Baetica and the *Claudii Herodes* from Attica. By coincidence she would also have a ‘Christian’ *nachleben*, because an Italian temple dedicated to Ceres and Faustina by her husband Herodes Atticus in 160 CE, the ceiling of which depicted her apotheosis, was reinaugurated as a church in the 7<sup>th</sup> century: S. Urbano alla Caffarella (cf. Graindor 1930, 83, 215 sqq., fig. 21).

<sup>60</sup> Following the example of Alexander, Ptolemy Auletes, Mithridates and Antony, the emperors of the Baetica Trajan and Hadrian as well as Antoninus Pius, who was related to the *Annii* by marriage, called themselves “New Dionysus”.

but the accusations before the emperor were in vain. The *Iobakchoi* stood by him: Shortly before his passing he was enthusiastically welcomed with a Bacchanalian procession, from Eleusis into Athens, as if Dionysus himself, accompanied by the two goddesses, celebrated his homecoming—like a new Antony, if not like a new Caesar.<sup>61</sup>

Since therefore the Bacchic component of our stone can be traced back to Caesar and the early imperial cult, it is worthwhile to scrutinize the historical event of Caesar's funeral and its staging by Mark Antony, which included an articulated wax effigy of the slain and introduced a novel, historic liturgy. We will investigate if and how this ceremony is related to the 'crucifixion' of Orpheos Bakkikos.

Caesar's funeral, at which Mark Antony gave his famous funerary oration, took place on 17 March 44 BCE, on the third day after his assassination.<sup>62</sup> Since Caesar's body was laid out flat on his bier on the Rostra and could not be seen by the attending people, a realistic wax figure was raised above the bier. It displayed all the dagger wounds, particularly the fatal wound to his side, and was fastened to a cruciform *tropaeum*, which also carried Caesar's blood-stained robe. By means of a mechanism the *tropaeum* was rotated around its vertical axis, so that the entire crowd on the *Forum Romanum* could see how savagely the murderers had slaughtered him.<sup>63</sup> The people revolted, cremated Caesar's body on the Forum and hunted for the assassins and conspirators. This was celebrated as his resurrection, as his victory over death.

A rendition of Caesar's funeral and resurrection can be found on a *denarius* that was minted the same year (figs. 24a, b).<sup>64</sup> It metaphorically represents him as Endymion,<sup>65</sup> the shepherd or king who was found sleeping in a cave by the moon goddess Selene. She fell in love with him and requested eternal life for him from Zeus. He chose eternal sleep, from which he would only awaken to receive Selene, who would descend to him every night. On the coin Endymion lies in the cave on a bed of furs, reclined to the rock, his head resting on his bent left arm. In this moment of awakening he seems to be sitting up from his sleep, while Selene is descending from her carriage. A winged figure<sup>66</sup> is lighting the scene with the upright torch of immortality.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Graindor 1930, 1–136 (127–36).

<sup>62</sup> On the dating v.i., n. 80.

<sup>63</sup> App. *BC* 2.146; Suet. *Jul.* 84; cf. F. Carotta, *Was Jesus Caesar?*, Munich 1999, 406, n. 157 (= *Jesus was Caesar*, Soesterberg 2005, 384 sqq., n. 157) [N.B.: new German edition in preparation: Ludwig, Kiel].

<sup>64</sup> Craw 480.1; BMC R4161.

<sup>65</sup> E. Babelon, *Traité des monnaies grecques et romaines* 2, No. 38, Paris 1910. It was later assumed that this *denarius* by Buca, who was one of Julius Caesar's moneyers, depicts a dream of the long-deceased Sulla, a hypothesis that was however falsified by Fears (cf. J.R. Fears, "Sulla or Endymion: A Reconsideration of a Denarius of L. Aemilius Buca", *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 20, 1975, 29–37); on the interpretation of Endymion as Caesar cf. also C. Cogrossi, "Il denario di Aemilius Buca e la morte di Cesare", *Contributi dell'Istituto di Storia Antica dell'Università del Sacro Cuore, Milano* 4, 1976, 169–78; cf. C. Battenberg, *Pompeius und Caesar. Persönlichkeit und Programm in ihrer Münzpropaganda*, Dissertation, Marburg 1980, 168–71.

<sup>66</sup> Several interpretations are possible for the torchbearer and companion of Selene, i.a. Aura, Phosphorus (Lucifer) or Eros (Amor), and especially the commonly assumed Hypnos (Somnus) in the form of a Victoria. The winged figure was alternatively interpreted as Virgo, however in conjunction with the earlier Sulla hypothesis (cf. A. Alföldi, "Der machtverheißende Traum des Sulla. Zur Auswertung der Münzquellen der Geschichte des Jahres 44 v. Chr., 1. Beitrag", *Jahrbuch des Bernischen Historischen Museums in Bern* 41/42,



Figs. 24a, b: Buca *denarius*. Caesar's resurrection, metaphorically depicted as the eternal sleep of Endymion, who is awakened every night by Selene's kiss. 44 BCE.

The awakening figure is not depicted in a frontal but in a three-quarter view, as on the coin of Domitian's son (fig. 23) and on the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone (fig. 2b). Hence the argument that this kind of slightly turned depiction is a stylistic innovation of Middle Byzantine Christian art and thus impossible before the seventh century,<sup>68</sup> is false and inadmissible because this form of representation was indeed common in Antiquity. So instead of postdating by several centuries we only need to antedate a little. Here, too, the right foot conspicuously remains behind the left, as in Becker's drawing (fig. 12).

Buca's representation of Caesar as the shepherd/king Endymion—marshaled into eternal sleep, but woken every night by a kiss—does not only accord with the early Christian iconography, which often identifies Jonah in Endymion's pose with Christ,<sup>69</sup> but is also confusingly similar to a reclined Christ (*Cristo giacente*), complete with the Virgin and an angel, as which Selene and the winged figure can be perceived—as was incidentally the case in the Middle Ages and also the Renaissance.<sup>70</sup> The moon also plays a central role here: Selene, the personified moon, wears a crescent moon on her head—well visible in figure 24b.

Of course the reclined figure does not represent Caesar's real body, because it was flatly laid out in a miniature temple of Venus Genetrix, but rather his wax figure, which had been modeled on Endymion,<sup>71</sup> bore all of Caesar's wounds and was shown to the

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Bern 1961/62, 278, with iconographical reference to: E. Simon, "Zum Fries der Mysterienvilla bei Pompeji", *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 76, 1961, 132–34).

<sup>67</sup> In the original tradition the torch used to be an attribute of Artemis in the form of Hecate, the co-judge together with Zeus. In Hellenistic times the torch was conferred on Selene.

<sup>68</sup> Spier 2007, 178.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Neumann 1968, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Mastrocinque 1993, 18, n. 18.

<sup>71</sup> App. *BC* 2.146: *andreíkelon autou Kaisáros ek kêrou pepoiêménon*. It has been established that Roman (and especially the Caesarian) moneyers generally referred to contemporary political events and illustrated them using realistic and archaeologically reliable motifs. A coin by Macer, which was issued together with our Buca *denarius*, depicts a mourning Mark Antony, who wears a beard and long hair, as well as a *desultor*, a trick rider, which refers to the games during the Parilia on 21 April shortly after Caesar's death and resurrection (Craw 480.22). Therefore we can assume that in those dramatic times also Buca's Caesar-Endymion reproduced a motif that was known to the people from Caesar's funeral ceremony. That this coin documented an existent iconography is corroborated by the fact that the Caesar-Endymion

people. For this reason we also know, in which position it had been arranged, namely with bent legs. We can also see that the arms were articulated, because the figure could be positioned as to be resting on its elbow. Other depictions of Roman funerals from the same period also display such articulated figures, for example the one from Amiternum.



Fig. 25a: *Pompa funebris*, Amiternum, Museo Aquilano: marble relief;<sup>72</sup>

Fig. 25b: Detail; deathbed with articulated wax effigy, supported on elbow.<sup>73</sup> Late republic (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE).

We know from ancient toy dolls that the Romans were capable of implementing postures with limb mechanisms very skillfully. Furthermore they had the possibility of concealing the joints with parchment. We also know from many depictions what a Roman tropaeum looked like, for example from the miniature in figure 27a. Julius Caesar's own *tropaea* were cruciform, as his coins show (fig. 28a).



Fig. 26: Ancient wooden mannequin, Rome.

Fig. 27a: Miniature tropaeum, *Collection of Classical Antiquities*, Berlin.

Fig. 28a: Tropaeum on Caesar's coin,<sup>74</sup> decorated with spoils of war, i.a. the armor of Vercingetorix (lower right); on the lower left a weeping Gallia. 46–45 BCE.

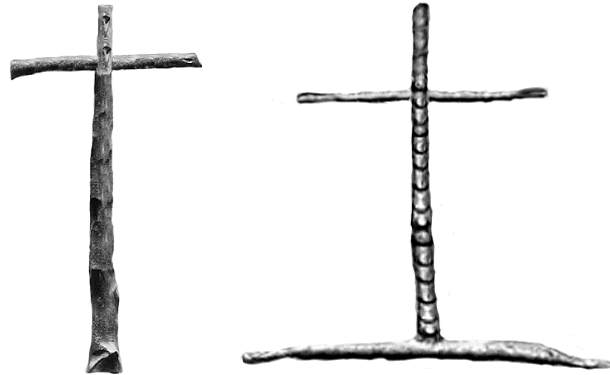
occupied a prominent place in imperial iconography in the following centuries, not least on the triumphal arch of Constantine the Great (western narrow face; cf. H.P. L'Orange and A. von Gerkan, *Der spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens*, Berlin 1939, 164, pl. 38b, fig. 1).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, London 1971, 46–7, fig. 11.

<sup>73</sup> The body of the deceased is under the bed, laid out in a coffin, which in relation to the wax figure is scaled down in a naive style of perspective, consistent with the bearers of the *ferculum* in the background, who were also depicted smaller in comparison with the bearers in the foreground.

<sup>74</sup> Syd 1014; Craw 468.1; RSC 13.

From the clipped tropaea we can see that they came in different shapes, as it would be required for different occasions (figs. 27b, 28b).



Figs. 27b, 28b: Tropaea, clipped.

Caesar's obsequies were orchestrated with great splendor,<sup>75</sup> so his tropaeum would not have been coarse—and interestingly, neither is the cross on the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone.

If we clip Caesar's funeral effigy from the Buca *denarius* and arrange it on a tropaeum, we obtain a figure quite similar to the Orpheos Bakkikos: A 'Crucified' appears (figs. 29a–c).



Figs. 29a–c: Caesar-Endymion from the Buca *denarius*, clipped and attached to the tropaeum.

In this position it looks like a Descent from the Cross. However, it would hardly have been possible to see the main wound to the chest, the only fatal one,<sup>76</sup> because the arm would have obscured the view. But if we position the articulated arms, so that they can be tied to the crossbeam of the tropaeum—something that Antony's assistants surely would have done, because it was the purpose of the funerary act to display Caesar's

<sup>75</sup> App. *BC* 2.143.

<sup>76</sup> Suet. *Jul.* 82.3: *nec in tot vulneribus, ut Antistius medicus existimabat, letale ullum repertum est, nisi quod secundo loco in pectore acceperat*, ("And of so many wounds none turned out to be mortal, in the opinion of the physician Antistius, except the second one in the breast.")



wounds, first and foremost the deadly one to his chest—, then the image very much resembles that of the Orpheos Bakkikos (fig. 29d).

It must be noted that four straps are necessary to fasten the wax figure to the tropaeum's crossbeam, at the wrists and under the armpits, as we have seen on the jasper from Gaza (fig. 11; consistent with fig. 5), and as it would be required for staging a Descent from the Cross with the Christ of the Gascons (fig. 22a), if one were to abandon the nails for the hands.

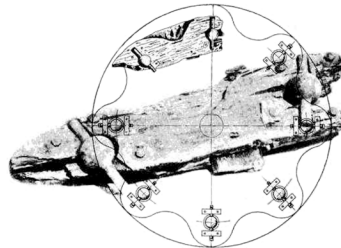


Fig. 29d: Idem with spread arms; cp. the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone (fig. 2b).

Now we are also able to explain the thick round dowels affixed to the base of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* cross (fig. 2b). If the two elements only served to stabilize the cross they would come in the form of wedges or angles, which would have been more suitable. Why then are they round and cone-shaped? This could of course stem from the engraving itself, which is so microscopic that all shapes would appear rounded. But their shape is adequate if the (truncated) cones represent the mechanism (*mêchanê*), which facilitated the tropaeum's rotation to present Caesar's wax effigy to the people.<sup>77</sup> It is established that the Romans knew the roller bearing technology: Ancient bearings that already anticipate real ball bearings were found on a sunken ship in Lake Nemi. They had been installed at the base of a statue, whereas their mechanism also served as a means of rotation.<sup>78</sup> Two

<sup>77</sup> On the 4<sup>th</sup> century gem from the *Nott Collection* (fig. 6) it is conspicuous that the two (Apostolic?) figures to the left and right of the cross extend their arms to touch a short horizontal beam, on which the Christ's feet seem to rest. Is this the very earliest representation of the *suppedaneum* in Christian art or simply a small platform or column? And do the two figures extend their arms as a gesture of acclamation or to grab a handle to rotate the structure? However, it is to be noted that none of these speculations can be answered because the cross is not visible behind Christ (v.s., figs. 7, 9).

<sup>78</sup> Combined axial needle and ball bearing for a rotating statue base, Lake Nemi, 37–41 CE (fig. 30, from: E. Fabio, L. Fassitelli, *Roma: ingegneria e industria*, Petrolieri d'Italia, Milan 1990).





shipwrecks were salvaged there, one of them presumably from the property of Caligula. But Caesar had also owned a villa at Lake Nemi, so the recovered statue could as well originate from the Caesarian or early imperial period.

Furthermore, the base cones of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* cross exhibit a noticeably rounded, mushroom-shaped head, which we can also see at the three visible ends of the cross beams (cf. fig. 2). In addition they were even interpreted as phallic.<sup>79</sup> Would this be a coincidence or a hint at the date? According to the ancient historiographers Caesar's funeral proceeded on 17 March, on the day of the *Liberalia*, the festival of Libera (Kore), daughter of Ceres (Demeter), but also the festival of Liber Pater, an early syncretistic variant of Bacchus (Dionysus).<sup>80</sup> On this day old women handed out wafers to the populace, and wine was also consumed, as it is still done today during the Christian Eucharist, especially on Easter. Like Easter the *Liberalia* were a celebration of both the resurrection of nature in spring and of fertility: On the same day processions in honor of Liber Pater showcasing phallic symbols were held in Lavinium *pro eventibus seminum*.<sup>81</sup> Would this be prefigured by the phallic shape of the base cones and the peaks of the cross beams?

Orpheus however was not only the good shepherd but also the hero who had returned Eurydice from Hades. On the day of the *Liberalia* Julius Caesar had been his own Bacchic Orpheus, because he had returned himself from the underworld, as he had once already done with his uncle Gaius Marius.<sup>82</sup> His *resurrectio* as Divus Iulius on the *Liberalia* was however effectuated by Mark Antony's dramatic staging, who was not only consul, but also the designated *flamen Divi Iulii*, high priest of the deified Caesar. Antony had commemorated Caesar's historical Easter and led him to political and divine resurrection from death by raising his bloodstained wax effigy on a tropaeum: Caesar's *erectio crucis*. So as the celebrant Antony was the actual Bacchic Orpheus.

Of this he was proud: When he joined Cleopatra, the new Aphrodite, he allowed to be worshipped as the new Dionysus. The fate of Mark Antony, a skilled bacchanalian lover of wine and women, who was torn between the two powerful women Fulvia and Cleopatra, who had saved Caesar from Hades with Fulvia's help, but who had then

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<sup>79</sup> Information by Prof. F. Rodríguez Pascual; the sadly departed Claretian ethnologist and anthropologist of the Pontificia University of Salamanca had excavated and re-erected several ancient stone phalli next to the church in Rabanales, a neighbor village of Bercianos de Aliste (fig. 21). He associated them with the ancient tradition of rural fertility rites and the cults of Bacchus and Ceres (cf. Rodríguez Pascual 1998, internet). So it is no surprise that they were also connected to Easter, one of the Christian fertility festivals. With the advent of Christianity these ancient phalli were even reused as stations of the rural *Via Crucis* (cf. Salas Parrilla 2006, internet).

<sup>80</sup> 17 March results unanimously from the reports by Appian, Suetonius, Plutarch and Nicolaus of Damascus as the date of Caesar's funeral. Modern attempts like Drumann's unfortunate computation, which regrettably caught on and tried to upend the ancient chronology—apparently only on the basis of *Phil.* 2.35, a questionable passage by Cicero (and to what end?)—, did not determine a commonly accepted date: Therefore everything from 18 to 23 March and later was possible, *ad libitum* (cf. W. Drumann, P. Groebe, *Geschichte Roms in seinem Übergange von der republikanischen zur monarchischen Verfassung* 1, Berlin/Leipzig 1899–1922<sup>2</sup>, 90, n. 67, 417). Cf. Carotta-Eickenberg 2009, including archaeological evidence for the tropaeum as a prop of the Dionysian rites. [[Click here for a link to the English version](#)].

<sup>81</sup> *Bacchanalia* (186 CE): Var. in August. *De civ. Dei* 6.9, 7.2–3, 7.16, 7.21, 4.11; cf. G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, Munich 1921/1970, 297–304 (299).

<sup>82</sup> Plut. *Caes.* 5.

abandoned his wife in her battle against Octavian, and who eventually perished from his love for Cleopatra-Aphrodite, driven to his death by Octavian-Apollo, is truly an epigonic tale of the Bacchic Orpheus. The material of our stone, hematite, a blood-red ferric oxide, would not have been selected by chance: It is in line with Antony, also because he had reigned in the East of the Empire, where such stones and cones were in common use.

The artefact's inscription also fits into this context, not only because Greek used to be the canonical language of the gems: ΟΡΦΕΟΣ ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ contains two mistakes, one per word, which points to a Latin-speaking author. On the one hand we are struck by the erroneous spelling *Orpheos* instead of *Orpheus*: The Latin speaker was used to render the Latin suffix *-us* as the Greek *-os*. It is therefore a mistake owing to hypercorrectness. On the other hand *Bakkikos* has replaced the correct *Bakchikos* (ΒΑΚΚΙΚΟΣ ≠ ΒΑΚΧΙΚΟΣ), because the Latin language does not comprise the phoneme *ch*, whereas the equivalent letter *X* is used for *ks*. These observations point to a bilingual environment—like that of the *Iobakchoi* in Greece and Italy.

Incidentally this is not a constant clerical error: Other gems with the correct spelling ΒΑΚΧΙΚΟΣ have been documented.<sup>83</sup> Divergent orthography, sometimes amalgamating Latin and Greek alphabets, was common also in purely Christian testimonies: see above, the Latin letter *V* for *Y* in ΥΧΘVC (fig. 5) or the remarkable ΕΗCO ΧΡΕΤΟC for 'Jesus Christ' (fig. 6).

Hence we recognize the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone as the archaeological link between the cult of Divus Iulius, which commenced as the Roman imperial religion in 44 BCE, and Christianity, which became its substitute from the second or third century onward. The *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone would thus be both Orphic-syncretistic and Julian-Proto-Christian, with an Eastern Antonian tendency. As a consequence nothing would obviate the early dating to the third or even second century, as proposed by connoisseurs of gems and of the Orphic cults.

Therefore the affiliation of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone to the society of the *Iobakchoi*, which had been identified by Neumann and Hinz, has now been verified. This also suggests an alternative hypothesis on the original use of the so-called 'seal' or 'amulet', namely as an element in the *habitus* of an imperial high priest, such as the *iobacchus* Herodes Atticus.

The *flamen Dialis*, high priest of Jupiter, wore an archaic cap of white wool or fleece, adorned with an *apex*, a flamboyantly elongate olive branch, which is why the cap itself was *pars pro toto* often simply called *apex* instead of *pilleus* or *albogalerus*. A woolen fillet (*filum*) was used to attach the *apex*, but also a tuft of hair or a snippet of fur from the sacrificial victim, which is why the Romans thought that the title *flamen* derived from *filamen*.<sup>84</sup> So the *apex* of the weather god's high priest looked like a shamanic lightning rod. Its form is well documented, for example on one of Caesar's coins, which exhibits the *apex* as part of the panoply of the *pontifex maximus*, together with the

<sup>83</sup> Mastrocinque 1993, 19.

<sup>84</sup> Var. *LL* 5.84; cf. J.H. Vanggaard, *The Flamen – A Study in the History and Sociology of Roman Religion*, Copenhagen 1988, 40–5.

*simpulum* (ladle), the *aspergillum* (sprinkler for holy water) and the *securis* (sacrificial hatchet with the head of the Capitoline Wolf).



Fig. 31: *Pontifex maximus* coin of Caesar:<sup>85</sup> on the right the *pilleus* with *apex*. 49–48 BCE.

The caps of the other *flamines*, among them the *flamen Divi Iulii*, high priest of the deified Caesar, were based on the same archetype and can be witnessed on the processional frieze of the Augustan *Ara Pacis*.



Fig. 32: The *flamines maiores* wearing their *apex* on the processional frieze of the *Ara Pacis* (south face). 9 BCE.<sup>86</sup>

The most important *flamen* of Divus Iulius naturally resided at Rome, but for maintaining his state-supporting cult, high priests of the new god inaugurated throughout the Empire. The form of the *apex* of a colonial *flamen Divi Iulii* is known from a find in Alexandria Troas, a city where Herodes Atticus constructed a famous aqueduct (*see above*).

A remarkable detail is the small transverse piece integrated in the *apex* at half height, thereby slightly indicating a cruciform shape (fig. 33). As we know, this design was inherited by Christianity, and still today such a headdress is worn by the Patriarchs of the

<sup>85</sup> Craw 443.1; Syd 1006.

<sup>86</sup> Third (older) flamen from left (in the background): *flamen Divi Iulii* Sextus Appuleius; CIL 8.24583 = ILS 8963; maybe the husband of Augustus' stepsister Octavia Maior (PIR<sup>2</sup> 1.186, #960); cf. S. Weinstock, "The Chair and the Image of Germanicus", *Journal of Roman Studies* 47, 1957, 151–4; cf. W. Helbig, *Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen Klassischer Altertümer in Rom* 2, Tübingen 1966<sup>4</sup>, 682 sq. (#1937); or his homonymous son (PIR<sup>2</sup> 1.186, #961): cf. M.W. Hoffman Lewis, *The Official Priests of Rome Under the Julio-Claudians. A Study of the Nobility from 44 B.C. to 68 A.D.*, Rome 1955, 37.

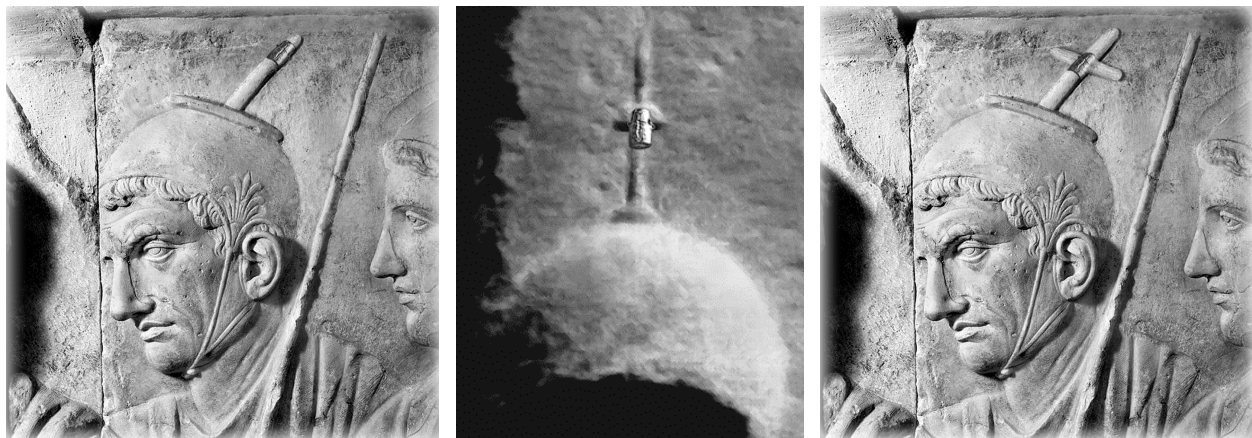
Eastern Church, but also by the Pope, whereas the actual *apex*, the branch itself, has been transformed into a distinct cross.



Fig. 33: Base in honor of the *flamen Divi Iulii* C. Antonius Rufus; fitted with his *pilleus* and *apex*; Alexandria Troas, British Museum, London. 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>87</sup>

Figs. 34a, b: Ritual headdresses of an Orthodox Patriarch and the Pope (*tiara*).

This elongate branch on top of the ancient *pilleus* of the *flamen* is slightly conical (figs. 31–33). So the tiny and also conical *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone could have fitted the branch and have been attached to its tip. Its two basal openings (figs. 3, 4) and the lateral longitudinal grooves next to the perforation holes (fig. 3) would then have been functional for affixing it to the *apex*. The perforation holes could also have served to hold transverse pieces of wood, which then represented a cruciform miniature tropaeum (fig. 35c). In any case the stone on the *apex* of the *flamen Divi Iulii*—with its depiction of the assassinated Caesar’s wax effigy, exhibited on a tropaeum—would have had the same function as the small cross on the *apex* of the subsequent Christian *tiara*: the first *crucifixum signum*.



Figs. 35a, b: Possible positions of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone on the *apex* of the *flamines Divi Iulii*.

Fig. 35c: Possible position with wooden crosspieces.

<sup>87</sup> S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, Oxford 1971, 405, pl. 31, fig. 2; in fig. 1 (409, n. 4, pl. 31) a similar *apex* of a *flamen* from the temple of Augustus in Tarraco (Tarragona, Spain), from: R. Étienne, *Le culte impérial dans la Péninsule Ibérique*, Paris 1958, pl. 3.

Irrespective of whether this assumption is correct, the very existence of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone enables us to establish another hypothesis. The Christian crucifixes with bent legs can be regarded in filiation of the *Orpheos Bakkikos* stone. The same would probably also apply for the crucifixes with bent arms, which is an indication for only seemingly stretched legs and therefore a stylistic category, in which also the crucifix of San Damiano would belong, at the least due to the different elevation of its knees (fig. 16). The articulated crucifixes of the Holy Week apparently follow this tradition too. Their depictions in ancient art are scarce insofar as they themselves were already a representation, so there would have been infrequent need for the representation of a representation. At any rate, it is certain that these figures were taken out of the crypts, chapels and sacristies to incorporate them in the ritual activities during the Holy Week.

Otherwise the Christian catacombs and churches at first only displayed the (slaughtered) lamb or the Good Shepherd, then later the triumphant Christ as *pantokrator*. If the Crucified was shown instead of the lamb, his *habitus* was majestic and victorious.<sup>88</sup> It was not until Bernard of Clairvaux' twelfth century monastic emphasis on the suffering Christ that the crucifixes became presentable outside of the Holy Week. They served as models for the illustration of a conceived 'real' Crucifixion, of which the artists however had no technical and artistic knowledge: The crucifixion had been abolished as a form of punishment under Constantine the Great, and no depictions had been preserved from Antiquity.<sup>89</sup>

But conspicuously almost all of the above-mentioned ancient protagonists knew the crucifixion: Caesar ordered the pirates crucified, who had captured him;<sup>90</sup> his son-in-law Pompey the insurgent slaves of Spartacus; Caesar's assassin Cassius Longinus a defector in Jerusalem; Antony's co-consul Dolabella the men, who planned to lynch Caesar's murderers; Domitian's brother Titus the rebels in Jerusalem; and a proconsul named Atticus—presumably the homonymous father of our Herodes Atticus—crucified Symeon, the Bishop of Jerusalem. Almost all of them had a direct relation to that city: King Herod the Great was a member of the *gens Iulia* because Julius Caesar had adopted his father Antipatros, the *Hierosolymarius* Pompey<sup>91</sup> attacked the city's temple, and Antony ordered King Herod to build his tower at the same location. Helena, the mother of Constantine, later discovered the "True Cross" in Jerusalem, and there the Crusaders wanted to liberate the "Holy Sepulchre". The new idea of a real "Crucified One" replacing the effigy on the cross was associated with Jerusalem. Although this new concept only established itself very slowly and with difficulty in rite and iconography, it does not appear to have been completely novel, but could have retained a reminiscence of the crucifixions in the era from Julius Caesar to Herodes Atticus.

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<sup>88</sup> *Pange lingua* according to Venantius Fortunatus: *et super crucis tropaeo dic triumphum nobilem*. The lamb as a symbol of Christ was prohibited by the Quinisext Council (Canon 82, Constantinople, 692 CE), which paved the way for the significant decline of symbolic depictions in favor of representations in human form, which in turn facilitated the Mediaeval development of the *Christus patiens* in Christian art.

<sup>89</sup> 315 CE; cf. Hinz 1973, 90.

<sup>90</sup> Though during this incident Caesar also showed his clemency and had the pirates strangled before hanging them from the cross, so that they were spared the agony of a crucifixion (Suet. *Jul.* 74).

<sup>91</sup> Cicero called Pompeius *Noster Hierosolymarius* (*Att.* 2.9).

The rites of the Holy Week were then adapted to the new concept by inversion: The raising of the wax effigy onto the cross transformed into the Descent from the Cross. In later times Christians further emphasized the removal of the nails.<sup>92</sup> In historical memory the nails had superseded the daggers, with which Caesar had once been murdered. These daggers however migrated to the heart of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the Christian Venus Genetrix.

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<sup>92</sup> The first documentation of a *Deposito Crucis* north of the Alps is from the tenth century *Regularis Concordiae Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque*, written by St. Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester (according to: K. Gschwend, *Die Depositio und Elevatio Crucis im Raum der alten Diözese Brixen*, Sarnen 1965, 11–2, in: Tripps 1998, 122); for the *desenclavo*, documented since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, cf. F.J. Blázquez y Vicente, L. Monzón Pérez, *Semana Santa Salmantina: historia y guía ilustrada*, Salamanca 1992, 81–2; cf. J.M. Domínguez Moreno, “La función del descendimiento en la Diócesis de Coria (Cáceres)”, *Revista de Folklore* 77, Valladolid 1987, 147–53.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*  
 ILS = Dessau H. 1892–1916. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin.  
 PIR<sup>2</sup> = Goag E, Stein A. 1933–52<sup>2</sup>. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* 1–4.1. Berlin.  
 SIG<sup>3/4</sup> = Dittenberger G. 1915–24<sup>3/4</sup>. *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*. Leipzig.

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<sup>#</sup> For full WebCite URLs please add <http://www.webcitation.org/> in front of the WebCite code.