The Face of the Dead and the Early Christian World

Edited by Ivan Foletti

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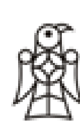

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The face of the dead and the Early Christian world

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Edited by Ivan Foletti

With the collaboration of Alžběta Filipová

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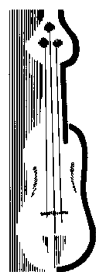

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Ivan Foletti

Introduction

The following pages are a compromise – which I hope the reader will find a happy one – between a book of conference proceedings and a collective monograph. To the six original presentations, echo of our conference held at Brno in the Moravian Gallery on 18.10.2012, we have added four later essays which we felt were needed to complete the panorama. In my estimation, given the richness of the debates which took place in Brno, the intriguing question of how the deceased were represented, and of how their faces were represented, deserved to be asked from a still broader point of view. The papers presented at the conference revolved around the topic of the funerary portrait. To these we added a second question dealing with the representation of the whole body of the deceased (as described in antique texts, above all medical ones) and with reliefs on sarcophagi. With this widening of perspective, we hope to emphasize the ample range of meanings that a funerary image – figurative or rhetorical – could take on.

The book in hand would therefore appear to deal with two completely distinct questions. The first concerns a reflection on the portrait of the deceased, found in places associated with his or her memory. At first we looked into the portrait and its function, and the reason for which Late Antiquity, following a custom it inherited from previous eras, covered itself with individual images of the deceased. As in previous eras, the portrait appears, above all, to be an attempt to express the individual in his or her entirety; the techniques and "instruments" perfected in the course of the the 3rd century, however, lead to divergent formal and conceptual results.

We witness the slide towards a form which tends to express, more than anything else, the moral quality of the deceased. The papers by Nicolas Bock and Ivan Foletti investigate the way in which rhetorical, figurative, or textual instruments (such as *tituli*) result in the emergence of the individual image as a more complete – or should we say more expressive? – representation. The consequences of this process, our understanding of which is enriched by the contributions of the sinologist Ladislav Kesner, are confirmed by the reflections of Claudia Corneli. By the end of this process, the image has become an "idea", linking the person depicted to his or her visual representation. An anonymous and standardized image could become a portrait simply by being accompanied by a label which left

no doubt as to who was depicted. This thesis is reinforced by the research of Valentina Cantone, who describes the mutation as it appears in funerary portraits giving the deceased the features of an eagle. This shows how an image with *mimetic* features was only one of several ways to describe the spiritual identity of the deceased. The next step is a short one: not only in China, but also in the European Early Middle Ages, and even in our own days, the funerary inscription can assume, if not the value of a portrait, at least the value of representing the "real presence" of the deceased. As shown by altars of the dead in China – simple wooden panels with name inscribed, there is nothing exclusively western about this, nor anything characteristically Christian.

From this survey – of the antique portrait, of the stylized image, and of the mere inscription – another fact emerges: from the research of Corneli, we can clearly discern the temporal coexistence of completely divergent traditions. In the same era when the Roman catacombs were dominated by "conceptual" portraits, made up of anonymous images accompanied at times by inscriptions, "mimetic" images were being painted on wood and encrusted into the walls of those very same burial spaces. These "mimetic" images bear a striking similarity to the celebrated Fayoum portraits. Such an eclectic mix remains somewhat of a mystery to us.

In the work of Stefano d'Ovidio and Chiara Croci, we meet portraits having different functions, even though they can be found in the same places and media as the funerary portraits already discussed. The portrait of a typical deceased individual, versus the portrait of an "exceptional" deceased person (e.g. a bishop of San Gennaro), versus a portrait of that most extraordinary deceased person of all – the saint.

Croci show us a fundamental change in these portraits: in the 4th century, on glass cups, an ordinary deceased person and a saint are represented in the same manner. Portraits of "exceptional" deceased persons are more common, of course. But the "exceptional" are not identifiable by differences in form or composition, since ordinary and exceptional both follow the same models, often drawn from the imperial lexicon, e.g. the *concordia augustorum*.

Little more than a century later, however, things have changed drastically. In the catacombs of San Gennaro, in the "bishops' crypt," the faces of the ecclesiastical dignitaries seem to slide towards a completely different function: with their expressive looks, their rigid frontal posture, and the solemnity of their images, these bishops announce the arrival of the devotional image of the centuries to come. This phenomenon is made even clearer in D'Ovidio's essay, which turns the traditional historiography upside down and proposes a new chronology for the inside of the so-called "bishops' crypt". D'Ovidio proposes a later date for the image of John I (perhaps due to an important restoration at some point), and underlines the connection between para-devotional function and the hieratic style developed in the persons depicted. Croci draws our attention to another interesting phenomenon: glass cups bearing images of the saints were often attached to the tombs of ordinary deceased persons. Obviously, their function must have been to protect or intercede. But Croci also proposes a more intriguing reading:

the face of Saint Agnes, placed in the tomb of a woman, could in fact take us beyond the relation between the deceased and her protector to a kind of identification of the two. More than a physical portrait, the face of the deceased would thus become a sort of spiritual concept.

The second question, answered more briefly, deals with the perception and representation of the dead body as a whole, defined by David Le Breton as "la souche identitaire de l'homme." The question asked is a fundamental one, since we are confronted with humanity itself after its passage to that which lies beyond: does the body become just a memory or does it preserve the real presence of the man who once was. The answer, as it appears in the texts and images analysed by Philippe Mudry, Manuela Studer-Karen and Jutta Dresken Weinland, is that the body retained the presence of the deceased. Especially in sarcophagi, it was a body which, by analogy with the resurrected body of Christ, spoke not so much of death as of life. Even in medical treatises, the body is never treated as a separate entity from a man himself. Proof of this is found in the fact that the Greeks and Romans – with very few exceptions – prohibited vivisection. The integrity of the body cannot be violated even after death, because it preserves inside itself the essence of the man.

It is here that our two axes intersect: the funerary image, strictly tied to a place of burial, represents a body destined for eternity, and the image's ambition is to maintain the living identity of the deceased. The instruments available for making such an image are various, and run the gamut from a mimetic portrait to a simple inscription. The essential fact, however, is another one: in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, death did not modify the essence of a man. Saint or layperson, a man or woman continued to be an indivisible whole – for scientific or devotional reasons – whose spiritual peculiarities could be described by his or her funerary image.

This is the first volume in a new series of studies on the Middle Ages. Entitled *Studia Artium Medievalium Brunensia*, this series aims to give a coherent form to the research promoted by the *Center for Early Christian Studies* in Brno. There will be conference proceedings, but also monographs. In order to meet the rigorous standards demanded by contemporary researchers, we have decided to furnish the series with an editorial committee formed of prominent medievalists: Klára Benešovská (Head of the Department of Medieval Art at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences), Elisabetta Scirocco (Projektmitarbeiterin at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz), Herbert Kessler (Professor of the History of Art at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore), and Serena Romano (Professor of the History of Art at University of Lausanne), as well as the author of these lines. We would like to extend our most sincere thanks to those who have accepted this task, and we hope that their undeniable scientific expertise will help to make the *Studia Artium Medievalium Brunensia* a prestigious and useful series.

Finally, I would like to thank those who have made the appearance of this volume possible. First of all, the entire Department of Art History at Masaryk

University, Brno, who have financed the publication and kept it alive with their enthusiasm. In particular, thanks to Head of Department Ondřej Jakubec, professor Jiří Kroupa, and secretary Marcela Schelleová, all of whom gave their unconditional support for this initiative, and to the Moravian Gallery in Brno which hosted us. And a final thanks to Alžběta Filipová, who helped with the editing of the present volume, and to Laïna Berclaz for her valuable help.

Stefano D'Ovidio

Devotion and Memory: Episcopal Portraits in the Catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples

In 1971, during archaeological investigations in the catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples, the workers at the site made an unexpected discovery. Father Umberto Maria Fasola later recalled the event in his book on the catacombs:

> Their screams echoed all of a sudden in the deep silence of the catacombs. They were almost scared by the mosaic they had just unearthed after centuries of concealment. I felt a sense of wonder myself, when I realized that the severe portrait of an African man was staring at us with a vivid expression in his eyes, as if he was still alive.[1]

Forty years after its rediscovery, the portrait of Quodvultdeus (fig. 6) still evokes similar impressions in the viewer. Surprise, for the unusual features of a man of colour; wonder, for the artistic quality of the mosaic; liveliness, for its immediate naturalism. Compared to the portrait of Quodvultdeus, the three other bishops pictured in mosaic in the same *cubiculum* (figg. 7-10) may look less intriguing at first because of their desperate state of preservation, but their importance is immediately evident when one considers their historical significance: they are among the earliest surviving examples of Christian funerary portraits in mosaic depicting church dignitaries.

Despite their importance, the episcopal portraits have attracted the interest of a limited number of specialists. First Father Fasola identified two of the mosaics as the portraits of Quodvultdeus, the African bishop of Carthage who probably died in Naples in 454, and of the bishop of Naples John I who, according to the 9th century *Gesta Episcoporum*, moved the relics of San Gennaro, patron saint of the city, into the catacombs. The excavations directed by Fasola between 1971 and 1973 gave an essential contribution to the general history of the catacombs. Further investigations run by Nicola Ciavolino up until 1994 confirmed some of Fasola's opinions and allowed a better understanding of the site.[2] Fabrizio Bisconti

1. Umberto Maria Fasola, *Le catacombe di San Gennaro a Capodimonte*, Roma 1975, p. 155.

2. Nicola Ciavolino, "Scavi e scoperte di archeologia cristiana in Campania dal 1983 al 1993", in *1983-1993: dieci anni di archeologia cristiana in Italia.* Atti del VII Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana (Cassino, 20-24 settembre 1993), Eugenio Russo ed., Roma 2003, pp. 615-669. For an overview on the Neapolitan catacombs see also: Paul Arthur, *Naples. From Roman Town to*

investigated the religious significance of the episcopal portraits.[3] More recently, Maria Andaloro analysed the mosaics as an example of the transition from the Roman funerary portrait to Christian medieval imagery.[4] Finally, Serena Romano stressed the importance of the site in the history of the local church, where episcopal portraiture in funerary contexts seems to have been a well-established tradition throughout the middle ages.[5]

In this paper, I will present their opinions and discuss the portraits in their broader historic, religious and artistic contexts. In the first part, I will focus on the location and history of the catacombs. I will consider the events that determined the creation of the *cubiculum* with the episcopal portraits after the relics of san Gennaro were moved into the catacombs in the 5th century. In the second part, I will analyse the architecture of the *cubiculum*, named *Cripta dei vescovi* by Fasola, and examine in detail the iconography and artistic quality of the portraits in order to determine their liturgical and devotional function within the vast cemeterial complex.

The catacombs' location and history

The catacombs of San Gennaro are located on the hill of Capodimonte, which dominates the northern end of the ancient city centre of Naples. The hill consists of a soft volcanic rock abundant in the region, the so-called *tufo giallo napoletano* or Neapolitan yellow tuff. Easy to quarry and carve, Neapolitan tuff

City-State, London 2002, pp. 56-58, 64-65; William Tronzo, Caroline Bruzelius, *Medieval Naples. An architectural and urban history 400-1400*, New York 2011, pp. 12-24.

3. Fabrizio Bisconti, "Il restauro della Cripta dei Vescovi nelle catacombe di S. Gennaro", in *Atti del II Colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico (Roma, 5-7 dicembre 1994)*, Irene Bragantini, Federico Guidobaldi ed., Bordighera 1995, pp. 311-317; Fabrizio Bisconti, "Imprese musive paleocristiane negli edifici di culto dell'Italia meridionale: documenti e monumenti dell'area campana", in *Atti del IV Colloquio dell'Associazione Internazionale per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico (Palermo, 9-13 dicembre 1996)*, Ravenna 1997, pp. 733-746; Fabrizio Bisconti, "Testimonianze archeologiche delle origini cristiane nel napoletano. Le catacombe di San Gennaro", in *Roma, la Campania e l'Oriente cristiano antico.* Atti del Convegno (Napoli, 9-11 ottobre 2000), Napoli 2004, pp. 211-228. Fabrizio Bisconti, "Riflessi del culto di San Gennaro nel complesso catacombale di Capodimonte", in *San Gennaro nel XVII secntenario del martirio (305-2005).* Atti del Convegno internazionale (Napoli, 21-23 settembre 2005), Gennaro Luongo ed., Napoli 2006, I, pp. 165-175.

4. Maria Andaloro, "Dal ritratto all'icona", in Maria Andaloro, Serena Romano, *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Da Costantino a Cola di Rienzo*, Milano 2000, pp. 31-67.

5. Serena Romano, "Die Bischöfe von Neapel als Auftraggeber. Zum Bild des Humbert d'Ormont", in *Medien der Macht. Kunst zur Zeit des Anjous in Italien.* Akten der internationalen Tagung in Liebighaus – Museum Alter Plastik (Frankfurt am Main, 21-23 November 1997), Tanja Michalsky ed., Berlin 2001, pp. 191-224. Serena Romano, "La cattedrale di Napoli, i vescovi e l'immagine. Una storia di lunga durata", in *Il Duomo di Napoli dal paleocristiano all'età angioina.* Atti della I Giornata di Studi su Napoli (Losanna, 23 novembre 2000), Serena Romano, Nicolas Bock edd., Napoli 2002, pp. 7-20.

is more compact than the tuff available in Rome. An excellent building material, its peculiar solidity allowed the creation of an elaborate network of underground caverns and tunnels used for the most varied purposes throughout the centuries. Since the Greek foundation of Naples in the 5th century BC, the lower slopes of Capodimonte have been extensively quarried and underground burial chambers have been excavated in the area for its convenient location outside the city walls. Splendid Greek *hypogea* from the 4th and 3rd century BC have been discovered almost intact east of Capodimonte, in the district now called Borgo dei Vergini.[6] The cemeterial use of Capodimonte survived during the Roman age. *Columbaria* were installed in pre-existing Greek *hypogea* and more tombs were excavated into the rock along the roads connecting the city to the inland region. Christian catacombs later originated along the same route. Besides the catacombs of San Gennaro, more catacombs survive in the area, such as the catacombs of San Gaudioso, San Fortunato and San Severo, but they have been only partially investigated by modern archaeology.

The location of the Neapolitan catacombs is clearly recognizable in the view of Naples (fig. 1) by Alessandro Baratta (1679), where Capodimonte appears still untouched by the chaotic development that overtook the hill since the 1960s. At the bottom, the church and convent of Santa Maria della Sanità (number 63 in the print) stands out in the suburban district marking the site of the catacombs of San Gaudioso. A masterpiece of Neapolitan baroque, the church was built after the catacombs were rediscovered in the 16th century. To the right, there is the church of San Severo (number 81), rebuilt in 1573 on the catacombs where Bishop Severus built a basilica and was buried in the 4th century.[7] To the left, above the church of Santa Maria della Vita (number 123), also built on the site of pre-existing catacombs, a secondary winding road leads to the basilica of San Gennaro *extra moenia* (number 210). The latter was the main access to the catacombs of San Gennaro.

Little is known about the earliest foundation of the church, built on the site of a suburban Roman villa – remains of a bath were discovered in 1928 under the atrium.[8] The church was the main extramural basilica of Naples. Used by Bishop Paul II as his temporary seat in the 8th century, the church was chosen as a burial place by Neapolitan bishops until the 10th century.[9] A Benedictine monastery was

6. Giovanni Liccardo, "Le presenze archeologiche: dai complessi ellenistici a quelli altomedievali", in *Il borgo dei Vergini. Storia e struttura di un ambito urbano*, Alfredo Buccaro ed., Napoli 1991, pp. 93-102.

7. On the Neapolitan catacombs and their rediscovery in the 16th century see: Maria Amodio, "Riflessi monumentali del culto ianuariano: le catacombe di San Gennaro a Capodimonte. Dalla *curiositas* degli eruditi alle indagini archeologiche", in *San Gennaro* (n. 3), pp. 123-144, see sp. p. 126, with relevant bibliography.

8. Carlo Ebanista, "Il piccone del fossore: un secolo di scavi nella catacomba di San Gennaro a Napoli (1830-1930)", *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, 86 (2010), pp. 127-174 (see sp. pp. 158-161).

9. Vinni Lucherini, *La cattedrale di Napoli. Storia, architettura, storiografia di un monumento medievale*, Roma 2009, p. 91, 128.

established here by Bishop Atanasio I in the 9th century.[10] The basilica was involved in episcopal ceremonies and processions, as attested by the collection of liturgical *Consuetudines* of the Neapolitan church written in 1337.[11] Fragments of a marble *ciborium* from the 14th century are now on display in the Museo Civico di Castelnuovo in Naples.[12] In 1468, cardinal Oliviero Carafa restored the church and founded a hospital run by a secular confraternity, and still active today.

The church as it appears today is the result of an early 20th century restoration, which uncovered structures dating back to the 15th century. The building has preserved its original basilical plan with central nave and side aisles.[13] Two Roman columns were reused in the early Christian church to support the triumphal arch. Arches in the apse were open onto the adjoining catacombs, but they were later walled up. The cemeterial area was also accessible through arches from the right aisle.

It seems likely that the catacombs were never completely abandoned, although artistic and archaeological evidence can be dated no later than the 12th century. Used as a cemetery for plague victims after the hospital was built in the 15th century, most of the complex was inaccessible to Giovanni Antonio Summonte, the first modern author who mentioned the catacombs in 1602.[14] During the 17th and 18th centuries, in a period of renewed interest toward early Christian antiquity, local historians and foreign travellers to Naples often ventured into the catacombs.[15] The most detailed description is by the 17th century Neapolitan writer Carlo Celano, although it is difficult to retrace his itinerary.[16] Prints from the 18th and 19th centuries show solitary visitors wandering around the catacombs with torches, as well as pilgrims attending ceremonies and praying.

Archaeological investigations of the catacombs began in 1831 with Andrea De Jorio and continued more extensively with Gennaro Aspreno Galante at the end of the 19th century.[17] The German book *Die Katakomben von Neapel*, published in 1936 by Hans Achelis and beautifully illustrated with watercolours, was the first attempt to present the catacombs into their broader historic and artistic

10. *Ibidem*, p. 137.

11. Domenico Mallardo, "La Pasqua e la settimana maggiore a Napoli dal secolo V al XIV", *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, LXVI (1952), pp. 3-36.

12. Francesco Aceto, "Trois bas-reliefs provenant d'un ciborium: Saint Agrippino avec un donateur, Saint Janvier avec un donateur et Saint Benoît" in *L'Europe des Anjou: aventures des princes. angevins du XIIIe au XVe siècle*, catalogue de l'exposition (Fontevraud, Abbaye Royale 2001), Guy Massin Le Goff, Dominique Soulier edd., Paris 2001, p. 293.

13. The basilica's original configuration and dedication is controversial, see: Mirko Giordano, "Il complesso martiriale dei SS. Gennaro e Agrippino in Napoli. Una nuova lettura del monumento", in *Tardo antico e alto medioevo. Filologia, storia, archeologia, arte*, Marcello Rotili ed., Napoli 2009, pp. 377-405.

14. Giovanni Antonio Summonte, *Historia della città e Regno di Napoli*, I, Napoli 1602, pp. 336-337.

15. Maria Amodio, "Riflessi monumentali", in *San Gennaro* (n. 3), pp. 125-137.

16. Carlo Celano, *Notitie del bello, dell'antico e del curioso della città di Napoli*, Napoli 1692, *Giornata Settima*, Simona Starita ed., 2009, www.memofonte.it., pp. 20-22.

17. Maria Amodio, "Riflessi monumentali", in *San Gennaro* (n. 3), pp. 137-144.

context. Further excavations were carried out early in the 20th century by Domenico Mallardo, Emilio Lavagnino and Antonio Bellucci, but were delayed by bureaucracy and brutally interrupted by WWII, when the catacombs were used as air-raids shelters.[18] Finally, systematic campaigns directed by Umberto Maria Fasola between 1971 and 1973 provided a better understanding of the site. Excavations were continued by Nicola Ciavolino but the results have only been partially published.

The catacombs of San Gennaro consist of two main levels, usually referred as the lower catacomb and the upper catacomb. The cemeterial complex also extended northwest of the upper catacomb behind the apse of the church, but this area has not been fully explored and is inaccessible at the moment. Both the lower and the upper catacombs originated from pre-existing tomb chambers (*hypogea*). Many aspects concerning the exact chronology of the catacombs are still unclear, but on the basis of Fasola's research, it is possible to summarize their development as follows.

Between the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd, two *hypogea* were excavated in the western side of the lower level (B1 and B11 in the plan published by Fasola). Surviving frescoes suggest that they may have been created for non-Christian individuals or families. In the 3rd century, the bishop of Naples saint Agrippinus was buried in the smallest *hypogeum*, later converted into a basilica dedicated to the saint. The lower catacomb was further developed during the 4th century as a *retrosanctos*. Two galleries (B9 and B10) were excavated eastward and were accessible through arches opened into the wall of the largest of the pre-existing *hypogea*, which became the vestibule of the lower catacomb.

By that time, more *hypogea* already existed on the upper level. The oldest one (A1) was excavated on the western side and can be dated to the 3rd century. The tomb belonged to Christian owners as attested by frescoes in the vault with the images of *Adam and Eve*, *David and Goliath*, as well as the unusual *Building of the celestial tower* – inspired to the early Christian poem *The shepherd of Hermas*. At least three more *hypogea* were excavated at different levels east of the oldest Christian *hypogeum* and were probably accessible through side paths. The complex formed a sort of a Christian necropolis on the western end of the ancient cemeterial area of the city.

In the 5th century the relics of san Gennaro were moved into the catacombs from their original location near Pozzuoli, where the saint was martyred in 305 according to a later tradition. The event transformed the site into the main cemeterial complex of the city and a major destination for pilgrims. Basing on the 9th century *Gesta Episcoporum Neapolitanorum*, the initiative of moving the relics of San Gennaro is commonly assigned to Bishop John I, although the chronicler

18. Carlo Ebanista, "Napoli tardoantica: vecchi scavi e nuovi approcci per lo studio delle catacombe", in *La trasformazione del mondo romano e le grandi migrazioni*. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Cimitile - Santa Maria Capua Vetere, 16-17 giugno 2011), Carlo Ebanista, Marcello Rotili edd., Cimitile 2012, pp. 303-338.

only referred to it as a possibility when he mentioned the burial place of the bishop.[19] John died in 432 and Father Fasola identified the tombs of both the saint and the bishop, the latter situated in a *cubiculum* of the upper level (A6), created by lowering the floor of one of the pre-exiting *hypogea*, so as to reach the top of san Gennaro's tomb, located by Fasola in the lower catacomb (B6). More church dignitaries were buried in the same *cubiculum* as Bishop John over about one century: this is the *cubiculum* that Fasola named Cripta dei vescovi. In the 6th century the so-called Basilica dei vescovi was excavated in front of the Cripta as the main hall for rituals. The basilica extended eastwards into a spectacular L shaped gallery, which is 50 metres long, 12 metres wide and 6 metres tall. As a result of these major changes, the pre-existing *hypogea* were finally incorporated into the upper catacomb.

The lower and the upper catacombs were connected by stairs and were used as a destination for pilgrims as well as for rituals and official ceremonies throughout early medieval times. In the 8th century Bishop Paul II installed a baptistery in the lower vestibule. Tradition has it that the relics of san Gennaro were stolen in the 9th century by Sico, the Lombard prince of Benevento,[20] but the catacombs continued to be used even after Bishop John IV moved the relics of some bishops from the Cripta into the cathedral of Naples.[21] Side altars and niches were carved into the rock and decorated with frescoes until at least the 10th century, when the Benedictine monastery created by Bishop Atanasio I was in charge of the site. During this whole period, the *cubiculum* with the episcopal portraits played a special role in the catacombs. Embellished and renovated several times, it was the shrine of the upper catacomb and one of the most venerated sites of entire complex.

San Gennaro and early Christian imagery in the catacombs

Before examining the peculiar destination of the Cripta, I would like to briefly discuss visual and literary sources on the earliest devotion for san Gennaro. The first example to consider are the frescoes painted in one the oldest *cubicula* of the upper catacomb (A22). Here, the standing figures of Saint Paul and Saint Lawrence, identified by their *tituli*, are painted in the *arcosolium* carved into the side wall of the *cubiculum*. They wear a toga, symbol of their privileged status. Saint Lawrence is portrayed as he offers the crown of the martyrs, probably to Jesus, whose image was likely reproduced in the lost mosaic of the central *arcosolium*, as suggested by Fasola. In the third *arcosolium*, Saint Peter is recognizable by his distinctive features and painted with a Saint in the same pose as Saint Lawrence.

19. See below.

20. Vinni Lucherini raises well-grounded doubts about the theft of the relics: Lucherini, *La cattedrale di Napoli* (n. 9), pp. 131-133.

21. See below.

According to Father Fasola, the unidentified Saint can be interpreted as the oldest image of San Gennaro.[22] There is no evidence for such an interpretation, but his opinion reveals a peculiar aspect of the local devotion for the saint. San Gennaro was the martyr of Naples, just like saint Lawrence was the martyr of Rome. The oldest surviving image of San Gennaro appears in the middle of another *arcosolium* along with the portraits of the occupants of the grave, Comnina and her young daughter Nicatiola (fig. 3). An inscription identifies the Saint as "Sancto Martyri Ianuario". The sacrality of the image is evident from the slightly bigger proportions of the Saint, as well as from his toga and halo, the latter inscribed with a cross and the monogram of Christ. In contrast, Comnina and Nicatiola are dressed according to the fashion of the time. Like San Gennaro, they are portrayed in the pose of the *Orantes*, as in a mutual intercession both for and from the dead.

The fresco can be dated toward the end of the 5th century and it is almost contemporary to the earliest literary evidence of the devotion for san Gennaro. This can be found in a letter by presbyter Uranius describing the death of saint Paulinus bishop of Nola, who died in 431.[23] Uranius wrote that, after celebrating mass, the saint asked: "Where are my brothers?" And someone replied: "Here are your brothers", referring to the bishops that attended the service and were there in the room with him. But the saint answered: "I mean my brothers Gennaro and Martin. They just spoke to me and told me that they were coming back to me soon". Martin, Uranius informed the reader, was the famous bishop of Gaul, and Gennaro: "Neapolitanae urbis illustrat ecclesiam" – gives prestige to the Church of Naples.

In a recent study on Uranius' letter, Gennaro Luongo noticed that the vision of Paulinus should be interpreted as a reference to the regions where the saint was born and died. Martin represented Paulinus' native Gaul and Gennaro was related to Campania, the region where Paulinus spent the last twenty years of his life. According to Luongo, the expression used by Uranius could also be interpreted as a specific reference to the relics of san Gennaro, whose possession gave benefit to the city of Naples. The Latin verb "illustro" recurs with the same meaning in the writings of other authors of the period, such as Gaudenzio of Brescia and Gregory of Tours. In any case, Uranius' letter is clear evidence of the special link between Naples and san Gennaro: along with the earliest visual sources from the catacombs, it testifies to the popularity of the saint in local devotion since the 5th century.

Surprisingly, Uranius' letter does not mention Felix, the saint whose relics were located in Nola, where Paulinus built a sanctuary and decided to be buried. I wonder whether the letter may reflect the interest of a Neapolitan *entourage*. The reference to san Gennaro may have been intended to promote the devotion of the saint after his relics were moved into the catacombs by John I. Some versions of

22. Fasola, *Le catacombe* (n. 1), p. 102.

23. Gennaro Luongo, "*Neapolitanae urbis illustrat ecclesiam* (Uranio, *De Obitu Paulini* 3)", in *San Gennaro* (n. 3), pp. 15-36.

the same letter also included the narration of the death of John, who in turn had a vision of Paulinus before he died, although the story may be a later addition.[24] Besides the interpretation of the letter, the parallel between Paulinus and John is evident: they both took zealous care of the relics of the local martyrs and decided to be buried at the same site. In this way, they granted the special protection of the saint to their cities and themselves.

The *peculiare patrocinum* deriving from the possession of the relics of a martyr recurs in several writings of the period. Saint Maximus of Turin wrote in his *Sermon 12*:

> All the martyrs must be honoured with the same devotion, but those whose relics we possess should be honoured with the greatest devotion. [...]. We have some familiarity with them: they are always with us, they reside with us, they look after us as long as we live in our body and they receive us when we abandon it.[25]

Paulinus himself assigned the role of his advocate at the tribunal of God to saint Felix and often evoked the thaumaturgic power deriving from the relics of the saints as well as from their burial places. Avitus of Vienne noticed in his *Homily 28*: "the prestige of a small town derives from its buildings no less than from their patron saints: ennobled by the relics of their patron saints, from small towns they become cities".[26] The latter example demonstrates that John's initiative in Naples was not only inspired by his religious duties, but also had a civic meaning. The city already had cemeterial areas and basilicas consecrated to its early bishops, but still lacked a *martyrium*. At the same time, John's act symbolizes the growing importance of Naples during late Antiquity, corresponding to the decline of Pozzuoli, where the saint was martyred and his relics rested.[27]

The Cripta dei vescovi

According to Father Fasola, John placed the relics of San Gennaro in a small *cubiculum* of the lower catacombs. Father Fasola based his interpretation on the evidence that the *cubiculum* was preserved when the Basilica dei vescovi was built above it in the 6th century, as to protect the sacrality emanating from the place. The *cubiculum*, that Fasola denominates *confessio*, was a venerated site of the catacombs, as indicated by the presence of three layers of fresco-painting on its outer wall. In the earliest layer, dating to the 6th century, the standing figure of a *Saint* survives intact in the middle of two more *Saints*, only recognizable from

24. Antonio Vuolo, "Rilettura del dossier agiografico di san Gennaro e compagni", in *San Gennaro* (n. 3), pp. 179-221 (see sp. pp. 188-189).

25. Maximus of Turin, *Serm*. 12, 1-2 (*Scrittori dell'area Santambrosiana* 4, pp. 64-66). See: Luongo, "*Neapolitanae*" (n. 23), p. 33.

26. Avitus of Vienne, *Hom.* 28 (MGH, *Auctores Antiquissimi* VI 2, p. 150). See: Luongo, "*Neapolitanae*" (n. 23), p. 34.

27. Arthur, *Naples* (n. 2), p. 10.

their haloes and a *titulus* mentioning Saint Stephen. The hills in their background reminded Father Fasola of the mounts Vesuvius and Somma and the image was interpreted as the earliest picture of *San Gennaro patron saint of Naples*. The head of a *Saint* on the middle layer was also referred to San Gennaro. *Tituli* undoubtedly identify the *Saints* painted on the outer layer as *San Gennaro and his martyr companions*. Dating to the 9th century, the series continued on the adjoining walls and provided a visual counterpart to the hagiography of the saint as it was attested since the 7th century.[28]

The *confessio* lies in the floor of the so-called Basilica dei vescovi at few metres from the Cripta dei vescovi. The basilica is named after the images of the first fourteen bishops of Naples once painted in the vault along with their corresponding numbers in the series, like in the papal series of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome as well as in other examples attested by written sources.[29] Only the earliest two bishops and the last four numerals survive. A fragmentary inscription in graffiti found in 1992 was referred to the creation of the basilica. It was probably used as a guideline to engrave the proper inscription on the altar that, according to Nicola Ciavolino, stood in the middle of the Basilica, on the site of the *confessio*. It was possible to reconstruct the *incipit* of the inscription: "John enriched the tomb of the martyr with adequate honour by enlarging the site, which was dark because of its narrow entrance, in order to give visibility to the altars reserved to the sacred ceremonies".[30] Later, the word "sanctus" was added to the name of John. The latter has been identified with Bishop John II.[31] Dated to the 6th century, the inscription is the oldest reference to the tomb of a martyr venerated in the catacombs and confirms the ritual relevance of the area in front of the Cripta.

The *cubiculum* with the episcopal portraits was named Cripta dei vescovi by Fasola for its analogy with the Cripta dei papi in the catacombs of San Callisto in Rome, which housed the relics of nine popes and eight bishops of the 3rd century. Basing on the archaeological findings, it is possible to ideally reconstruct its original appearance. The narrow and tall *cubiculum* (fig. 4) was approached by four steps covered in marble. Its unusual height (6 metres in total) resulted from the adaptation of the pre-existing *hypogeum*. Two marble columns originally stood on the side of the entrance and supported a wooden beam used to hang either lamps or a *velarium*, as appears in several early Christian mosaics. Frescoes were painted on the adjoining walls with the images of two Saints on either side of the Cripta's entrance. To the left, a Benedictine Saint is pictured with a Bishop Saint,

28. Vuolo, "Rilettura del dossier agiografico" (n. 24).

29. Andaloro, "Dal ritratto all'icona" (n. 4), pp. 38-48, sp. pp. 44-45.

30. "Martyris obscuru parvo prius ore sepulcru/ dilatans digno cumulavit honore Iohs/ intus ut ete[…]is pateant altaria sacris". See: Ciavolino, "Scavi e scoperte" (n. 2), pp. 652-653, 659-661. See also: Danilo Mazzoleni, "Note e osservazioni sulle iscrizioni del complesso monumentale di San Gennaro", in *San Gennaro* (n. 3), pp. 147-164, sp. pp. 162-163.

31. More fragments of the same inscription were found on site and future investigations will probably be able to better clarify the development of the site.

usually identified with San Gennaro. The frescoes can be dated to the 9th century, when the Benedictine monastery was installed by Atanasio I. Animals painted into circles in the lower part of the frescoes imitated similar patterns from church reliefs and textiles of the period.

The interior of the Cripta was the best-decorated part of the catacombs. The fronts of the tombs were encrusted with marble inlay. Several fragments were found on site and Nicola Ciavolino was also able to partially reconstruct their design, which included animals, flowers, geometrical motifs and human figures.[32] Grapes and vines recalled the same subject in the mosaics with the episcopal portraits. The upper part of the walls above the *arcosolia* was decorated with fresco-painting. At least two subsequent layers of fresco can be recognized to the right of the central *arcosolium*.[33] On the outer layer a bishop-saint is portrayed in a *clipeus* in the act of the *acclamatio* given to Jesus, that according to Fasola may have been painted in a *clipeus* above the central *arcosolium*. A shaft in the vault adapted from the entrance of the pre-existing *hypogeum* widely illuminated the Cripta and its colourful frescoes, mosaics and marble encrustations.

The *arcosolium* in the central wall was identified by Fasola as the tomb of Bishop John I. His opinion was confirmed after restoration in 1991-1994, when a fragmentary inscription with the name of S[an]c[tu]s Johannes was uncovered in the mosaic on the extrados of the *arcosolium*.[34] The identification of John's burial place corresponds to the location indicated in the 9th century *Gesta Episcoporum*. The chronicler wrote that Bishop John I was buried "with a large retinue of neophytes, in that oratory where it is said that he personally had moved the relics of the most blessed martyr Ianuarius, transferred from the Marcianum [near Pozzuoli]. There, he rested in peace, buried on the right side".[35] The oratory mentioned by the chronicler should be identified with the Basilica dei vescovi: John's tomb actually stands to the right of the visitor entering the basilica from the adjoining gallery.[36] As noted by Vinni Lucherini, the chronicler compensated the lack of information on the early bishops of Naples with his direct experience of the early Christian monuments of the city.[37] It is interesting to notice that if he had no doubts about the location of John's tomb – identified, as we have seen, by the inscription – the responsibility of the bishop in the moving of San Gennaro's relics was not given for granted. The proximity of the tomb to the site where "it is said" (*dicitur*) that John had moved the relics of the martyr seems to have been his only source of information.

32. Ciavolino, "Scavi e scoperte" (n. 2), pp. 651-652.

33. Fasola, *Le catacombe* (n. 1), p. 142.

34. Ciavolino, "Scavi e scoperte" (n. 2), p. 651; Bisconti, "Il restauro della Cripta" (n. 3),

35. See the Latin transcription in Lucherini, *La cattedrale di Napoli* (n. 9), p. 309: "Neophitorum pompa prosequente, in eo oratorio ubi manu sua dicitur condidisse beatissimum martyrem Ianuarium a Marciano sublato, et ipse a parte dextra humatus quievit."

36. Fasola, *Le catacombe* (n. 1), p. 146.

37. Lucherini, *La cattedrale di Napoli* (n. 9), pp. 70-71.

The episcopal portraits

The Cripta and its tombs predate the creation of the Basilica dei vescovi. Eight *arcosolia* and ten l*oculi* were carved into the walls during a period of at least one century. The last *arcosolium* was excavated with difficulty in the top right corner of the *cubiculum* and followed the opening of the short gallery (A 2) giving access to the subterranean basilica from the upper vestibule.[38] Only four *arcosolia* are made of mosaic, the remaining four being painted in fresco, few fragments of which survive. Despite their difference in chronology, the portraits (figg. 5-10) show common characters. Floral motifs branch out of the central *clipeus* with a half-size portrait of the deceased, wearing the toga and holding a book or a scroll as a symbol of his status. Only the mosaic in the last *arcosolium* carved into the Cripta presents the deceased against a blue background without the *clipeus* and the book. Stylized vines originating from two vases are pictured on the intrados. The realistic physiognomy of the characters contrasts with their conventional pose and severe expression, recalling the type of the philosopher.

According to Father Fasola, the oldest mosaic in the series was the portrait of John I (fig. 7), who died in 432. The identification of the inscription with the titulus "Sanctus Iohannes" suggests that the mosaic may have been the result of a subsequent redecoration of the tomb, determined by the veneration of John as a saint. Such a possibility corresponds to the main function assigned to the episcopal portraits, that not only perpetrated the memory of the bishops, but also encouraged the devotion to them.

Looking at the mosaics as a whole, one may notice that their style becomes more and more abstract. This is evident in single details, as well as in their general appearance. The elegant branches with colourful flowers and leaves of acanthus in the background of Quodvultdeus (fig. 5) look more naturalistic than the undetermined botanic species visible in the mosaic with the portrait of John (fig. 7). The pulpy branches and succulent grapes in the latter contrast with the dry leaves and schematised vines that are visible in the last two mosaics (figg. 9-10). The hands of Quodvultdeus realistically hold the book, where three lines of black *tesserae* reproduce the pages in perspective. John's right hand only show four fingers with no relation to the book (fig. 8), barely recognizable by its cover and thickness, marked with gold *tesserae* and no indication of the pages. John's *clipeus* is more similar to a flat frame then to the border of the three-dimensional opening through which Quodvultdeus appears in his tomb. John's head is out of proportion compared with the rest of his body, that occupies the lower part of the *clipeus* shaped like a trapezium. On the other hand, the better proportioned body of Quodvultdeus stands behind the *clipeus* in a more natural way and his prominent right shoulder slightly juts out of his episcopal dress.

In my opinion, the decreasing level of realism not only indicates the better quality of the portrait of Quodvultdeus, but also suggests an earlier date for its

38. Fasola, *Le catacombe* (n. 1), p. 138.

composition. During the 5th and 6th centuries, the artistic production progressively abandoned the naturalistic style of the classical period in favour of a more symbolic and abstract representation. The realistic appearance of Quodvultdeus is not so far from the vivid impression evoked by the mosaics of the baptistery of Naples, where statuary figures of the Apostles are pictured with the images of the Tetramorphs inspired by the same naturalism.[39] The flourishing garden in his background recalls similar motifs in the baptistery, as well as in the mosaics on the vault of the chapel of Santa Matrona in San Prisco, near Caserta.[40] The portrait of John, instead, seems closer to the portraits of secular men and women buried in the catacombs during the 6th century. His features are marked in black, like in the portrait of the Byzantine dignitary Theoctenus. Several other portraits in the catacombs show similar elongated hands and trapezoidal bodies. The bad state of preservation of the mosaic does not allow conclusions on its chronology, but it seems possible that the portrait of John as it appears from the photographs published by Fasola followed the portrait of Quodvultdeus. His tomb may have been renovated soon after his death as a sign of devotion. This would explain the epithet "Sanctus" in the inscription. Something similar happened to the tomb of saint Gaudiosus, the African bishop who came to Naples with Quodvultdeus after Gensericus' invasion of Africa and was worshipped as a saint. Buried in the catacombs named after him, his tomb was redecorated in mosaic with an inscription referring to the bishop as "Sanctus".[41]

The arrival of Christian refugees from northern Africa favoured the use of mosaic in funerary context during the 5th and 6th centuries. At least fourteen tombstones in the catacombs of Naples were made of mosaic, the highest number in Italy of a burial typology that originated in northern Africa and spread to the coastal regions of Spain, Sardinia, Sicily and the Adriatic Sea.[42] The largest surviving fragment with the epitaph of a certain Alex can be compared to similar examples from Tabarka at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis (see, in particular, the tombstone of Stercorius and his wife Crescentia).

During the 5th and 6th centuries, Naples attracted exiles as well as inhabitants from the suburbs.[43] The reconstruction of the walls by emperor Valentinianus III after the Vandals' invasion made the city a safer place to live. Commercial relations were favoured by the convenient position of the city, whose increasing

39. Katia Gandolfi, "Les mosaïques du baptistère de Naples: programme iconographique et liturgie", in *Il Duomo di Napoli* (n. 5), pp. 21-34. See also: Tronzo, Bruzelius, *Medieval Naples* (n. 2), pp. 32-41.

40. Gillian Mackie, *Early Christian Chapels in the West: decoration, function and patronage*, Toronto 2003, pp. 129-143, with relevant bibliography.

41. Fabrizio Bisconti, "Mosaici nel cimitero di San Gaudioso: revisione iconografica e approfondimenti iconologici", in *Atti del VII Colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico (Pompei, 22-25 marzo 2000)*, Andrea Paribeni ed., Ravenna 2001, pp. 87-98.

42. Maria Amodio, *La componente africana nella civiltà napoletana tardo-antica. Fonti letterarie ed evidenze archeologiche*, Roma 2005, pp. 106-107.

43. *Ibidem*, pp. 18-21.

importance during late Antiquity contrasts with the decline of the port of Pozzuoli and the inland towns of Campania. The multiethnicity of Naples reflected this situation. The structured hierarchy of the local church and the protagonism of its bishops can also be considered as a sign of the city's wealth and emerging position.

Seen in this context, the mosaic with the portrait of the African bishop does not look isolated. His identification with the bishop of Carthage Quodvultdeus, suggested by Fasola, has always been accepted in the literature, although no historical evidence exists. The biography of the bishop, as well as the prestigious location of his tomb in the episcopal *cubiculum* are still valid pieces of proof to support Fasola's opinion. Quodvultdeus was a fierce opponent of Arianism. As a bishop of Carthage, he was forced to leave the city after the conquest of the Arian Gensericus. As we know from the *Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae*, the Vandal king: "ordered the Bishop Quodvultdeus and a great number of clerics to be expelled from the city. Naked and deprived of all their belongings, they were boarded onto boats in poor conditions. The Lord in His mercy led them happily to the city of Naples in Campania".[44] On exile, Quodvultdeus continued his apostolate against the Arians and assisted the bishop of Naples Nostrianus in the persecution of the Pelagist Florus, who "not far from Naples, acted illicitly and ruined the souls of many", as he wrote in his *Liber promissionum et predictorum Dei*.[45]

It is therefore possible that Quodvultdeus may have died in Naples in 454 and his tomb located in the *cubiculum* where Nostrianus' predecessor John was buried. In the same way, Fasola noted, the African Bishop Numidianus was probably buried in the Cripta dei papi in the catacombs of San Callisto in Rome.[46] The tomb of Quodvultdeus (fig. 5) bears clear signs of devotion: a *mensa oleorum* was carved in the corner of its front and the latter was encrusted with marble, later pillaged. The bishop was venerated as a saint in Naples, as attested by the 9th century marble calendar from the basilica of San Giovanni Maggiore, where his festivity is recorded on 19th February.[47]

The portrait of Quodvultdeus seems to capture his heavenly status with the same naturalism used to express his distinctive features. Tiny purple *tesserae* circle his hands and mark the details of his face as to underline his ethnicity, clearly evident from the deep red lips of a man of colour. The silverish toga contrasted with his dark skin and symbolized his episcopal dignity. The golden *volumen* in his hands emphasized his role as a custodian of the Word of God and his fidelity to the apostolic tradition. The adoption of the *imago clipeata* connected the mosaic to the Roman tradition and was inspired to solar symbology, where the *clipeus*

44. *Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae*, I, 15 (CSEL 7), Michael Petschenig ed., p. 8. See: Fasola, *Le catacombe* (n. 1), p. 158.

45. *Opera Quodvultdeo Carthaginiensi episcopo tributa*, (CSEL 60), René Braun ed., p. 198.

46. Fasola, *Le catacombe* (n. 1), p. 160.

47. Domenico Mallardo, *Il calendario marmoreo di Napoli*, Roma 1947, pp. 57-59.

was held as an attribute of superior life.[48] Encircled by the *clipeus* and surrounded by a flowered garden, Quodvultdeus appeared in his tomb as the *homo spiritualis* who has gained the prize of the eternal life, in a perfect balance between his realistic features and spiritual qualities. Of all the portraits in the Cripta, Quodvultdeus' is probably the closest to the naturalism of classical portraiture and, at the same time, expresses the new concept of Christian iconic images.

In her study on the subject, Maria Andaloro recalled Paulinus of Nola's answer to Sulpicius Severus, who had requested a portrait from him: "I blush to be painted the way I am, I do not dare to be painted in the way I am not".[49] Paolinus' problematic view contrasts with the drastic rejection of portraits expressed one century before by Eusebius to the daughter of Constantine, who requested a portrait of Jesus from him. As noted by Andaloro, Paolinus' words reveal a new approach to portraiture, no longer accepting the realism of the Roman tradition and anticipating the symbolism of the Christian icon. The episcopal portraits in the Cripta dei vescovi seem to provide a visual counterpart to Paolinus' words in the creation of a Christian imagery that aims at the representation of an idealized *homo spiritualis*.

John's portrait may reflect Paulinus' ideas. In his tomb, the spiritual qualities of the bishop were given a particular meaning by the grapes pictured in the branches surrounding the *clipeus*. The flourishing garden in the background of Quodvultdeus was replaced in John's tomb by the Vine of the Lord, symbol of the church. In this way John was presented in his episcopal role as custodian of the church. The subject was predominant in the decoration of the Cripta: vines and grapes appear in the mosaics with the other two portraits (figg. 9-10) and, as we have seen, the same motifs extended from the episcopal tombs to the marble incrustations on their fronts.

The episcopal role is also evident in the comparison between the portraits of the bishops and the secular portraits surviving in the catacombs of San Gennaro. As noted by Fabrizio Bisconti, the bishop-philosophers of the Cripta corresponded to the *Orantes* portrayed in the cemeterial basilica.[50] The open books often painted with their praying images symbolize the Word of God as the instrument to gain celestial beatitude. On the other hand, the closed books and scroll in the hands of the bishops represented the source of their authority, based on the apostolic tradition. A social map of the Neapolitan church is depicted by the episcopal and secular portraits in their respective location within the catacombs: the secular portraits in the cemeterial basilica and the bishops in the *cubiculum* near the tomb of the martyr, the ceremonial centre of the catacombs.

Archaeological findings and visual sources from the catacombs can give an idea of their elaborate ritual setting. Candles and torches painted in the frescoes also burnt for real in front of the tombs. Oil lamps were suspended with chains

48. Amodio, *La componente africana* (n. 41), p. 84.
49. Andaloro, "Dal ritratto all'icona", (n. 4), p. 47. See also Nicolas Bock in this book.
50. Bisconti, "Imprese musive" (n. 3), pp. 742-746.

in front of the images and placed on the *mensa olearia*. Several examples were found in the Cripta, where a bronze hook still survives in the central *arcosolium* above the portrait of John.[51] Metal crowns with precious stones also hang above the images, as appears in the fresco with Theoctenus and his family. They symbolized the prize of eternal life. Flower garlands and crowns were used with the same purpose: two garlands are painted in the fresco with the portrait of another African refugee, Proculus, and a crown of leaves was found buried with the occupant of a tomb.[52] Extensive evidence of ritual banquets was discovered everywhere in the catacombs.

The ritual layout of the catacombs is essential for the interpretation of the episcopal portraits. It stressed the devotional function of the images. The use of mosaic and precious marble decorations enhanced this effect. Natural and artificial light was reflected by the shining *tesserae* almost giving the impression of animated figures. The portraits of the bishops perpetrated their memory and symbolised their protection. During the rituals, dead and alive coexisted in the catacombs as a visible sign of the eternal salvation.

The last dignitary buried in the Cripta is portrayed in a mosaic with no *clipeus* (fig. 10). Based on the inscription attesting the works undertaken in the Basilica dei vescovi, he is believed to be the bishop of Naples John II. He was probably responsible for the decoration of the Cripta and the creation of the Basilica with the episcopal series painted in the vault. We know from his biography in the *Gesta Episcoporum* that he built the basilica of San Lorenzo in the city centre of Naples, where "quasi ad lineam omne stratum ex marmoreum crustis ordinatum, placabile oculis omnium videntur".[53] A description that could also be adapted to the rich marble decoration of the Cripta.

The catacombs of San Gennaro remained a privileged burial site for local bishops. An unidentified bishop is buried in the upper vestibule and portrayed with the usual attributes of his status. The fresco is now disfigured by the graffiti left by the pilgrims who visited the catacombs during the 17th to 19th centuries. Even when John IV moved the relics of the bishops into the cathedral of Naples in the 9th century, more Neapolitan bishops including himself were buried in the extramural basilica of San Gennaro near the catacombs.[54] Serena Romano and Vinni Lucherini recently investigated the meaning of such an initiative into the broader historic context of the Carolingian age.[55] As a result, the *arcosolia* in the Cripta were abandoned, but the devotion for the *imagines depictae* of the early bishops of Naples continued in the cathedral, where John IV moved their relics into new tombs "ac desuper eorum effigies depinxit".[56]

51. Fasola, *Le catacombe* (n. 1), p. 143.
52. Ciavolino, "Scavi e scoperte" (n. 2), p. 649.
53. Lucherini, *La cattedrale di Napoli* (n. 9), p. 310.
54. *Ibidem*, p. 128.
55. Romano, "Die Bischöfe von Neapel" (n. 5), pp. 222-224; Romano, "La cattedrale di Napoli" (n. 5), pp. 8-9; Lucherini, *La cattedrale di Napoli* (n. 9), pp. 70-74, 127-135.
56. Lucherini, *La cattedrale di Napoli* (n. 9), p. 323.

Created as a privileged burial site near the tomb of a martyr in the 5th century, the Cripta was consecrated to the veneration of the earliest bishops of Naples. The interpretation of archaeological evidence and historical data suggests that the Cripta originated from the initiative of Bishop John I. Following the example of Paulinus of Nola, he was buried in the *cubiculum* facing the area where the tomb of a martyr was venerated since at least the 6th century, as attested by the inscription discovered in 1992. Future investigations could reveal more details about the history of the upper catacomb, so closely related to the earliest devotion to san Gennaro. Literary and visual sources confirm that the saint was venerated as a martyr in Naples since at least the 5th century. His relics, moved into one of the main Christian cemeteries of the city, favoured the further development of the catacombs. Converted into a *martyrium*, the catacombs of San Gennaro were chosen as a burial place by church-dignitaries, as well as by notable and common members of the early Christian community of Naples.

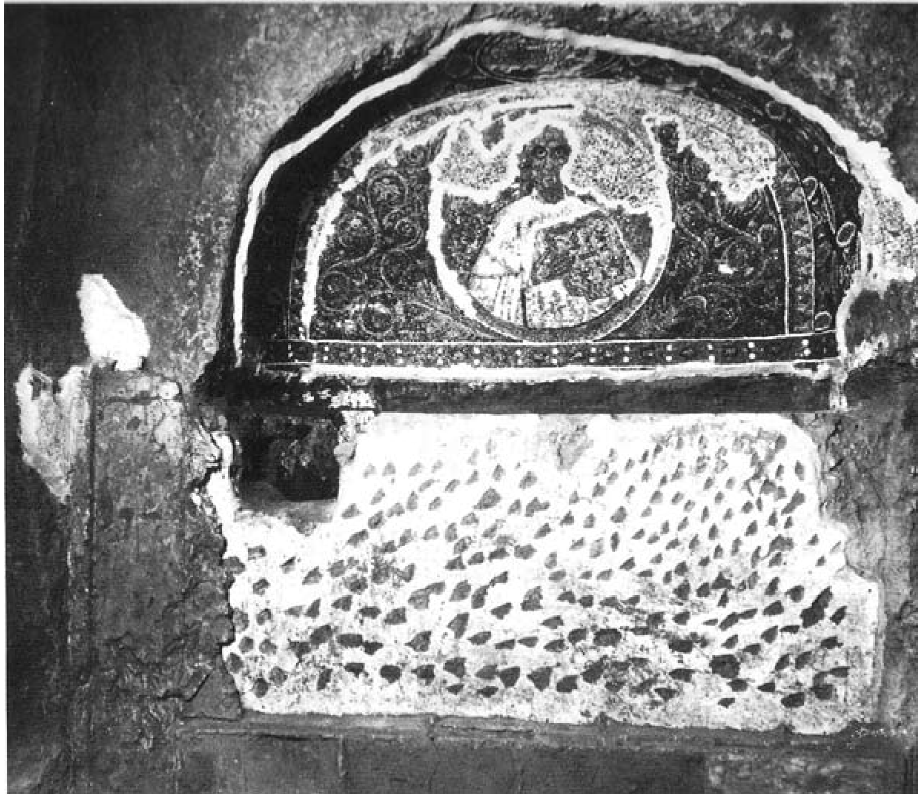
The Cripta was not the only burial place for bishops in Naples. It was with the creation of the Basilica dei vescovi in the 6th century that the *cubiculum* was given a peculiar episcopal meaning and became the ceremonial centre of the cemeterial complex. The monumentalization of the upper catacomb transformed the site into a major destination for pilgrims, attracted by the relics of the martyr and of the early bishop-saints of Naples. The episcopal portraits in mosaic shone in the most sacred part of the subterranean basilica for about four centuries. Images made the spiritual qualities of the bishops visible and promoted the veneration of their relics. The close relationship between portraits and relics was preserved in the new ritual setting designed by John IV in the cathedral, where the remains of the early bishops of Naples were moved in the 9th century. The main devotional function of the Cripta was therefore lost, but its legacy survived in the transmission of the ancient memory of the local church.

1. Alessandro Baratta, *Fidelissimae Urbis Neapolitanae cum Omnibus Viis Accurata et Nova Delineatio* (detail), Naples 1629, Rome, Collezione Banca Intesa.

2. Naples, Basilica of San Gennaro *extra moenia* (interior).

3. *Arcosolium* of Comnina and Nicatiola, Naples, Catacombs of San Gennaro.

4. Naples, Catacombs of San Gennaro, Cripta dei vescovi.



5. *Arcosolium* of Quodvultdeus, Naples, Catacombs of San Gennaro, Cripta dei vescovi.

6. Detail of fig. 5

7. *Arcosolium* of Bishop John, Naples, Catacombs of San Gennaro, Cripta dei vescovi.

8. Detail of fig. 7.

9. *Arcosolium* of an unknown bishop, Naples, Catacombs of San Gennaro, Cripta dei vescovi.

10. *Arcosolium* of an unknown dignitary (Bishop John II?), Naples, Catacombs of San Gennaro, Cripta dei vescovi.

The Face of the Dead and the Early Christian World

Edited by Ivan Foletti
with the collaboration of Alžběta Filipová

Peter Brown has described the position of holy bodies in the Early Christian period as a "place between Earth and Heaven." The principal aim of this book is to deal with precisely this intersection between two worlds expressed by the Dead, and in particular by their images and their faces.
The first part of this book looks into the portrait and its function, and the reason for which Late Antiquity, following a custom it inherited from previous eras, covered itself with individual images of the deceased. As in previous eras, the portrait appears, above all, to be an attempt to express the individual in his or her entirety; the techniques and "instruments" perfected in the course of the the 3rd century, however, lead to divergent formal and conceptual results.
The second question, answered more briefly, deals with the perception and representation of the dead body as a whole, defined by David Le Breton as "la souche identitaire de l'homme." The question asked is a fundamental one, since we are confronted with humanity itself after its passage to that which lies beyond: does the body become just a memory or does it preserve the real presence of the person who once existed?

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