NOTES

NOTES ON CHRISTIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

St. Hippolytus

Recently, G. Bovini has undertaken to review the whole complicated question of Hippolytus and of the namesakes who have been confused or fused with him.[1] Bovini seeks to establish the true personality and the salient facts in the life of this remarkable man, to point out where duplications have occurred and where legend has falsified the true personality of this erratic ecclesiastical leader. Here we shall merely set down some of the conclusions which the study has reached, and add a few observations.

In the first place and fundamental is the conclusion that the St. Hippolytus, Martyr, who was venerated in a catacomb on the Tiburtine Way, which is known by the same name, is the same person as the author of the bulk of the writings which go under this name; the same as the leader of an opposition faction under the Popes Zephyrinus and Callistus; and the same as the "presbyter" Hippolytus who was sent into the mines with Pope Pontianus in 235 and, apparently, there met his end as confessor of the faith. Strange as this combination may appear, there seems to be no way to gainsay the evidence. No attempt is made in the essay to determine the causes of the dissension or to analyse the psychology of the man who so vehemently presented his side of the case. A careful reading of the *Philosopheumena* will convince the reader, I think, that much of personal pique on the part of Hippolytus entered into the strife, though there is no denying that there were differences of principles, especially in matters of church discipline.

In connection with this fatal division some minor questions need to be carefully studied. Quite commonly, Hippolytus is cited as the first anti-pope. Is there sufficiently solid ground for giving him this status? Bovini makes no definite statement in this regard, and the main scope of his study did not require him to take a stand. On the other hand, I once carefully read the whole account of Hippolytus with the view of finding any expression which might show that he looked upon himself as rightful bishop of Rome; I found none. He violently dissented from some views of Zephyrinus and especially of Callistus; he separated himself from their community and led a faction of dissenters in the Roman church; but the attempt to supplant them in their official character goes beyond that. Learned and versatile as Hippolytus was and a witness without peer in his day to the true tradition

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[1] Giuseppe Bovini, "Sant' Ippolito della Via Tiburtina," *Revista di Archeologia Cristiana*, XIX (1942), 35–85.

of the Church, yet he will hardly be allowed the honor of a deep and consistent thinker.   It may well be that in the heat of the controversy with all its annoyances Hippolytus never clearly thought out his position and was restrained by habitual reverence from making the final break.   This appears to be a reasonable interpretation unless further conclusive evidence can be produced.

Another point concerns the time of reconciliation between Hippolytus and the reigning pope.   In the article under discussion it is taken for granted that the miseries of common banishment brought this about.   However, Hippolytus must have completed his vitriolic account of the struggle shortly after the death of Callistus, which occurred in 222 A.D.   Of the fortunes of Hippolytus during the next years we know next to nothing, except that it was a time of rich literary activity; then in 235 appears the solitary notice that he shared banishment with Pontianus and presumably died in exile. During the intervening years many things may have taken place to effect a reunion.   The quarrel with Zephyrinus and Callistus seems to have been largely due to personal rivalry between the latter and the celebrated teacher. Once a martyr's death had removed Callistus from the scene, a prime cause of difference was gone, and under Urban I (223–230) or Pontianus (231–235) a reconcilation might easily have come about.   Had the conflict lasted till the time of banishment, it is hard to conceive that the clergy and people of Rome would so readily have rendered a religious cultus to the martyr, and so thoroughly forgotten his role as schismatic leader.

Legend has been busy with this strange character and has almost completely effaced his true lines.   Bovini does not attempt to follow the single steps of this transformation, from which the ecclesiastical leader emerges as a soldier and a gaoler who is converted from paganism only a few days before his martyrdom.   Prudentius still knew him as ecclesiastic and schismatic in the early years of the fifth century but by a strange anachronism made him a follower of Novatus.   From this point to the emergence of the *Passio* of St. Lawrence, which has become so popular, there is almost a complete gap in our information.

The Color of Angels

In an article published in 1940, but which became available in this country only recently, Father E. Kirschbaum, S.J., reviews the iconography of the angels during the early centuries of the Church and during the Middle Ages.[2] The particular question which he investigates is the meaning of colors,

[2] E. Kirschbaum, S.J., "L'Angelo rosso e l'Angelo turchino," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, XVII (1940), 210–48.

chiefly red and dark blue, when depicting angels monochromatically. Hitherto the fact of such use had been noted, but only tentative solutions were offered, if any attempt was made to give them. By examining the prevalent theology and philosophy on the nature of angels and devils in the early centuries and in the late Middle Ages, Father Kirschbaum has been led to a solution which is eminently reasonable and which will be of assistance in the examination of similar problems. In a few lines we shall sum up the main conclusions as they pertain to the early period.

The presence of red or blue monochromatic angel figures has not the same significance in medieval artistic works as in the earlier works. The figure chosen by the artist of the fourth and following centuries was a human one with wings and a halo of light; it is derived from the classical Victory figure. As yet there is no distinctive figure or bodily attribute to mark out the fallen angel from the good one. Nor is there any effort made to separate the angels into distinctive groups or choirs.

We now have the key for the interpretation of a sixth-century mosaic at Ravenna, in the Church of St. Apollinare Nuovo. Christ as Judge is seated on His judgment seat. Symmetrically there are grouped at His sides angels and animals: on His right, an angel in red and before him three sheep; at the left a replica of the same figure but with dark blue color and before it three goats. The figure in red is the angel of light with his body of ether or fire; the blue figure is the fallen angel with his body of air—the spirit of darkness. Not black but blue was the color of darkness with ancient artists. As compared with the upper regions, the lower atmosphere, where dwell the fallen angels, was the region of darkness, which shows its true color only at night.

Under the influence of St. Gregory the Great, who drew his inspiration from Denys the Areopagite, the doctrine of theologians and philosophers underwent considerable modification during the Middle Ages. As a consequence, artistic expression and the symbolism of colors also was radically changed.

The Ship as Christian Symbol

The field of study of Christian symbolism in antiquity is far from exhausted. New materials are being added continually and old ones need to be more thoroughly evaluated. As the dates and the places of production of early artistic works are more carefully studied, it often occurs that traditional judgments must be revised or that distinctions have to be made which were not attended to before.

In line with this development we must welcome the final study of Georg Stuhlfauth, who has made numerous notable contributions in this field during

his long and fruitful career.   In an article entitled, "Das Schiff als Symbol der altchristlichen Kunst,"[3] he has brought together and analysed all the instances known from the early centuries of Christianity in which a ship in any form was used as symbol to express Christian thought.   The patristic contributions to the question are only briefly touched on at a few points, mainly as illustration.   This leaves a field open for further literary investigation, which would no doubt throw additional light also on the iconographic tradition.

For the present we shall merely sum up the conclusions of Dr. Stuhlfauth, which must henceforth be the starting point for additional studies.   Two main phases must be distinguished in the significance of this symbolic expression of Christian thought.   The earlier one is funereal and has its roots in classical thought.   It is used to signify the voyage of the departed soul to Christ— what St. Cyprian calls "navigare per patriam."   With this sense we find the symbolical ship used mainly during the third and fourth centuries in Europe and western Africa.

At the end of this period, a new meaning grows up and gradually supplants the older.   The ship is now the Church; in it Christ Himself or one of His apostles at times appear as helmsman.   The first literary indications of this conception are found in Tertullian and it is more fully developed by Hippolytus.   During the Middle Ages this symbolism receives a rich development but the beginnings go back to the earlier centuries.

Many obscurities still remain about the origin of this conception: What were its sources and how was it evolved?   Did it grow out of the older symbol and was an entirely new one taking its place?   Where was it first employed and how did it spread?   Such and other allied questions still await wider investigation.

Agape, Refrigerium, Fractio Panis

Community banquets of a more or less elaborate form were a common feature of early Christian life.   The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of St. Paul, the works of the Fathers from Ignatius of Antioch to Augustine contain numerous testimonies to the practice.   The Apologists of the second century and the speakers in the Letter of Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan are at pains to explain that nothing of a scandalous nature was enacted at these gatherings, but freely admit that common meals were of frequent occurrence among Christians.   The fourth century saw a vigorous expansion of the practice in the West and in Africa but also an increase of

[3] Georg Stuhlfauth, "Das Schiff als Symbol der altchristlichen Kunst," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, XIX (1942), 111–41.

abuses. For this reason the authorities took vigorous measures to keep things within bounds and finally did away with the practice almost completely, as far as it was linked with religious celebrations.

Many things are still obscure respecting the origin and history of the practice. In particular, the collection and study of the archaeological materials are still far from completed. Something more has been attempted in the scrutiny of the literary statements and allusions; but without comparison with the real remains and control by them the results will remain uncertain and incoherent. Msgr. Wilpert has done pioneer work in bringing together and discussing the iconographical representations which have a bearing on the subject. The collections of Latin and Greek Christian inscriptions contain much material and new things are being added as the publications appear. A number of special studies have likewise appeared which prepare the way for the over-all survey.

Any new archaeological materials that are published are therefore to be heartily welcomed. Pictorial representations are most numerous in the underground cemeteries of Rome. Of real remains Africa has the greater abundance. Likewise our literary notices concern themselves more particularly with the African usages and give more detailed accounts of the bitter struggle against abuses, which led to the final abolition of the custom.

However, C. Zammit calls attention to a significant group of monuments in the catacombs of Malta, whose importance has been overlooked.[4] There is question of a number of rock tables which were once used for banquets of the type which we are considering. Four excellent pictures and two drawings give a clear idea of the form of the objects. Within an apse which was hewn out of the rock a semicircular or sigma-shaped mass of stone was fashioned into a table of ancient type; it consists of a circular center which projects slightly upwards and of an edge on which the guests reclined in a half-recumbent posture. The elevated part itself has a large depression in the center and a segment cut out of the rim.

To judge by the place in which these tables are found, we have to deal with funerary banquets, which are more specifically called *refrigeria*. According to St. Augustine, these were a relic from paganism, tolerated by the Church in her indulgence to human weakness, once the practice had been purged of all idolatrous and superstitious elements. In the pagan conception there was question of real material solace for the departed, whereas for the Christians the refreshment was a spiritual one.

[4] C. Zammit, "I triclini funebri nelle catacome di Malta," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, XVII (1940), 293–97.

This latter conception was broadened by having the poor participate in the good things which were served at these repasts.

Three kinds of community banquets may be distinguished, though it is not always possible to tell exactly wherein they differ. The *refrigerium* or funeral banquet has already been spoken of. Out of this probably developed the banquet in honor of the martyrs; the cultus of the martyrs at this epoch centered about the tomb and at the outset had much of the funereal clinging to it. Both of these forms received their first great development during the earlier part of the fourth century, though the first beginnings probably go farther back. Preceding these and already spoken of in the New Testament was the "love-banquet" or *agape*, which was closely related to the Eucharistic celebration. Later writers mention it on various occasions and Tertullian still defends its legitimate use. However, by this time it seems no longer to have had any direct ties with the Holy Eucharist. How this separation was effected and what were its single steps has not been explained.

The abuses occurring at such banquets are castigated already by St. Paul (I Cor. 11:17–22). In like manner St. Jude hints at objectionable practices (Jude 12). Yet these were not such as would force authorities to consider abolishing the practice. The *agape* could be a means of education in charity, sobriety, and other social virtues whose practice was sorely needed in Roman society. In like manner the repasts at the tombs of the dead and in honor of the martyrs could serve important purposes. St. Paulinus and others were loud in their praise of Pammachius when he gave a banquet to an immense number of the poor, so that he might honor the memory of his recently deceased wife. From this it is evident that the leaders saw no objection to the practice as such.

However, the recurring and even rampant abuses gave occasion for serious thought on the matter. Attempts at remedying the abuses without abolishing the custom proved only partially successful. St. Augustine tells at different times about the opposition, even open rebellion, which he encountered in his fight against the excesses in Africa. He likewise tells us that before the end of the fourth century the practice had been suppressed in Rome and Milan; St. Ambrose found occasion to advise St. Monica on this custom while she was staying with her son Augustine at Milan. The fifth century saw a general waning of the custom, at least in the West. The details of this struggle and its final outcome are little known; the proper estimate of the practice will require a wide study, not only of the usage itself but also of the background, both Christian and pagan.

Qal'at Sim'ân: New inscription raises new problems

The far-famed sanctuary which once housed and honored the pillar of the first stylite still proves to be an inexhaustible mine of study for archaelogists, historians and students of art. To the old materials which still await exhaustive examination new ones are being added as investigations proceed. Only on the basis of such scientific investigations can the final history of this religious monument ever be attempted.

A notable find was made by Daniel Krenker in the spring of 1938 in the form of an inscription partly in Greek and partly in Syriac. After being discussed by H. Lietzmann and Bruno Meissner a new attempt at interpretation is made by Julian Obermann.[5] Difficulties arise from various sources. In the first place, the text is incomplete in both its parts; and attempts to supply missing parts lead to differences of opinion. Then there is the grammatical structure of the Greek, which violates the syntactical rules of the language in several instances. Furthermore, the question arises whether the two inscriptions are treating of the same building operations or of different ones.

The new solution offered by Obermann is based to a certain extent on a discovery which he made when studying three Greek and three Aramaic inscriptions that were found in the synagogue at Dura-Europus. The process is of great interest, as it may point the way for the interpretation of many building inscriptions of the Orient. Briefly, these are the facts. The three Aramaic inscriptions—and the same is true of the Greek, though less clearly—treat partly of the same building operations and partly of different ones. The second inscription resumes or copies the first and adds to it; the third resumes the second, thus also the first, and continues to add. Thus the content of the last is partly that of the two preceding, but not necessarily in the same words. The hypothesis now is that this was common practice wherever different stages of the same building operations or different stages of the same building operations or different undertakings at the same place are in question. The bearing of this observation on the interpretation of many Oriental inscriptions can easily be surmised.

Leaving aside the linguistic remarks which the author makes on the text, we may summarize the results of the application of this theory to the bilingual text in a few sentences. This text, which stood in the floor of the main basilica, was set up and executed in mosaic at one and the same time. However, the equivalent of the Greek part, speaking of a renovation of the

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[5] Julian Obermann, "A Composite Inscription from the Church of St. Simeon the Stylite," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, V (1946), 73–82.

churches and the foundation of a monastery, was set up in a monastery. Credit for this work is given to two "patriarchs" and to an "hegoumenos" who probably was a civil officer; the names have all disappeared. The Syriac part gives the credit for the work to the head of the monastery, whose name has likewise disappeared. He was responsible for an outer wall of the monastery and some decorative work of note within. The linguistic peculiarities in the Greek text can be explained by contamination from Syriac usage. If we assume that the redaction and execution of the in-scription was entrusted to a scribe who was more adept in Syriac than in Greek, we can easily conjecture how he would modify the earlier text so as to conform to Syrian syntax. Thus the present reading gives the fusion of two distinct records and we have information regarding different building operations.

The date of these undertakings is not entirely certain, but the first cannot be before 963 A.D. We are thus led into the very last days of this great institution of Christian antiquity. We are also given an insight into the life of a community where two languages were in common use.

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