

Damnati ad Metalla*

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In the ecclesiastical tradition, the reign of Diocletian (AD 284–305) is known as the “Age of Martyrs”. The Dalmatian emperor issued a good four edicts against Christians and ordered a fierce persecution (the “Great Persecution” par excellence) that began in AD 303.

The persecution was particularly intense in the East, where the Christian faith was very widespread, and especially so in Egypt. Egypt fell under the jurisdiction of Diocletian with the institution of the tetrarchy (293) and the emperor, as Augustus in the East, visited there on various occasions.

From the third century, Roman Egypt experienced a period of relative turbulence. Subject to pressure from the Sassanids and exposed to the Syrian rulers’ ambitions, Egypt had almost escaped Roman control until it became the object of a conquest campaign by Emperor Aurelian (272). The last decade of the century saw the outbreak of internal revolts and the election of an anti-emperor. Alexandria was besieged for eight months by the imperial forces with the presence of Diocletian, who afterwards visited Upper Egypt in 298.

Diocletian went up the Nile again and visited the Thebaid region (in 302) the last Emperor to visit Egypt and the only one who visited twice Upper Egypt. It was probably in occasion of one of these visits that the *sacellum* of the Great Temple of Amun, located in the city of Thebes (Luxor), was “frescoed” with a representation of the tetrarch leaders (fig. 79). In that period the temple, which was built in the Pharaonic era, was in the centre of a Roman encampment. The paintings in the *sacellum* depict a procession of soldiers and a series of seated figures (that probably represent an imperial hearing) (fig. 80). The central apse, on the other hand, illustrates four figures wearing togas surmounted by the imperial eagle (fig. 81) that correspond to the Augusti, Diocletian and Maximian in the centre, and to the Caesars, Galerius and Constantius, beside them.¹

Returning to the vicissitudes of the Christians, Egypt was not only home to fanatical persecutors such as Sossianus Hierocles,² who was already present in Bithynia and prefect of Egypt in the Galerian period, but also to the quarries to which the confessors were deported and sentenced to hard labour *ad metalla*,** together with criminals guilty of more serious crimes.³ These Roman quarries are situated in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, in the so-called Qena Quadrangle (fig. 82, map), and this impenetrable and inaccessible area is to be found about forty kilometres inland from the Red Sea, still today controlled by Bedouin tribes.⁴ Here Mons Porphyrites (Gebel Abu Dukhan) is located, along the unpaved track that connected Kainopolis, a stop along the Nile, to Myos Hormos, a Ptolemaic port on the Red Sea (the Via Porphyrites). Near this mountain, over 1600 metres in height, the Imperial Red Porphyry was extracted, of a quality that was only to be found in this area. The stone was then transported by ox-drawn cart to Kainopolis or to Koptos (150 kilometres away or a seven day walk),⁵ to subsequently reach the Mediterranean, having travelled down the Nile. The quarries were active from the first century AD, in particular from Claudius’s reign onwards⁶ and were used as places of imprisonment from at least the second century.⁷ Already in the Trajanic and Antoninian periods, many Christians were destined to forced labour here.⁸ The period of peak demand for Red Porphyry, apart from Hadrian’s use of it, was during Diocletian’s reign, when, incidentally, it was used in abundance in the palace of Split.⁹ In those years, the quarries were developed, with the construction of new ramps and with the maintenance of the previous infrastructure.¹⁰ The number of miners, which also included freemen / technicians and soldiers / amounted to several thousand and a fortified settlement existed, where there were also places of worship and, seemingly, thermal baths (in Wadi Umm Sidri located at the base of ramps) and necropolises.¹¹ There were also other residential settlements: the village known as Lykabettos, in the district of quarry A, another village near quarry B (in the north-west) and other accommodation spread over the mining areas. The activity was not limited just to extraction: the stonemasonry began on the mountain itself, as shown by the finds of fragments of columns, baths (fig. 83) and even a rough cast of a bust carved *in situ*.¹²

* Translator’s note: the Latin *damnati ad metalla* is understood to mean “condemnation to the mines”.

** Translator’s note: the Latin *ad metalla* is understood to mean in this context “in the mines”.

¹ BOWMAN 1986, pp. 44–46, 54.

² Hierocles also wrote anti-Christian works and was subsequently attacked by Eusebius of Caesarea in *Against Hierocles*.

³ Cf. EUSEBIUS 1955, ch. 8.

⁴ DEL BUFALO 2002, pp. 195–198.

⁵ WERNER 1998, pp. 2–9, cf. ROMEO, DE BIASIO 2004, p. 107.

⁶ ROMEO, DE BIASIO 2004, p. 101.

⁷ Cf. ARISTIDE 2011, “Discorso Egizio” (or. 48) 349.

⁸ PEACOCK 1995 with further references.

⁹ GNOLI 1971, pp. 122, 128; ROMEO, DE BIASIO 2004, p. 102.

¹⁰ Quarrying began to decline from the fourth century, with the subsequent diffusion of the practice of reusing older materials, which probably happened for Julian’s sarcophagus, see ROMEO, DE BIASIO 2004, p. 103. The abandonment of the caves can be dated to the second half of the fifth century.

¹¹ ROMEO, DE BIASIO 2004, pp. 108–110.

¹² See PEACOCK 1995.

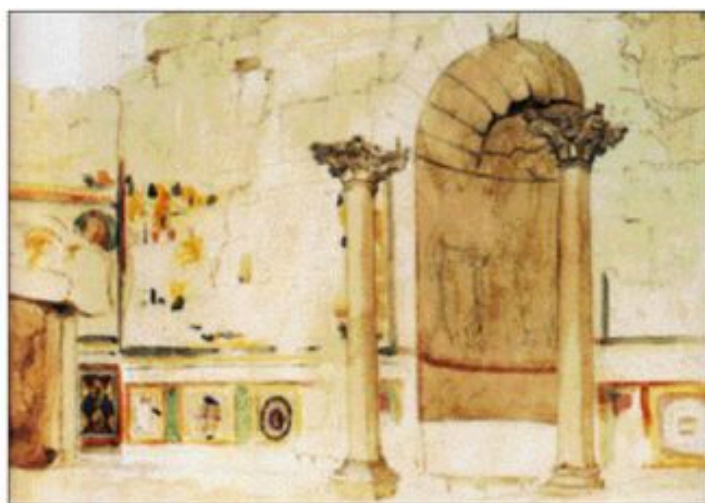


FIG. 79. WATERCOLOUR BY G. WILKINSON, 19TH CENTURY, SHOWING THE TETRARCHIC FRESCOS OF AMUN TEMPLE IN LUXOR.



FIG. 80. LUXOR, TEMPLE OF AMUN. DETAIL OF THE MILITARY ASSEMBLY REPRESENTED IN THE FRESCOS ON THE MAIN WALL.

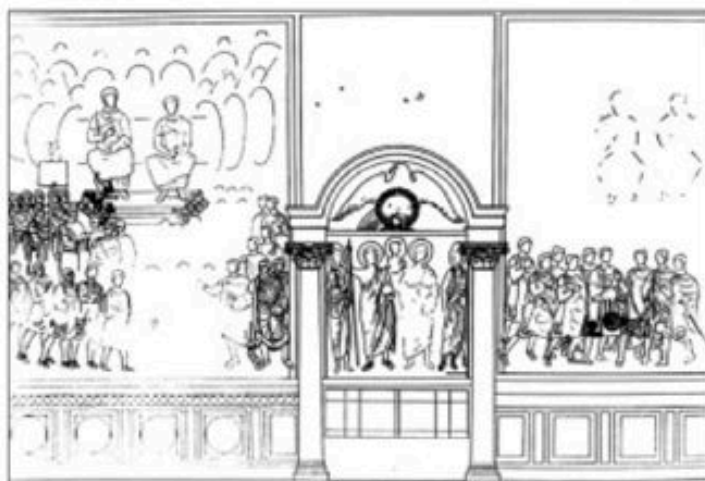


FIG. 81. PAPER DRAWING RECONSTRUCTING THE SCENE OF THE MILITARY TETRARCHIC FRESCO IN THE TEMPLE OF AMUN AT LUXOR.



FIG. 82. MAP OF EGYPT WITH THE THEBAÏD AREA IN THE EASTERN DESERT.



FIG. 83. BATH TUB IN RED PORPHYRY ABANDONED IN THE PORPHYRITES QUARRIES (NOW LOST).



FIG. 84. IRON HANDCUFF FOUND IN A SHELTER OF WADI NAGAT.



FIG. 85. WADI NAGAT, ROCK SHELTER OF CHRISTIAN FUGITIVES.

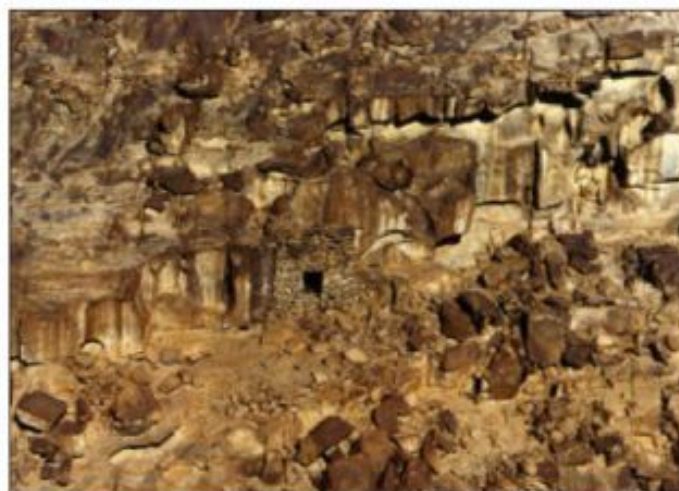


FIG. 86. WADI NAGAT. SHELTER BUILT IN THE ROCK WALL OF THE WADI BY CHRISTIAN FUGITIVES.



FIG. 87. WADI NAGAT. CROSS SYMBOL GRAFFITI ON A CHRISTIAN SHELTER STRUCTURE.

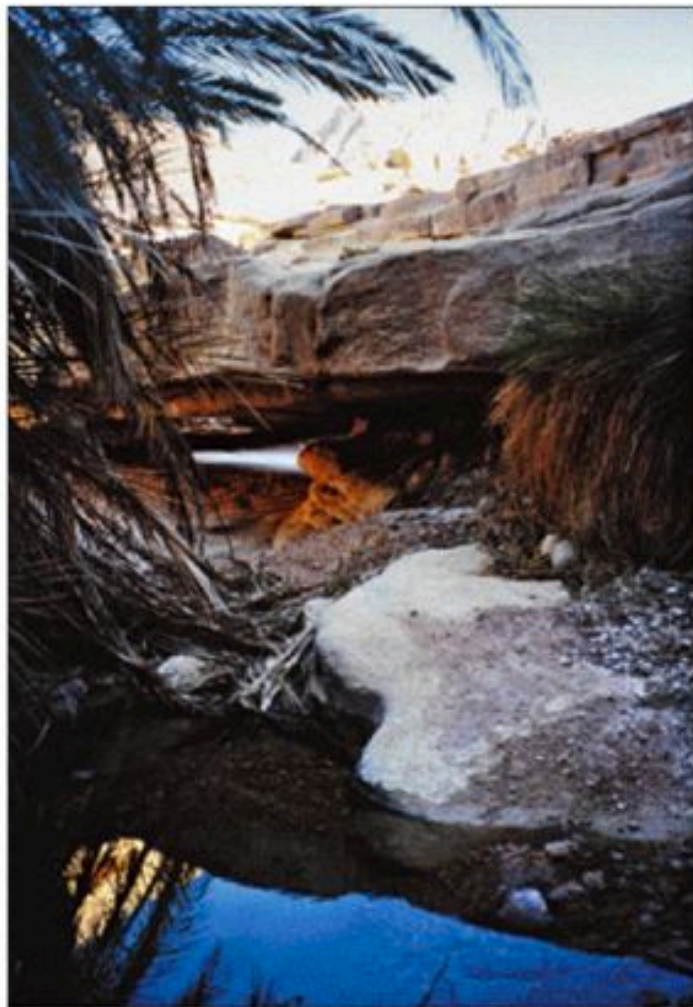


FIG. 88. WADI NAGAT. NATURAL CAVE WITH A SMALL WATER SOURCE.



FIG. 89. WADI NAGAT. NATURAL CAVE WITH AN OPEN CEILING (LIKE THE ONE OF SAINT PAUL).



FIG. 90. JACOBUS DE VORAGINE, THE GOLDEN LEGEND. A XILOGRAPHY DEPICTING SAINT PAUL SHARING A LOAF OF BREAD WITH SAINT ANTHONY, WHILE THE RAVEN, WHO BROUGHT THE BREAD, IS ON THE ROOF.



FIG. 91. WADI NAGAT. A VIEW FROM THE TOP OF THE WADI.

The *damnati ad metalla* were forced to dig the Porphyry with their hands and feet in chains. Any proselytising was not well tolerated and Eusebius recounts of the deportation of ninety-seven confessors, including women and children, from the quarries to Palestine, where, upon having professed their Christian faith, they suffered horrible mutilations.¹³ Despite the oppression and the limited mobility that was forced upon them in the quarries, some Christians tried to escape and succeeded.

The bare hills in the Thebaid region offered almost inaccessible, rocky hideouts (fig. 85) that must have ensured the fugitives relative safety for the time necessary to elude the searches by their Roman captors. Wadi Nagat, an impervious gorge carved out by a now dry stream, is located the distance of a night's walk to the south of Mons Porphyrites and near to Mount Qattar. Still today, the steep, rocky face conceals refuges built in the local stone that have remained intact over the centuries (fig. 86). One of these shelters reveals Christian symbols (fig. 87) and the author, during a survey in 1995, discovered (together with Sheikh Abdel Azaher from the Khushmaan Bedouin clan) an iron manacle with chain rings. It is possible that one of the fugitives from Mons Porphyrites managed to free himself from it, but conserved it in memory of his past (fig. 84).

The fugitives from the quarries were certainly not the first, nor the only, outcasts to be sheltered by the desolate heights of the Thebaid. The area was home, as it still is today, to Bedouin tribes, alien, if not openly hostile, to society and the Roman state, and, over the course of the centuries, bandits and outlaws of all kinds had their hideaways there. According to unspecified Egyptian sources cited by the Italian Dominican friar, Domenico Cavalca (1270-1342, *Vite dei santi padri*), the Thebaid caves were the seat of clandestine mints, where, in the late Hellenistic period, money was minted and it would not have been difficult to obtain, or simply find, basic metallurgical tools (such as anvils and hammers). The life of the anchorite, Saint Paul of Thebes (c. 250-335), fits precisely into this scenario. The saint, known in the Christian tradition as the first hermit, fled to the desert to avoid persecution by Decius, having been denounced by a brother-in-law. According to Cavalca, Paul settled in a cavern situated on a completely barren mountain.

The cavern was relatively large and was characterised both by an opening in the ceiling, from which a date palm emerged, as well as by a small fresh-water spring. This description, which may seem bizarre, is not implausible. The author has had occasion to visit and photograph, specifically in Wadi Nagat, a cave that exactly matches the description found in the hagiographical sources (figs. 88-89). Places like this are certainly not common in the Thebaid mountain region and it may be hypothesised at this stage that the identification of Saint Paul's cave is the very same hideout that was visited and photographed. It is probable that the area had already been used by Christians fleeing from Mons Porphyrites – the first authentic anchorites, however much forced to be such – and that, aware of this “practice”, Paul had chosen the region for his own voluntary hermitage. Another piece of information from the hagiographic legends is of particular interest: so much so that Cavalca, and another thirteenth-century Dominican friar, Jacobus de Voragine (1230-1298, in the *Golden Legend*), both mention the tradition about a raven that ensured that Saint Paul of Thebes had half a loaf of bread on a daily basis for the duration of his hermitage, only to double the quantity the day that Saint Anthony Abbot visited him (fig. 90). In reality, a Bedouin figure may actually be behind the image of the raven: the customary black robes lend themselves to the metaphor of a bird with black plumage. Indeed, one can imagine that over the course of the centuries, through a more or less continual frequentation of the area, a form of solidarity between elements at the margins of imperial society was established and almost institutionalised. As well as the Bedouins' ability to control the territory, the rapidity in delivering a double quantity of food – a whole loaf of bread – when Saint Anthony arrived at Saint Paul's cave (fig. 91) must be attributed to a “raven”. The same kind of solidarity will have allowed the fugitives, *damnati ad metalla*, during the Diocletian and Galerian era, to survive for some time in the rocky hideouts of Wadi Nagat.

The years from 311 to 313 were memorable for Christians: Emperor Galerius, up to then an intransigent supporter and promoter of the persecutions, promulgated the Edict of Toleration, to be confirmed in the Edict of Milan two years later by Constantine, when Christianity was put on the same level as the other professed religions throughout the Empire and confiscated property was returned to the Church. After only sixty-seven years, Christianity finally triumphed, becoming the state religion in 380, upon the decree issued by Theodosius I. The effects of this “liberation” were explosive in Egypt¹⁴ and the people converted to Christianity almost immediately. During Constantine's reign, Christianity pervaded the social and ruling structures and radically changed the actual mentality of the population. It is estimated that by the end of the fourth century the vast majority of Egyptians professed the Christian faith and, in some cases, in forms that were more or less syncretic with earlier traditions.

With the publication of the Edict of Toleration (AD 311), several thousand Christian confessors had to be set free throughout the Empire, from prisons and from forced labour, including those in the Mons Porphyrites quarries. Thousands of finally free men embarked on the return journey through the desert, certainly helped (during the seven or more days of travel that separated the quarries from Thebes) by the Roman authorities with food, water and a military escort. The evacuation of the Christian prisoners was certainly not a simple or quick task. One can perhaps date to these months of “liberation” the only two burials of

¹³ EUSEBIUS 1955, ch. 8.1, cf. PEACOCK 1995 with further references. The fact that the authorities could afford to renounce on so much labour, together with the size of

settlements around the caves, gives an idea of the number of miners/convicts that were working on the mountain.

¹⁴ BOWMAN 1986, pp. 46-47.

FIG. 92. LUXOR, TEMPLE OF AMUN. DETAIL OF THE TETRARCHIC FRESCO IN THE APSE; THE HAND IS HOLDING A TWIG OF AN OLIVE TREE.

FIG. 93. VENICE, PIAZZA SAN MARCO. THE TETRARCHS SCULPTED IN PORPHYRY, FROM THE HONORARY COLUMNS OF CONSTANTINOPLE (SEE S50 AND C2).



FIG. 94. RAVENNA, MUSEO ARCIVESCOVILE. TETRARCHIC ACEPHALOUS STATUE WEARING A CHLAMYS, THE HAND READY ON THE SWORD (SEE S47).



FIG. 95. BERLIN, BODE-MUSEUM. TETRARCHIC ACEPHALOUS STATUE WEARING A CHLAMY, THE HAND READY ON THE SWORD (SEE S45).

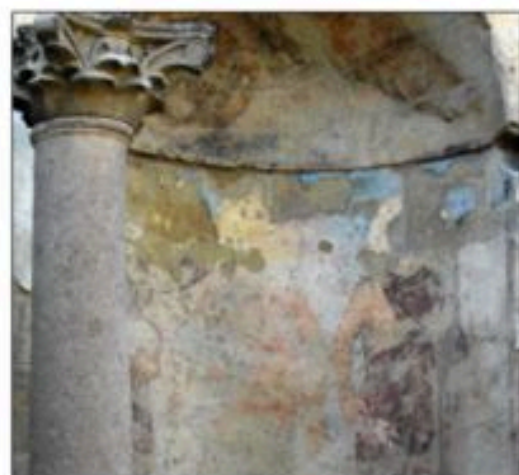


FIG. 96. LUXOR, TEMPLE OF AMUN. FRESCOES IN THE APSE DEPICTING FOUR CHARACTERS WITH AUREOLAS.

FIG. 97. PAPER DRAWING RECONSTRUCTING THE SCENE OF THE MILITARY TETRARCHIC FRESCO IN THE TEMPLE OF AMUN AT LUXOR.





FIG. 98. SINAI, MONASTERY OF SAINT CATHERINE. ICON OF SAINT PETER ON WOOD WITH AN IMAGE, ON THE LEFT, OF YOUNG CHRIST WITH A YELLOW AUREOLA, 6TH CENTURY.



FIG. 99. ROME, ALBANO CATACOMB OF SAINT SENATORE. A FRESCO IMAGE OF A YOUNG BOY (CHRIST) WITH A YELLOW AUREOLA, 3RD-4TH CENTURY.



FIG. 100. ROME, ALBANO CATACOMB OF SAINT SENATORE. A FRESCOED WALL DEPICTING CHRIST (CENTRE) BETWEEN THE FOUR CROWNED MARTYRS.

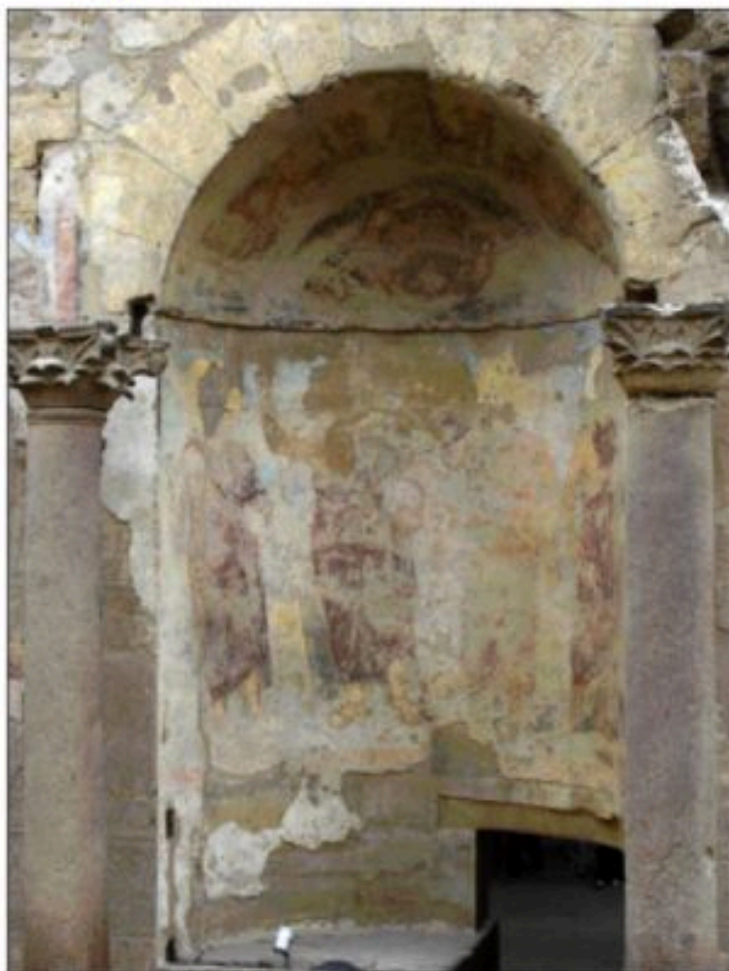


FIG. 101. LUXOR, TEMPLE OF AMUN. FRESCOES IN THE APSE DEPICTING FOUR CHARACTERS WITH AUREOLAS, THE FOUR CROWNED MARTYRS.



FIG. 102. ROME, BASILICA OF THE SANTI QUATTRO CORONATI, CRYPT. THE SARCOPHAGI OF THE FOUR CROWNED MARTYRS IN EGYPTIAN PORPHYRY (SEE S1 AND S2).



FIG. 103. ROME, FIORENTINI COLLECTION. AN OVAL IN RED PORPHYRY, REPRESENTING THE FOUR CROWNED MARTYRS (SEE R37).

Christian workers in the various graveyards on Mons Porphyrites,¹⁵ where the tomb inscriptions could finally include the symbols of the workers' faith.

Activity in the quarries did not stop even though it was drastically reduced. The last emperor to be buried in Porphyry in 457 was the Byzantine Marcian, but it is possible that the block of Porphyry used for his coffin was one that had been extracted tens of years before.

Over the centuries to follow, the Christian presence in the area changed from being a forced one to an intentional one and the Mons Porphyrites region remained home to the poorly documented anchorites and hermitages. In particular, John Moschos, a Byzantine monk who lived between the sixth and seventh centuries, states in the *Pratum Spirituale*, that in about 620 a certain Abbot Zosimus settled in "Porphyrite" with his disciple John and there met two hermits by the names of Theodore and Paul.¹⁶ Thebes was undoubtedly the first large city that the Christian ex-prisoners arrived at on their road to freedom and was probably where they gathered, thereby forming the first Christian community. We should return for a moment to the Temple of Amun to look closely at the paintings in the apsidal niche where the tetrarchs are depicted. Recent Italian restoration¹⁷ has revealed details that leave one, to say the least, perplexed about this identification:

1. The tetrarch on the right holds an olive branch (symbolising peace) in his hand (fig. 92), whereas normally tetrarchs were depicted with their hand resting on the hilt of their sword, in readiness to draw it, as can be seen in the celebrated Porphyry statues in Venice (fig. 93), the tetrarch in Ravenna (fig. 94) or the one in Berlin (fig. 95), but also those in Capua and Istanbul;
2. the figures of the tetrarchs in the fresco have clearly visible aureolas (fig. 96), where normally the emperors would not even have a hint of one;
3. a fifth character, depicted with a smaller-sized bust and also with aureola, has been revealed in the centre of the composition, positioned between the two central tetrarchs¹⁸ (fig. 97).

These iconographic characteristics lead one immediately to think of Christian images. Furthermore, the small bust in the centre of the scene reminds one of the image of Christ in the encaustic icon with the portrait of Saint Peter, located in Saint Catherine's monastery in Sinai (fig. 98), or of the one in Albano, Rome (fig. 99).

The first Christians who arrived in Thebes from the quarries and who were assembled in the Temple of Amun for a hearing will have been outraged to find themselves being received in the *sacellum* where the four portraits of the tetrarchs, their bitter enemies and tormentors, were still to be seen.

It is very likely that the survivors from the quarries, after heated protests, requested that the images of the tetrarchs be replaced (precisely because there were four tetrarchs) with four victims of the persecution that had been carried out by these very tetrarchs. This all leaves the author to believe that the martyrs we see today in the apse are the Four Crowned Martyrs. The hagiographic tradition concerning these martyrs is very confusing and controversial (fig. 100). The *communis opinio* is that there were five (!) Pannonian stonecutters, killed by order of Diocletian, who were then confused with four Roman *cornicularii* (army officers, from where the word "crowned" derives), killed two years afterwards on the Via Labicana, later buried and recognised as martyrs by Saint Sebastian and Pope Miltiades. The present Basilica of the Santi Quattro Coronati on the Caelian Hill in Rome was consecrated in the sixth century and the bodies of saints were only transported there under Leo IV in 851.

The most extensive hagiographic account of their martyrdom can be found in a Latin *passio*, probably from the sixth century,¹⁹ where the oldest codes date back to the eighth century, which is transcribed (and evidently reworked) by a certain Porphyrius;²⁰ the full version of this *Passio* is reproduced in this book (pp. 65-68) with an English translation (our version, pp. 69-72). Incidentally, the Latin version of the *Passio* has various linguistic features that lead one to believe that it was originally written in Greek. According to Porphyrius's transcript, Diocletian visited several quarries in Pannonia and found four skilled workers there, who proved to be particularly skilful in sculpting the marble of the "porphyritic mountain that is known as igneous" (see *Passio*, para. 4 (our version)). The four men were Christians and they converted a colleague and friend, Simplicius, to Christianity. Later in the narration, the four, together with Simplicius, suffered martyrdom for having refused to sculpt a statue of Asclepius: Diocletian ordered them to be enclosed in lead coffins and thrown into the river. Now, this story has created much confusion amongst scholars - apart from the mention of a fifth martyr - above all due to the setting in Pannonia. The region in general lacks quarries, let alone Imperial Red Porphyry,²¹ and, consequently, there is no reason to believe that Diocletian even went there to personally visit and inspect the mining production. Moreover, there are no records of Christians having been condemned to forced labour in Pannonia.

If, however, as other scholars have already suggested in the past, the story is transposed to the Thebaid quarries in Egypt, many elements start to fit together. Firstly, the name of the mountain: the only known mountain by the name of Mons Porphyrites or

¹⁵ Cf. PEACOCK 1995; ROMEO, DE BIASIO 2004, p. 118.

¹⁶ Cf. GNOLI 1971, p. 126 n. 1; ROMEO, DE BIASIO 2004, p. 118.

¹⁷ Restoration work was carried out by Luigi De Cesaris in 2008-2009.

¹⁸ Cf. DEL BUFALO 2010, p. 233.

¹⁹ AMORE 1968, pp. 1276-1286.

²⁰ See PEACOCK 1995.

²¹ Cf. DAMJANOVIĆ 2009; PEACOCK 1995.

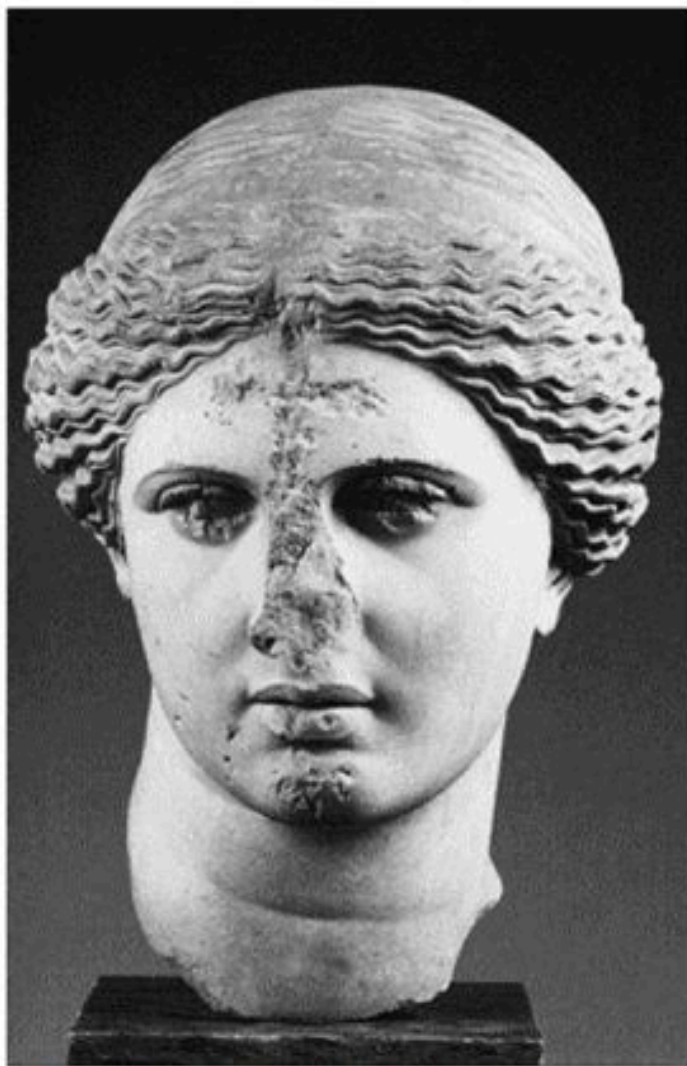


FIG. 104. ATHENS, NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM. HEAD OF A DIVINITY, EXORCISED WITH A CROSS SCULPTED ON HER FOREHEAD BY GREEK EARLY CHRISTIANS.

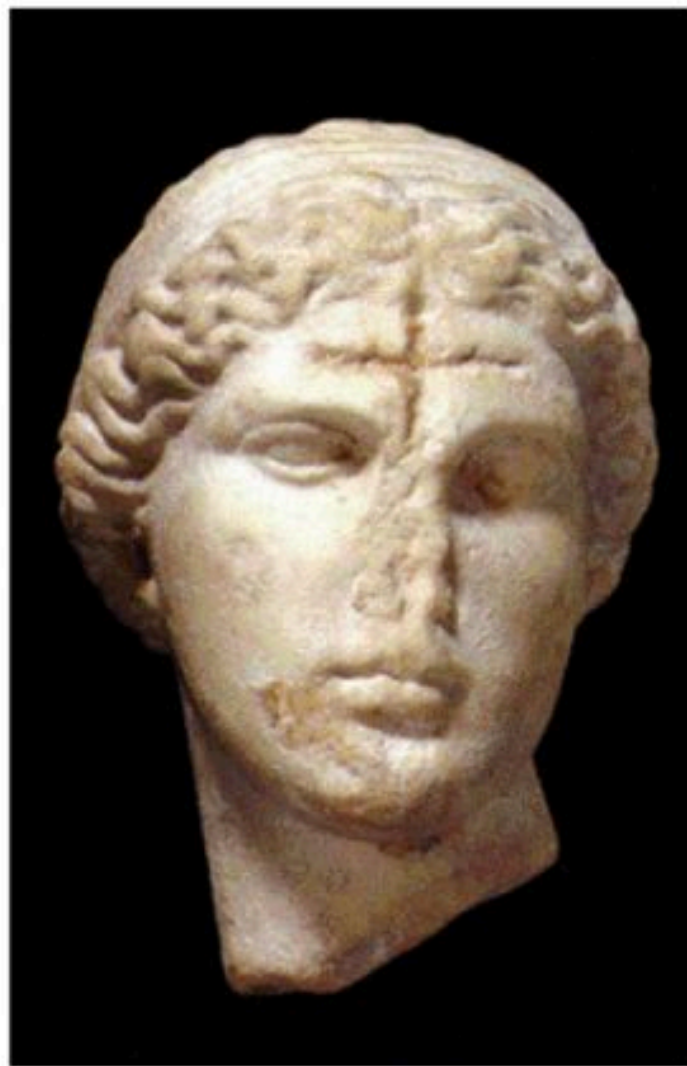


FIG. 105. NEW YORK, CHRISTIE'S. HEAD OF A DIVINITY, EXORCISED WITH A CROSS SCULPTED ON HER FOREHEAD BY ROMAN EARLY CHRISTIANS.

Mons Igneus is Gebel Abu Dukhan. Secondly, we know for certain that Diocletian visited the Thebaid region on various occasions (perhaps the only emperor to have done so) and his love of Red Porphyry is also wellknown. The presence of Christian prisoners has already been discussed and of the possible activity of proselytism, with the subsequent violent repression by the authorities. Furthermore, as we have seen, specifically on Gebel Abu Dukhan precise and unambiguous traces of both sculptural activity in the marble quarries, as well as its extraction, exist. This specific practice of marble extraction would legitimise the hagiographical historical account of four sculptors having worked in such a site. The author's impression is that Porphyrius was a secondary writer who wanted to transpose the story in an area (Pannonia) which was evidently linked to some personal interest (perhaps he himself was Pannonian?).

Leaving aside the anachronisms and the novel-like elements of the *passio*, it is by now certain that the Four Crowned Martyrs were actually Christian confessors and good stonecutters who were *damnati ad metalla* on Mons Porphyrites in the Thebaid region. These four craftsmen openly and consistently professed their faith during their imprisonment – perhaps even converting others – and were martyred for this. The fame of their martyrdom must have spread rapidly through the Christian communities (the fact that in the year 324 Constantine the Great mapped out the perimeter of Constantinople on 8 November, specifically on the feast day of the Four Crowned Martyrs, is perhaps more than just a coincidence) and the memory of them must have been particularly alive and venerated in the community which they themselves had been part of: that of the *damnati ad metalla*.²²

The images of the four emperors depicted in the fresco of the Temple of Amun at Thebes were replaced by these local favourites, the Four Crowned Martyrs, who will have been known personally, during the imprisonment in the Porphyry quarries of Mons Porphyrites, to more than one member of that Christian community (fig. 101).

It is significant that the remains that lie in the crypt of the Basilica of the Santi Quattro Coronati are preserved in Porphyry chests

²² The exact date when the Four Martyrs became the patrons of the Guild of Stonemasons and Woodworkers is unknown, but it is without doubt very early.



FIG. 106. LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM. GERMANICUS PORTRAIT EXECUTED IN EGYPTIAN BEKHEN STONE (EGYPTIAN GREYWAKE OR GREEN BASANITE), EXORCISED WITH A CROSS SCULPTED ON HIS FOREHEAD BY ROMAN EARLY CHRISTIANS.



FIG. 107. NAPLES, NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM. TOMB OF ROGER I: IN ORDER TO REUSE A ROMAN SARCOPHAGUS THE FACE OF MEDUSA WAS EXORCISED BY RESCULPTING IT WITH A HOLY CROSS.



FIG. 108. EPHEBUS, NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM. BUST OF LIVIA, EXORCISED WITH A CROSS SCULPTED ON HER FOREHEAD BY GREEK EARLY CHRISTIANS.

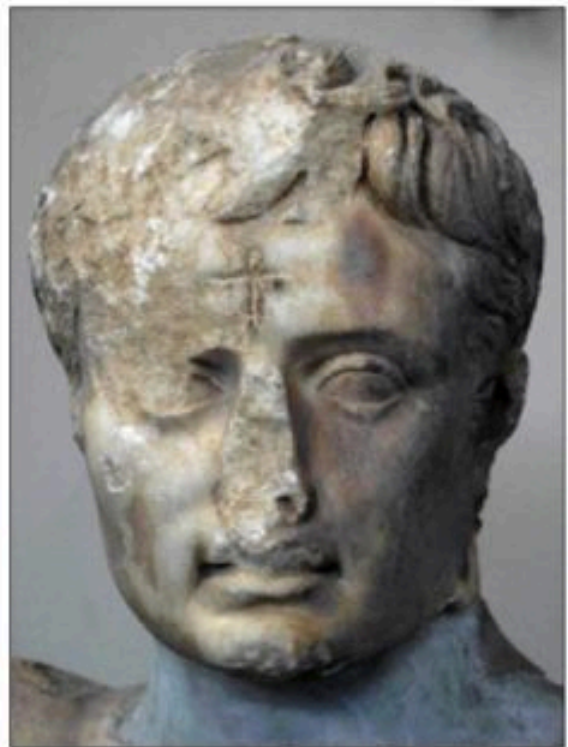


FIG. 109. EPHEBUS, NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM. HEAD OF AUGUSTUS, EXORCISED WITH A CROSS SCULPTED ON HIS FOREHEAD BY EARLY CHRISTIANS.

(fig. 102), actually ancient Roman thermal baths: the hagiographic tradition that linked their martyrdom to this material was still very alive in the Church of the ninth century, when Leo IV spent much energy and money to procure baths made specifically of expensive Egyptian Porphyry (fig. 103).

The reuse and reinterpretation of the Roman iconography is one of the important facts of the transition from pagan to Christian Rome. The replacement of the paintings of Thebes, with the *damnatio memoriae* of the persecutors, can probably be dated to the months immediately following the liberation and the establishment of the Christian community in this border city, and it fits in well with the rapid process of Christianisation, which, over the space of a few decades, would lead to the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion (Edict of Theodosius in AD 380). From the outset, the fate of much pagan art was marked, victim of an exaggerated reaction to centuries of intolerance. All pagan images were systematically destroyed and, where they could not be destroyed, a violent *damnatio memoriae* was carried out; some icons were saved because they were "Christianised" and exorcised with the symbol of the cross (figs. 104-109). In a similar way to the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in the Campidoglio, which was never destroyed or recast due to it being interpreted as a portrait of Constantine, father of the Church, other pagan works of art were saved because they were mistakenly believed to belong to the Christian tradition and to the victory of Christianity over paganism.