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The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Christ. The case of the *Chairete* or ‘All Hail’

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The post-resurrection appearances of Christ are a series of apparitions described in the four canonical Gospels and the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.¹ In the absence of any canonical description about Christ’s actual moment of resurrection, these apparitions became a visual and literal synonym and evidently confirmed the reality of Christ’s resurrection. The details in such descriptions are not necessarily consistent: the number of angels and women differ in each Gospel; the time of Christ’s appearance to them differs as well; and while Paul mentions Peter as the first to see Christ resurrected, the Marys (or Myrrh-bearers) are the individuals described by the Gospels as first at the tomb.² The most popular apparitions were: the Incredulity of Thomas, an event exclusive in John;³ the Appearance to the Eleven, described by all four Gospels and sometimes fused with the Mission of the Apostles; the Marys at the Tomb described with variations again by the four Gospels; and the *Chairete*.

The *Chairete* is a unique event described by Matthew. According to the Evangelist, two women, namely Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the mother of Jacob and Joses) discovered Christ’s empty tomb and when they saw the resurrected Christ, he hailed them. Fourth century commentators equate the ‘other Mary’ with the Virgin.⁴ The Gospel of John (20: 14-18) and the longer ending of Mark (16: 9) describe a similar event, but with only one woman – Mary Magdalene. This is called the Apparition of Christ to Mary Magdalene or *Noli me Tangere* (Touch Me Not).⁵ The latter appears rarely and usually very late on in Byzantine Art. It never acquired the importance that the *Chairete* scene had, especially in the early centuries.⁶ The *Chairete*’s importance is obvious, even in the Middle Byzantine period, where it appeared regularly either side by side with the Anastasis or sometimes bypassing it, as in the case of Paris gr. 510. What follows is a description of the artistic and literary evidence from the 4th to the 12th centuries, which will illustrate the evolution of this iconographical theme and explain the connotations it acquired in theological literature. The inclusion of the Virgin in the scene will also receive attention as it adds to the theme’s significance.

The post-resurrection appearances of Christ emerge very early in theological literature and continue until the 12th century in an uninterrupted sequence. Their use varies from arguments

¹ Matthew 28: 1-20; Mark 16:1-18; Luke 24: 1-49; John 20: 1-10; and finally in the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, 15 1-11. The latter, according to Weiss (1983: 36), is probably the oldest and only real catalogue of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. A mention of Christ’s post-resurrection appearances is also made in Acts 1: 1-11 and passim.

² Not all of the women who visited Christ’s tomb were named Mary. The term is used only because the main characters of these events were Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cleopas and Mary the mother of James. The latter, according to some ecclesiastical authors, should be identified with the Virgin (for this argument see below). The other individuals mentioned in the Gospels as being part of the *Myrophores* (Myrrh-bearers), are Joanna and Salome. For the absence on any reference to an appearance of Christ to women in Paul’s list, see Bauckham (2002: 304-310).

³ The longer ending of Mark (16: 9-20) contains a brief reference to *Noli me Tangere* and the Road at Emmaus.

⁴ See notes 11-13 for examples.

⁵ Wessel, K. and Restle, M. (eds.) 1966–: 382: *Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen*, where four types of *Noli Me Tangere* are distinguished.

⁶ “The choice of this scene as the sole reference to the Resurrection is characteristic of Early Christian Cycles” (Kartsonis 1986: 143).

against heretics to Gospel commentaries, from catechetical lectures to efforts to harmonise the post-resurrection narrative. The *Chairete* was not as popular as other apparitions as a literary polemic but we can still trace some interesting arguments compiled in defence of the dogma. Ambrose of Milan (c.AD 340-397) offers one such example in a complex argument written in his *Exposition of the Christian Faith*.⁷ The bishop Ambrose used the *Chairete* scene as evidence that Christ accepted worship from the two Marys as God, but at the same time he worshipped God with his human nature. This of course was a direct refutation of any monophysite teaching, as it demonstrated that Christ was equally a perfect god and a perfect man.

One of the most widespread ideas expressed by ecclesiastical writers regarding Christ's appearance to the two Marys, was that Christ appeared first to the women in order to destroy the connection of Eve with man's fall and the evils that followed it. One of the earliest references is found in the works of Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 296-373). Alexandria, the birthplace of Athanasius, was the undisputed religious capital of Egypt and it bore the legacy of such great philosophers as Philo and Origen whose importance rested in the fact that they associated Greek philosophy with the Bible.⁸ In such a complex environment, Athanasius composed his works, including the *Sermo in Sanctum Pascha*.⁹ According to the author, Christ appears to the two Marys and hails them (*Chairete*) because: "A woman was the cause for the loss of paradise but now she brings the good tidings of the resurrection; she pulled the first Adam to the fall but now she announces the resurrection of the second Adam".¹⁰ Hence Eve was the cause of man's fall, but by becoming the bearer of the good tidings of the resurrection she was redeemed.

An echo of Athanasius' explanation is also found in the work of Ambrose of Milan. In a sermon dedicated to the Holy Spirit, Ambrose made a reference not to Christ's appearance to the two Marys and the *Chairete*, but to Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene (*Noli me Tangere*).¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus (c.AD 329-c.390) also preferred Magdalene to the two Marys in his forty-fifth oration on Easter.¹² The choice of both writers to use the *Noli me Tangere* instead of the *Chairete*, is most likely based on the fact that it is much easier to set a parallel between Mary Magdalene and Eve than with two Marys and Eve. Gregory of Nyssa (c.AD 330-c.395), in his second oration on Easter, dealt with the discrepancies of the Gospel narrative regarding the post-resurrection events.¹³ While describing Christ's appearance to the two Marys, Gregory repeated Athanasius' idea, as to why Christ appeared first to the women,¹⁴ but moved a step further to identify the 'other Mary' as the Virgin.¹⁵ Gregory was not the only theologian to make this identification: for example John Chrysostom in his eighty-ninth homily on the Gospel of Matthew shared the same view.¹⁶ These views were likely to have influenced some of the artistic evidence that follows in this paper.

⁷ Wace, H. and Schaff, P. (eds) 1892

⁸ Pettersen 1995: 1-18.

⁹ *Patrologia Graeca* 28, col. 1084.

¹⁰ *Patrologia Graeca* 28, col. 1084: "Ἐν τῇ γὰρ τῆς παραβάσεως αἰτία καὶ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως κήρυξ· ἡ τὸν πρῶτον Ἀδάμ πρὸς τὴν πτωσὶν χειραγωγήσασα, τὸν δεύτερον Ἀδάμ ἀναστάντα μαρτύρεται".

¹¹ See Ambrose of Milan "On the Holy Spirit (To the Emperor Gratian)" in Wace, H. and Schaff, P. (eds) 1892: 145

¹² *Patrologia Graeca* 36, *Oratio XLV: In Sanctum Pascha*, col.657-58.

¹³ *Patrologia Graeca* 46, *In Sanctum Pascha et de triduo festo Resurrectionis Christi; Oratio Secundo*, col. 627-652

¹⁴ *Patrologia Graeca* 46, *In Sanctum Pascha*, col. 632.

¹⁵ "Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἄλλη Μαρία, ταύτην δε εἶναι τὴν Θεοτόκον πιστεύειν": *Patrologia Graeca* 46, *In Sanctum Pascha*, col. 633.

¹⁶ *Patrologia Graeca* 58, col.777: "Ταύτην <τὴν Θεοτοκόν> γὰρ λέγει τὴν Ἰακώβου".

The *Chairete* shared the same popularity in art as in the theological literature. There are two 4th century sarcophagi which provide an insight into what the early examples of *Chairete* looked like. The first one comes from the “Palazzo di Cesi” (Figure 1) and survives today only in a drawing from Bosio.¹⁷ The scene is flanked by twelve Apostles, six on either side. The latter are holding scrolls with their left hands while and with their right hands they introduce us towards the center where there is a cross surmounted with a Chi Rho. On the base of the cross a diminutive *Chairete* scene appears. The two Marys are seen prostrated in front of a circular building, which signifies the tomb and is in imitation of the Constantinian rotunda. This is a good example of where the imagery keeps a material memory of the church founded by the emperor Constantine.¹⁸ Christ appears to be moving away from the two women. A similar scene is evident on the fragmented Arles sarcophagus (Figure 2), which also contains a series of New Testament scenes.¹⁹ This tomb also imitates the Constantinian rotunda but there are three women instead of the usual two. This is a rare example with no later imitators.

Figure 1. Sarcophagus di Cesi, 4th century (Wilpert 1932: 325, Fig. 204; 331, Fig. 209 detail). [awaiting permission]

Figure 2. Sarcophagus, Arles, 4th century (Wilpert 1929: Tav. XV 1-2). [awaiting permission]

¹⁷ Wilpert, J. 1932: 325, fig.204 and detail 209. According to Bosio this sarcophagus was retrieved from a Vatican basilica and was preserved, probably until its disappearance, in the “palazzo del duca di Cesi in Borgo Vecchio” (Wilpert 1932: 325).

¹⁸ Grabar 1972: 266.

¹⁹ The fragmentary status of the sarcophagus does not permit us to safely reconstruct a Christological cycle. From the existing fragments though we can trace the scene were Pilate is washing his hands, preceding the *Chairete* scene, while following it, is a scene described by Wilpert as “Apparizione agli Apostoli” and the Ascension (1932: 331). This could be an early Passion and Resurrection cycle.

Old and New Testament scenes are depicted on the eighteen surviving figurative panels (out of the twenty-eight original) on the Santa Sabina door (c.AD 432) (Figure 3).²⁰ One of them contains a *Chairete* scene which is somewhat different to the ones depicted on the sarcophagi. In the background of this roughly processed wooden panel, three pine trees appear, while in the foreground Christ and the two women are depicted. The Marys are not kneeling as on the sarcophagi and Christ is standing, rather than moving away from the two Marys. The absence of the tomb is balanced by the presence of the trees, which signify the garden where the tomb lay. These two motifs interchanged in the centuries that followed and in some rare occasions they appeared together. The images on the sarcophagi and the wooden doors all follow the so-called asymmetrical type, where the women appear on one side of the depiction and Christ on the other.

Another such instance appears on folio 13^r of the sixth-century Rabbula Gospels (Figure 4).²¹ The page contains a scene of the Crucifixion, which covers two thirds of the page, while the remaining one third contains the Marys at the Tomb and the *Chairete*. Only two women are present in the last two events, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt. 28:1). Here the other Mary is identified by the halo as being the Virgin.²² The same applies for a pre-iconoclastic icon, now in the Old Library of Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, and dated to the 7th century (Figure 5). Part of its left side is missing, but it must have depicted the rest of the figure of Christ.²³ The inclusion of the Virgin in the post-resurrection sequence was an active tradition in Syria and Palestine in the 6th and 7th centuries.

Figure 3. Wooden Door of Santa Sabina, Rome, c.AD 432 (Jeremias 1980: TAF. 56) [awaiting permission]

²⁰ Volbach 1961: no.103-105; Weitzmann 1979: no. 438.

²¹ Cecchelli *et al.* 1959.

²² For the Virgin being part of the post-Resurrection sequence see Breckenridge 1957.

²³ Weitzmann 1976: 50, no. B27, plates LXXV and color XXI.

Figure 4. Rabulla Gospels, AD 586 (Kartsonis 1986: Fig. 5). [awaiting permission]

Figure 5. Pre-Iconoclastic icon from Sinai, 7th century (Weitzmann 1976: No.B27: Plates LXXV and Color XXI). [awaiting permission]

Choricus in his *Laudatio Marciani* (AD 536) briefly mentioned that the *Chairete* scene was part of the mosaic decoration of the church of Saint Sergius.²⁴ It is interesting that the artist sees the Virgin as being present at the scene. This follows the same tradition of the Rabulla Gospel (above). The author's description is as follows:

They also set guards next to His tomb, but He, making mock of their guards, regains His immortality and, after appearing to the women about His mother, is borne up to His dwelling place escorted by a heavenly choir. And so He has not belied the ancient prophets who compass about the central part of the ceiling.²⁵

It is interesting that the artist sees the Virgin as being present at the scene. This follows the same description as the Rabbula Gospels (above).

This tradition is also evident and in Romanos Melodos' *kontakion* "On Mary at the Cross". This was presented as a dialogue between the crucified Christ and his mother which took place under the cross. Romanos has Christ articulate the following promise: "Be brave, mother, as you will be the first to see me out of the tomb".²⁶ It was because of the increasing importance of the *Theotokos* in the centuries that followed the establishment of the gospel canon that many ecclesiastical writers took the initiative and tried to fill this gap by either identifying the *Theotokos* with "Mary the mother of James and Joseph" (Matt. 27: 56) or with the "other Mary" (Matt. 28: 1).²⁷ This *kontakion* does not make it clear if Romanos adopted one of the above-mentioned exegeses or if he believed that a special apparition was reserved for the Virgin.²⁸

To return to the iconographic evidence, folio 30^v of the 9th Century Paris Gregory (Figure 6) is divided into three registers containing a number of miniatures. The Crucifixion is depicted in the top register, the Entombment and the Deposition, in the second, while the *Chairete* occupies the bottom.²⁹ Christ stands in the middle of the composition, flanked by two kneeling women.³⁰ The centre of the background is covered with trees, while a rock-cut tomb is depicted on the right. The open door appears on the left. As Brubaker has already observed the tomb does not appear very frequently in later examples of this scene.³¹ In fact this is the first example where both the trees and the tomb appear in the same scene.³² A particularly interesting feature of this folio is the choice of the artist to depict the *Chairete* instead of the Anastasis. Many views have been put forward dealing with the artist's choice of the *Chairete*, but for the time being it will suffice to say that this demonstrates how it could be deemed appropriate for the Anastasis image to be replaced by a post-resurrection scene even in the Middle Byzantine period.

²⁴ Mango 1972: 60 n.25.

²⁵ Mango 1972: 68.

²⁶ Maas and Trypanis 1997: no. 19, p.146, ιβ:10, "Θάρσει, μητερ, οτι πρωτη με ορας απο του τάφου".

²⁷ For a complete catalogue of these authors see Breckenridge 1957: 9-32, with previous bibliography.

²⁸ Grosdidier de Matons 1964-1981; 1967: 177, n.2.

²⁹ Brubaker 1999: fig.7, p. 291ff. (especially 299-302) with older bibliography.

³⁰ Brubaker 1999: n.83, for bibliography on symmetrical and asymmetrical examples of the two women.

³¹ Brubaker 1999: 299.

³² The two sarcophagi of the 4th century, mentioned above, depict the tomb while the doors of the Santa Sabina, from the 5th century depict the trees. The example from the Rabbula Gospels is an exception where both the tomb and the trees are depicted. The tomb however is conveniently connected with both the Marys at the Tomb and the *Chairete* scenes. On the other hand it might be a scene of its own.

Figure 6. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. gr. 510, Homilies of Gregory, 9th century (Brubaker 1999: Fig. 7). [awaiting permission]

Figure 7. Ivory Diptych at Milan, 10th century (Goldschmidt and Weitzmann 1930: vol.II: No.42 and 41a). [awaiting permission]

An ivory diptych, now in the Cathedral of Milan (Figure 7), was dated by Weitzmann to the 10th century and was classified, amongst others, in the Romanos group.³³ Both leaves contain scenes from the life of Christ. In the right leaf, from top to bottom, the following scenes appear: Crucifixion, (first register), Marys at the Tomb (second register), Resurrection (third register) and *Chairete* (fourth register). The *Chairete* follows the monumental (or symmetrical) type, where Christ stands frontally and is flanked by the two Marys. The Dresden ivory (Figure 8) is also affiliated with the Romanos group.³⁴ The leaf contains just two scenes: the *Chairete* (first register) and the Anastasis (second register). Behind the two women two trees appear: a pine tree and a cypress.³⁵ This scene differs from the Milan Ivory in a number of ways: in the asymmetrical position of the two women, in the inclusion of a pine tree (instead of a second cypress) and in the gesture and gaze of Christ.³⁶ An ivory plaque from the Victoria and Albert Museum (11th Century) also follows this asymmetrical type, but the majority of the later examples make obvious that it is the symmetrical type that will prevail.³⁷

Depictions of the post-resurrection appearance of Christ, and the *Chairete* in particular never lost their importance in the centuries that followed the development of the Anastasis image. In fact their importance is apparent throughout the Middle Byzantine period and the seeming ‘insufficiency’ of the Anastasis is evident by the addition of a post-resurrection scene (usually the *Chairete* or the Incredulity of Thomas), as a compliment to the reality of the resurrection. The inclusion of the Virgin in the scene and the development of the monumental type, all helped the *Chairete* scene not to lose in importance. Finally the *Chairete* and the other post-resurrection scenes had something that the Anastasis image lacked: Gospel verification. In other words the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus (the literary source of the Anastasis), even though it had filled the gap of Christ’s resurrection, never acquired a canonical status in the Christian Church.

³³ Goldschmidt and Weitzmann 1930: vol.II: 37-38, no. 42. The authors acknowledge the difficulties of ascribing this ivory to a certain group.

³⁴ Goldschmidt and Weitzmann 1930: vol.II: 37, no. 41a.

³⁵ Goldschmidt and Weitzmann 1930: vol.II: 37. The authors believe that the pine tree might be an olive tree. Two pine trees also appear on the Santa Sabina doors (above).

³⁶ What is more unusual, beside the fact that they belong in the same group, is that the *Chairete* scene is not depicted in the second register, thus giving the impression that it precedes the Anastasis, which is not the case according to the Gospel narrative. On the Milan Ivory, it does follow the Anastasis; but the Milan Ivory has the same peculiarity on the left leaf were the Baptism is depicted before Christ in the Temple.

³⁷ Goldschmidt and Weitzmann 1930: vol.II: no. 198.

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