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## Christian religious scenes represented on the sarcophagi of Caesarean Mauritania- a -descriptive, iconographical and analytical study

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### Abstract:

The sarcophagi are considered among of the most important historical and archaeological documents that man has resorted to since ancient times to express his religious and funerary contents and his artistic prowess, whether these contents are related to religious or even daily life, such as mythological or Christian topics and other decorative topics, as most of them were found in areas and various archaeological sites in Algeria.

Through this research, we will attempt to study four models of sarcophagus found in coastal cities of Dellys and Cherchell, dating back to the late Roman period, where the latter occupies a very special place among the sarcophagi of its time, due to the themes on its front, which are closely linked to everything related to Christian events and its historical figures, which referred to through ancient holy books such as the Torah and the Gospel. Its importance also lies in its artistic, decorative and technical value used on it, at a time when Christians were in desperate need of a multiplicity of practitioners of the profession of carving on sarcophagi on the one hand, and enriching topics related to the Christian religion of origin, on the other hand.

**Keywords:** sarcophagus, funerary art, marble, Christian iconography, Caesarean Mauritania.

### 1. Introduction:

The countries of the ancient Maghreb witnessed a wide spread of funerary monuments of various types, which was confirmed by the material evidence of the various historical stages, starting with the prehistoric period and ending with the late Roman period, where death from ancient times acquired great importance in human thinking, and the methods of disposing of dead bodies differed from one society to another, and the sarcophagus was a major component of tombs in the pre-dynastic periods of the Pharaonic civilization, through the Greek and Roman civilizations. The only function of the sarcophagus was not to protect the body of the deceased from external influences; rather, it had many religious and symbolic functions that changed with the change of times.

The materials for making sarcophagi varied according to the economic circumstances and social status of the deceased, such as basalt stones, limestone, marble, wood, pottery and lead metal. Some of them are unique in their great artistic value, as many of them carry symbols, writings, animal and plant decorations, and human shapes that may belong to daily life, or to legendary events. They also came in various types, carrying decorations with varying levels of skill in terms of technology, artistry, and even details, and the creativity in decorating and decorating their facades is nothing but an expression of honoring and pleasing the souls of the deceased on the one hand, and a display of the extravagance of the families purchasing this type of burial sarcophagi on the other hand.

The importance of this topic lies in the possibility of introducing decorative formations that were incredibly popular among all Christian societies, starting from the latter part of the third century to the fourth century AD, and they spread on a large group of sarcophaguses, from which we chose four models, including a complete sarcophagus, and two side pieces of a sarcophagus, its front panel disappeared under circumstances we do not know about, in addition to two covers. These antiquities were found in the ancient city of Dellys and Cherchell, the capital of the Caesarean Mauritania, where they are considered among the only examples at the national level, if not at the Maghreb level.

I also dictated the structure of this topic on a theoretical aspect in which we address the generalities section as an overview of the history of the emergence of this type of funerary buildings, its status among ancient societies, and the extent of its spread and development among the peoples of the Mediterranean.

To achieve the desired goals, we relied in this study on the descriptive and analytical approach to the decorative elements, as this aspect is considered the first pillar for understanding the topics that form it. This topic also includes a technical study that deals with the sculpting methods adopted by the ancient sculptor, as the method of completion that the artist resorted to express the subjects, such as his method of expressing facial features, hairstyle, clothing, representing some body parts, by intensifying the use of some tools and not others.

Given the scarcity of sarcophagi found in Algeria, in order to classify this group we used the iconographic factor, as each model in this selected group is considered a unique model in terms of its thematic and artistic composition, in which the content of the problematic topics is analyzed, and an attempt is made to link them to the needs of customers, and to establish

a process of comparison between historical formations in the Christian world, through which it is possible to predict within reasonable limits the time period to which they belong, in addition to an analytical study through which the characteristics of each model are accessed in terms of the aesthetic and artistic aspects.

## **2. A historical overview of the appearance of sarcophaguses:**

The first use of the sarcophagus dates back to the Minoan civilization during the fifteenth century BC, through some ossaria funerary vessels that were found on the island of Crete, in which the cremated bones of the deceased were placed after collecting them from the funerary crypts, which raised many questions about whether it was possible. Whether they are considered sarcophagi or not, some observations have come to confirm that the latter are a model of sarcophagi of Greek origin, called Pecca(Cahen, Sarcophagus, pp. 1064-75), as some of them were observed in eastern Greece, in the country of Cyprus, in the country of the Phoenicians, in Asia Minor, and in Egypt, in the Saqqara cemetery, which was made of marble, limestone, wood, and pottery, in addition to another type that takes the human form, Anthrope, as an influence of Egyptian civilization (Cahen.E, p. 1065).

The use of the sarcophagus became common starting from the second century AD in its Greco-Roman form(Cahen.E, p. 1069), as sculptors became skilled at producing these types of sarcophagi for which marble was chosen as the material for shaping and decorating them. According to historical data, the use of sarcophagi in the Republican era was limited, due to the spread of the ritual of incineration, so that the sarcophagus of Lucius Barbatius Cornelius Scipio(Martha, 2014, pp. 184-485) is considered the only example dating back to this period, while the use of sarcophagi doubled in the imperial era, which coincided with It includes the process of burial and cremation, especially after the emergence of the Christian religion. The sarcophagi of the ancient period were divided into two types: (Cahen H. , pp. 1072-1073).

### **2.1. The first type: architectural style sarcophagi uses:**

It is one of the types derived from the primitive form of Greek origin, where the basin takes the shape of a box, improvised with facades that take the form of "temples, houses, altars or in the form of beds," while the cover is generally of a lance late shape, topped with decorations resembling scales. As for its four facades It is a sculpture given to be displayed outdoors. This type continued to be used throughout the Roman period, but to a limited extent, and among the oldest of them all is the Sarcophagus of the Amazons in Vienna(Cahen.E, p. 1070. fig.6102), and it is considered the first model of all Greek sarcophagi of the Roman period.

### **2.2. The second type: Roman style sarcophagi:**

are characterized by different characteristics, and the architectural façade has completely disappeared, as the basin has become four coordinated tiles, taking the shape of a rectangular box, and the lid is flat and low in height, decorated with side masks and decorative formations at the front facade level, and in some cases, it has nothing to do with what is carved on the facade of the basin (Cahen H. , Sarcophagus, p. 1073).

**2.3.** There is another type of sarcophagus, which does not belong to the other two types. It takes the shape of a lénos with circular edges, and is usually decorated with crooked strigiles(Cahen.E, p. 1072).

After the victory of the church, and at a time when the Christian religion was penetrating and becoming established among wealthy families, the custom of burning declined in a number of countries due to the firm belief that this method was considered a barrier to resurrection, especially during the era of the Antonines. These conditions helped greatly in the rapid development of the sarcophagus industry, as its use became common among various segments of society, after it had been limited to a certain elite and no one else (Grousset, 1885, p. 3).

Likewise, the beliefs related to the fate of the souls and the dead among Christians have not changed, nor have those related to the method of burying the dead, whether in terms of choosing the material used (rock or marble sarcophaguses), or in terms of the themes formed on the front of these sarcophaguses. In the beginning, there were no sarcophagus sculptors among the Christians, so they had to resort to pagan carving workshops to acquire their graves. However, their choice was not left to chance, due to the spread of topics that the new religion did not allow on their facades (Leclercq, Sarcophagi, 1953, pp. 774-888).

Christian art became mastered of its themes beginning in the fourth century, when narrative themes of biblical origin began to invade the fronts of the sarcophaguses, such as the themes of the Hebrews in the oven, Daniel in the pit of lions, and Jonas in the mouth of the whale (Leroux, 1927, pp. 285-293), The six miracles of Christ, and other topics for others, are essentially nothing but supplications for the souls of the deceased, expressed through these sculptures, which symbolize divine mercy and their meaning: (My God, help me as You helped this or that prophet)(Leroux, 1927, pp. 285-293).

## **3. The Miracles of Christ 'sarcophagus:**

This sarcophagus was found in 1857 in the city of Dellys, Boumerdes Province, 11 meters from the ancient city wall (Doublet, 1890, pp. 45-47), and it is currently displayed in the Hall of Christian Antiquities at the National Museum of Ancient Antiquities and Islamic Arts (Table N°. 01).

The name of piece	Place of discovery	Formingmaterial	Sizes	Inventory number	Conservation status
Lid of the sarcophagus of Christ's miracles	Dellys	White marble	Length: 2.14 m White marble Length: 2.14 m Width: 0.53m Thickness: 0.15 m	I.S.0687	Good
Basin of Christ's miracles	Dellys	White marble	Length: 2.15 m Width: 0.60 m Height: 0.60	I.S.0687	Good

**Table N°. 01: Characteristics of the sarcophagus the miracles of Christ**

On its front page, a group of topics closely related to historical events extracted from the Book of the Torah and the Gospel is distributed. This burial sarcophagus consists of two components: a basin and a lid.

### 3.1. the lid:

It was carved in a single piece of white marble, and the researcher Berbrugger confirmed regarding the quality of its marble that it was of high quality compared to the marble in which the basin was carved (Berbrugger, 1857, pp. 309-319). The cover consists of a rectangular slab, 2.14 m long, 0.53 m wide, and a thickness not exceeding 0.15 m. It is surmounted by a front with a height of 0.17 m, using the flat sculpture technique, it receives a decorative formation consisting of six dolphins swimming on a corrugated façade, four of them are towards the empty frame, and two others are swimming in the opposite direction, one towards the right and the other towards the left (see photo N° 01).



**Picture N°. 01 : The sarcophagus lid**

**3.2. Basin:** The basin has a rectangular shape, 2.15 m long and 0.60 m wide, at a height not exceeding 0.60 m. A number of elaborate scenes are arranged within seven registers, topped alternately by notched and arched fronts. The register is separated from the other by canopied Ionic columns, it is topped with style capitals compound, it is regularly decorated with decorations consisting of circular shapes, from which decorative bands emanate (Photo No. 02).



**Picture No. 02 The sarcophagus of Christ's miracles**

### A - The first scene:

The first composition of the sarcophagus is represented by a scene consisting of two young figures conversing: the first to the right is represented by Christ standing opposite him, holding a manuscript in his left hand and feeding a serpent with his right hand, which is represented in the left corner of the register. In the second place, directly behind Christ, a second figure is represented, looking towards him, holding an indistinguishable object in his right hand. This scene and all the others are bordered on the left and right by aqueduct columns bearing compound capitals with a single row of acanth leaves (Photo No. 03. The miracle of poisoning the Babylonian snake).



(Photo No. 03. The miracle of poisoning the Babylonian snake)

**B - The second scene:**

This record in turn contains two figures: the first to the right represents the figure of Christ in his youth, represented in three quarters to the right, looking towards the figure opposite him, holding a manuscript in his left hand, and in his right a staff placed inside a vessel; As for the figure represented opposite him, he is not beardless, and only the upper part of the body is visible (Photo No. 04. The miracle of turning water into wine).



(Photo No. 04. The miracle of turning water into wine).

**C- The third scene:**

It consists of three figures: the first is a kneeling woman wearing a mantle that covers her entire body Orarium (Cahen.E, pp. 2023-2025); As for the second figure to the left, it represents Christ at the age of a young man without a beard, standing sideways, placing his right hand on top of the head of the woman kneeling in front of him, and holding in his left hand the manuscript of Volumen (Lafaye, 1969, pp. 965-968). As for the third character, it is represented by an elderly, bearded man, represented in profile, looking towards Christ, with only the head visible, and in his left hand he holds a manuscript (Photo No. 05: The miracle of healing hemorrhoids).



(Photo No. 05: The miracle of healing hemorrhoids).

**D- Scene Four:**

In the center of the composition is represented a young figure represented by Christ, sitting on a spherical body mounted on a base represented by the head of a statue of Cariatides (Chipiez, p. 929), he holds an open manuscript in his left hand, while he extends his right hand in a state of supplication, and it stands Directly in front of him are two figures, represented in



miniature size compared to Christ, staring towards him in a state of supplication (Photo No. 06: Scene of Christ the Philosopher).



(Photo No. 06: Scene of Christ the Philosopher)

#### **E - Scene Five:**

In the right part of this record, the figure of Christ is represented, standing facing away with his head slightly turned to the left. He holds in his right hand a staff with which he places it in a cylindrical vessel, and with his left he holds the mantle of his pallium (Leroux, 1927, pp. 285-293). On the immediate right side, a bearded figure was represented, it appeared from its facial features that it was an elderly figure, turning towards Christ as if in a conversation position (Photo No. 07: Multiplication of bread).



(Photo No. 07: Multiplication of bread)

#### **F-Scene Six:**

It consists of three characters; The first one, to the left of the register, wears a long shirt with a mantle over it, part of which is thrown over the right shoulder, and in her left hand she holds a manuscript, with her right hand on the head of the boy represented in profile in front of him. The boy wears a short shirt and a coat that covers his head and shoulders, and his right hand is raised upward in supplication, while with his left hand he pulls on Christ's mantles. To the right, behind the above-mentioned figure, is a sculpture of an elderly, bearded figure, represented facing away, turning towards Christ in a conversational position (Image No. 08: The Miracle of the Healing of the Blind Man).



(Image No. 08: The Miracle of the Healing of the Blind Man)

#### **G- Scene Seven:**

The character of Christ is represented to the left side of the scene, where he stands facing him, turning slightly to the right towards the character represented in front of him, and in his left hand he carries a manuscript clutched to his chest. As for the character represented to his right, he is represented sideways, looking towards Christ, and his right hand is extended, pointing

with his thumb towards the rooster represented at the bottom of the composition (Photo No. 09: Scene of Saint Pierre's Blasphemy).



(Photo No. 09: Scene of Saint Pierre's Blasphemy)

### 3.3 Dress style:

Since the majority of the characters represented on the front of this sarcophagus are male figures, most of them wear the same dress, which is a long, loose shirt with long sleeves, in addition to a wide mantle that surrounds the waist and back, to be thrown on the right or left forearm. The characters represented in the three right registers of the sarcophagus also wear insoles tied to the foot using two straps, which meet to form a common tape, which is fixed to the insole after it passes between the big and middle toe. As for the character of the boy represented in the sixth register, starting from the left, he wears a short shirt tied to the waist with a belt consisting of three lobes, and a short coat whose length does not exceed the elbows, while the clothing of the girl represented in the third register to the left of the front of the sarcophagus, is represented by a robe that covers her head up to the top. The height of her heels, so that only the face and the left hand are visible from her body, and it is expressed by some concentrated folds in the part that covers the head, and as for the other folds, only three light, curved lines are barely visible.

### 3.4. Hair style:

The elderly characters' hairstyle was in the form of a hat, where their hair was brought from the top of the head in the form of light, wavy locks that ended at the forehead. The artist also succeeded in expressing the baldness of the elderly characters represented in the third, fifth and seventh registers, starting from the left, as their heads in the foreground were devoid of hair, while the rest of the head had its locks represented in the form of lightly wavy, finely deep lines. As for Christ's hairstyle, it is completely different from the other characters, as it came in the form of longer strands, especially in scenes when he was young, in addition to ending in the form of regular spirals that crowned the forehead and the back of the neck.

### 3.5. Sculpting technique:

The method of sculpting the elements of the cover is completely different from the method of sculpting the aquarium, as the technique of low-profile sculpting was adopted in the cover, as the sculptor excelled in imparting a kind of movement and vitality that characterizes dolphins, and this appears in the way the tail fins are twisted. The sculptor also succeeded in giving the necessary dimensions to this animal, whose head exceeds the size of its torso, and we noticed a great consistency between the sizes of the four dolphins facing towards the empty frame of writing, and those swimming in the opposite direction. We also noticed some lapses made by some sculptors, as a result of a lack of concentration in completing the decorations, and negligence in defining some body parts, such as the eye of the dolphin represented on the right side of the front of the cover, in which the core of the eye was not defined.

To address the decorative details on the facade of the basin, the sculptor also relied on the technique of relief sculpture, as there is hardly any separation between the figures and the background of the basin, as the degree of prominence reached 0.06 meter. We also noticed in this distinguished work the use of the drill tool, the effects of which appear at the level of the eyes, the corners of the mouth, between the fingers and toes, as well as in the spirals of the column capitals.

Regarding the eyes, the artist incised two horizontal lines to define their general shape, and another circular, slightly deep line to define the shape of the pupil. He also resorted to using the drill tool to determine the shape of the eye's core, excluding the figure of Christ represented in the central register. As for treating the two misleading palm trees of Christ with the same record, the technique of light incision was used in them, as they appear as if they were added later to the drawing, and its aim was to fill the void that surrounded the figure of Christ.

The technique of treating the figures using a drill in this model came in a light form that cannot be understood unless we closely examine the details of the sculpture, which differs from some of the models displayed in the Arles Museum, such as "Christ's Farewell Sarcophagus and Concordius' Sarcophagus" (Benoit F. , *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, 1954, pp. Pl.3-19), as this difference is represented in the sharpness of the protrusion of the carved elements, as well as in the intensification of the use of the drill tool at the level of some places on the body's organs, and on the architectural elements.

This technique also played an important role in creating a kind of contrast between the shadow provided by the holes resulting from the use of this tool and the parts exposed to light. In this regard, Benoit mentions that the use of the drill tool was a technology that reached its peak in the first part of the fourth century, and then declined significantly at the end of the fifth century (Benoit F. , *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, 1954, p. pl.20).

### 3.6. Iconographic study:

This sarcophagus belongs to a group of architectural style sarcophagi, on which a group of historical themes were drawn from the books of the Bible and the Torah, organized within a group of registers, topped by a frieze crowned with pyramid-shaped curves, raised by Ionic-style columns, and decorated with capitals of the composite style, and this style of organization belongs to the Greco-Roman schools, which appeared early in Italy and whose origins go back to Asia Minor (Benoit F., *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, 1954, p. 15).

Represented in the first register, starting from the right, is the scene of the miracle of poisoning the Babylonian snake, which is one of the few topics that appear on the fronts of the sarcophaguses, if we compare it to the scene of Daniel in the Lions' Pit (Leclercq, Daniel, 1992, pp. 220-221), where the figure of Christ presents a body Round in shape, it represents the recipe for poisoning a snake.

Also, the process of combining the character of Christ and Daniel in the same register seems somewhat ambiguous in this scene, and perhaps it is a reference on the part of the artist to a historical relationship that brings together the two subjects, or perhaps it is simply a subject that aroused strong feelings in the artist's soul that prompted him to immortalize it. Some explain the process of using topics extracted from the Book of the Torah alongside topics from the Book of the Gospel, as a method through which they aim to convince public opinion that they are topics complementary to each other (Grabar, 1968, p. 507). Here comes to mind the extent of the Church's intervention in the management and codification of subjects, and the extent to which sculptors and artists adhere to the laws issued by the latter.

As for the topic represented in the second record, the miracle of turning water into wine, it fulfills the meaning of the sacrament, that is, the transformation of wine into the blood of Christ (Bible, 1956, p. 1325), as it was integrated beginning in the third century into the record of topics adopted by adherents of the Christian religion, so that it is closely related to the theme formed in the fifth register, which is represented by the miracle of the multiplication of bread, which appeared beginning in the third century, and it is a purposeful tendency to simplify forms, by finding a kind of balance between the solid element represented by the bread, and the liquid element represented by the wine (Leclercq, D.A.C.L., 1925). Also, this topic did not know the popularity that the topic of doubling bread did, and perhaps that was due to the late appearance of this miracle on the wall paintings, compared to its strong presence on sculptures, specifically on the facades of sarcophaguses, by carving one bowl as in the sarcophagus of Dellys, or three bowls as is the case. On it in the bishop's sarcophagus in the Arles Museum, or two on the lid of a sarcophagus displayed in the same museum (Benoit F., *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, 1954, pp. pl.12-1 et pl.34-2).

Among the topics that became popular on the sculptures, we mention the miracle of the healing of a person suffering from hemorrhoids, who consulted all the doctors of her time to no avail, and her resort to touching Christ's mantle to be blessed by it was like a cure for her illness (Mathieu, 1956, p. 1325). This topic is considered one of the oldest topics created by the Christian artist in the second century, through a wall painting in Demas Prexat in Rome (Leclercq, D.A.C.L., 1948, p. 1734). The iconographic composition of this event has not changed, as the topic is always represented by a woman in a kneeling position, pulling with the mantle of Christ.

As for the subject represented in the central register, it is represented by Christ sitting on the throne, above the head of a statue of Uranus, which is a pagan embodiment of heaven. Its composition consists of characters inspired by the stories of the Torah and the Gospel, which the Christian artist approved of and developed according to the requirements of the new religion, starting in the third century in the East, then in Italy during the fourth century AD (Dumeige, 1972, pp. 115-141). The sculptor also tried to give this composition a kind of sanctity by using some tools, such as the hand raised to the sky in the form of a supplication, and the representation of the disciples at the bottom of the composition in a miniature size, which is a technique that the Christian artist acquired from the pagan artist to show the class and religious difference of the characters, which is a technique that was preceded by pagan artists for the same goal (Benoit F., *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, 1954, p. pl.24. n°1).

Among the sarcophagi similar to the Sarcophagus of Dellys in terms of artistic assortment, we mention first and foremost the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (Wilpert, *I sarcophagi cristiani antichi*, 1932, p. Tav.8), the Sarcophagus of the Municipal Museum of Rome (Grabbar, 1961, p. Fig.21), and the Sarcophagus of the Lateran Museum (Bovini, *I Sarcophagi paleocristiani*, 1949, p. 63). The fifth record is also devoted to the miracle of doubling bread, the close relationship with the miracle of turning water into wine, and this miracle is considered the first in terms of its artistic representation, whether through wall paintings or sculptures, as the first appearance of this miracle was on the murals of the catacombs of Alexandria in Egypt, which was dated to the second century, and depicted Christ blessing the bread and fish (Benoit F., *Sarcophages paléochrétiens d'Arles et de Marseille*, 1954, pp. pl.39. n°1-2). This artistic group appeared in stages, the most important of which are the following:

- The artist's composition of a theme consisting of seven figures, starting from the second century, eating the holy sacrificial meal, surrounded by three or four baskets filled with bread, and this theme was found in the Priscille cemetery in Rome (Leclercq, D.A.C.L., 1924, pp. 800- fig.172).
- This formation was simplified in the middle of the second century, by representing a basket full of bread alongside the fish symbolizing Christ, and that was in the Crypte of Lucine in Italy (Leclercq, D.A.C.L., 1914, p. 1729. pl.I.T). Beginning in the third century, another innovation occurred in which Christ appears in the process of performing a miracle, holding a staff in his hand directed toward a group of baskets placed in front of him. This formation was observed in the tomb of Pierre and Marcellin in Italy, and in the tomb of Domicille (Leclercq, D.A.C.L., 1937, p. 448). In the same century, the trend of simplifying shapes and abandoning the representation of fish in the group of offerings appeared, and replacing it with a rigid element represented by bread, and from the twelve baskets observed on murals dated to the second century, they were reduced to one basket observed on the sarcophagus of Dellys and other similar examples, we mention Among them is the sarcophagus of the worshiper in the Arles Museum (Février, *Les sarcophages d'Arles*, 1996).

The sixth register is also devoted to the theme of the miracle of the healing of the blind man, a theme that was spread on a number of monuments, the oldest of which are the murals of the Domicilla Cemetery in Rome (Leclercq, D.A.C.L., 1921, pp. 1404-1442), where Christ is represented wiping with his right hand the eyes of the blind man kneeling before him. In this regard, the Bible writers mention the events of two miracles in the healing of blind people: the first is represented by the miracle of healing the blind of Greco (Leclercq, D.A.C.L., 1927), and the second is represented by the miracle of healing the blind from birth (Bible, 1956, pp. 1301-1340), where it can be identified on them through the way Christ touches both people, as Christ places the thumb and middle of his right hand over the eyes of the blind man when it comes to the blindness of Greco, or he places his entire right hand on top of the blind man's from birth, as this theme is considered among the formations that have gained great popularity compared to the first.

As for the subject of the three miracles of blasphemy of Saint Pierre represented in the seventh scene, it is summarized in the book of the Gospel as follows: (Jesus said to his group, "You will be greatly astonished and appalled tonight; I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter." Saint Pierre denounces the matter, and sends saying: "I will not deny you. Never, Jesus, And Christ answers: Before the rooster crows twice this day, you will deny me three times" (Bible, 1956, p. 1345), as this theme symbolizes the resurrection of Christ, whose iconographic composition is represented by the meeting of the figure of Christ and Saint Pierre accompanied by the rooster. Which represents the main element in this topic, and we often find it at the bottom of the scene, as is the case with the sarcophagus of Dellys, as well as in the sarcophagus of the Lateran Museum (Bovini, I Sarcophagi Paleochristiani, 1949, p. 63).

#### 4. The two pieces of Daniel in the Pit of Lions and the Miracle of Water Blowing:

Among the very important discoveries similar to the sarcophagus of Christ's miracles, the dust of the city of Dellys yielded two pieces of a second sarcophagus, no less important than the model of Christ's miracles, although it was not found complete. Only two pieces remain of the latter, representing the two side faces of the basin, which was cut into several parts, mostly for smuggling. These two pieces were prepared with two white marble blocks, the marble of which does not differ from the Sarcophagus of the Miracles of Christ, and they are currently displayed in the same hall in which the Sarcophagus of the Miracles is displayed in the Hall of Christian Antiquities, at the National Museum of Ancient Antiquities and Islamic Arts.

These two pieces belong to the sarcophagus with characteristics similar to the sarcophagus The Miracles of Christ, as both were represented by characters drawn from the events of the Torah and the Gospel, such as the character of the Prophet Daniel in the pit of lions, and the Prophet Moses striking the rock with his staff to cause water to escape from it (Leclercq, Sarcophages, 1953, p. 873), as for You will find the sizes of these pieces in (Table N°02).

The Name of piece	Place of discovery	Forming material	Sizes	Inventory number	Conservation status
Daniel In The Pit Of Lions	Dellys	White marble	Height: 56, 0m Width: 38,0 m Thickness: 09, 0 m	I.S.066	Good
Kornai Piece	Dellys	White marble	Height: 59, 0 m Width: 37, 0 m Thickness: 10, 0m	IS .086	Good

**Table N°. 02: Characteristics of the pieces Daniel in the Black Pit, and the Miracle of Blowing Water.**

##### 4.1. Left facade:

All that remains of this facade is a bust representing the Prophet Daniel, naked, standing facing him. All that remains of this facade is the right part of the body (the head, shoulder, right leg, and the right hand extended in a state of supplication), bordered on the right by a palm tree. It was represented in a very schematic way (Photo No. 10, Daniel's scene).



**(Photo No. 10, Daniel's scene)**

We return to the well-known formations in the Christian world, representing Daniel accompanied by an angel helping the Prophet in the pit of lions. However, we did not notice his presence in this formation, due to the absence of a large part of the right side facade of the sarcophagus. At the bottom of the palm tree, a lion was depicted sitting on its hind legs, raising its head towards the Prophet. As for the lost part, the researcher Wilpert reimagined it as follows (the palm tree, the lion and the left half of the Prophet Daniel (Wilpert, 1930, p. 66).



#### 4.2. Right facade:

The characters on the right side facade of this sarcophagus represent the theme of water blowing by the Prophet Moses, accompanied by the apostle Corneille, standing sideways towards the right, extending their hands towards the water of the source represented on the facade of the sarcophagus, forming wavy lines. The figure of Moses is represented in larger proportions than his attendant, the latter wearing Andromides' cupped soles and a short, long-sleeved shirt, surmounted by a robe fastened by a buckle to the left shoulder. His hairstyle was in the form of short, curly strands, which were expressed using the notching technique using a drill tool. While the figure of the attendant is represented in profile, with smaller dimensions than the figure of Moses, he wears a short shirt tied at the waist with a belt, and extends his left hand towards the source. The legs are bare, and the feet are wearing tight sandals for the leg, as this collection is missing (the preacher Saint Pierre) and part of the source (Photo No. 11 Scene of the Three Blasphemes of Saint Pierre).



(Photo No. 11 Scene of the Three Blasphemes of Saint Pierre)

#### 5. Iconographic study:

This topic consists of a number of formations, including the following:

- Daniel poisons the Babylonian snake, but the latter appears very rarely on the sculptures.
- Daniel in the Pit of lions, and it is considered one of the ancient themes, as it represents the first formations that appeared on the wall drawings. It is also considered among the early Christian icons in which Daniel always appears in a position of worship and prayer, whether it is on the wall drawings in the catacombs or on the facades of the sarcophaguses. As for the symbolism associated with this topic, it is generally associated with indexes of the martyrs of the Old Testament, and lists of believers whom God miraculously saved from torment, as these scenes represent typical prayers in which God is pleaded to achieve salvation and salvation for the believers (Dulaey, 1998, pp. 38-39), which says: "O God, help me and save me as You saved the three Hebrews from the blazing fire, Daniel from the pit of lions, Moses from the hands of Pharaoh, and Noah from the flood" (Leblant, 1879, pp. 223-241).

The first forms of this theme go back to the second century, through the Capella Greca murals in the Priscille cemetery in Rome (Leclercq, Daniel, 1920, pp. 221-247) but some changes occurred on this theme at the beginning of the third century, after Daniel was represented with a group of the black, he became represented naked with only two lions, and among the antiques on which this model was observed in Algeria, we mention, for example:

- A dish made of shale pottery was found at the archaeological site of J'mila (Delamare, 1850, p. pl.105. fig.12).
- An architectural element represented by the buttress capital of the Tiggirt Basilica (Gavault, 1897, p. 31. fig.7).

As for the representation of this topic on the facades of sarcophagi in the Christian world, it is difficult to enumerate them all in this work, but we can give some examples:

- The sarcophagus collection is on display in the Latran Museum, Rome (Bruyne, 1943, p. 175).
- Lateral facet collection of sarcophagus, Brescia (Bruyne, 1943, p. 185. n°1.2).
- Sarcophagus Aurelio façade collection, Rome (Bovini, I Sarcophagi paleochristiani, 1949, p. 189. fig.197).
- Suzanne's sarcophagus collection, at the Arles Museum (Février, Sarcophages d'Arles, 1996, p. 337).

The iconography of the Prophet Moses blowing water is considered one of the most ancient themes, as it can be considered as the basis and basis for the miracle of Saint Peter. The gift of water in the desert was mentioned in the Book of Exodus and is the subject of a complex interpretation in early Christian literature, in which the rock symbolizes Christ, while water has several symbols, namely salvation and a reference to baptism (Dresken-weiland, 2013). The way this theme is represented by the artist Dellys is reminiscent of the same theme embodied on the small left façade of Sarcophagus, of the Four Seasons of the city of Tipaza, as well as of one of the Sarcophagi of the Museum of the French city of Arles, as it in turn is composed of two blocks separated by a longitudinal slit that divides the source into two parts. (Février, Sarcophages d'Arles, 1996, p. 341).

#### 6. Two-piece processing technology:

These two pieces belong to the same sarcophagus, which was cut into several parts at an unknown period, most likely to facilitate the task of transporting it, as the front end has not been found to this day. The sculptor of this sarcophagus applied the technique of relief sculpture, as the sharpness of its prominence was completely similar to the façade of the sarcophagus of Christ's miracles, based on what remained of the front façade, which is represented by the two figures who were represented in the right and left corners of the sarcophagus, where we noticed the application of the condensation process in the use of

the drill tool, especially at the level of hairstyle, beard, ears, as well as at the level of parts of clothing, and decoration represented in the architectural style represented by the entrances to the city.

He also applied the technique of light sculpting to the two pieces on the side facades of each piece, especially if we take into account the facade on which the Prophet Daniel was represented, to add some shadows at the level of the eyes, mouths, ears, at the level of beards, hairstyles, and at the level of the upper frames that make up the doors. The problem is with the two side corners of the front end.

As for the method of dealing with the folds of the clothing, the sculptor deliberately used curved lines of light depth, to create wide folds that we see evident at the level of the garment, and other vertical lines were resorted to express the lower edges of Kornai's companion's shirt. The sculptor also adopted the same method to express the flow of water from The source, using light and twisted lines.

## 7. The cover of the Hebrews' sarcophagus in hell:

This cover was found on the property of Kaddour, in the city of Cherchell in 1844 (Leclercq, Cherchell, 1950, p. 787), in a very poor state of preservation, as it was found broken into several pieces, and it was restored using plaster, and it is currently on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris, and a copy of it is also on display in the Museum of Ancient Antiquities and Islamic Arts (Table N°. 03).

The Name of piece	Ownership body	Forming material	Sizes	Conservation status
The Hebrew sarcophagus cover of hell	Louvre Museum (Display hall in stores)	White marble	Length: 37, 1 m Height: 07,0 m Thickness: 36, 0 m.	Broken into several pieces, restored with plaster

**Table N°. 03. Details of the Hebrews' cover of Hell**

### 7.1. Description:

This cover bears a diverse decorative arrangement consisting of two themes belonging to the register of themes of the Torah and the Gospel, in the middle of which is a square-shaped frame devoid of writing, raised on both sides by winged angels represented by the facing, their heads facing sideways, three-quarters towards the right for the genius represented on the right of the frame, and towards the left for the genius represented to the left of the frame. All the geniuses came naked wearing short coats, and the lineup was missing the geniuses' lower limbs, the bottom of the frame, and the bottom of the furnace.

To the right of the center scene, a scarf is represented with the bust of the dead person in the middle (Baratte, 1985, pp. 318-319), from which only the forearm and the right hand are visible. This scarf is carried on both sides by other geniuses, wearing coats similar to the coats of the carrying geniuses for the frame.

As for the topic formed to the left of the central frame, it is represented by the incident of the Hebrews in hell, standing facing away, raising their heads and hands towards heaven in the form of supplication and worship. They also wear Phrygian bonnets, short shirts tied at the waist with ribbons, and short coats that cover the chest and shoulders. As for the representation of hell, the latter is represented in a furnace resembling a rectangular terrace, with three curvatures from which the Praefournia flames emerge, and due to the poor state of preservation that characterizes this cover, only two ventilation outlets remain (Photo No. 12).



**Picture N°. 12: the lid of the Hebrews ' ark in Hell**

### 7.2 Iconographic study:

The inspiration for this incident is the third book of Daniel, which is the story of the Hebrews Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who refused to worship the statue of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who forced them to worship it in vain, and as a result were condemned to be burned in a furnace. However, they sought God's help through supplications and hymns in honor of God who had helped them, so the fire was coolness and peace for them. (Rassart, 1984, pp. 141-151).

The theme of the Hebrews in Hell is considered one of the themes of Hebrew origin, which was used a lot by Christian artists, due to the meanings and symbolism it carries that serve the Christian religion. It is contrasted with a bust of the dead raised by geniuses, as this theme is known for its pagan origin, but it was used by Christians in a manner consistent with the teachings of the new religion (Leclercq, Amours (les), 1924). This theme was observed on a different group of monuments and archaeological artifacts, such as the sarcophagus of the walls of the catacombs, on pottery, and rarely on mosaics. Prost also

notes in this context (Prost, 1887, p. 54), that the theme of the Hebrews in Hell represents a symbolic image of divine mercy, as it was represented on a variety of sarcophaguses, among which we mention:

- Sarcophagus Marcus Claudianus, in the National Museum of Rome (Bovini, I Sarcophagi Paleochristiani, 1949, p. 145).
- Sarcophagus Marcia Romania, in the Old Museum of Arles (Dresken, 2013).
- Sarcophagus cover of Saint Pierre, Vatican Museum, Rome (Dresken, 2013)
- Sarcophagus cover of the Carthage Museum on the subject of the deceased carried in a scarf by geniuses (Pilipinko, p. 140. pl.24. n°140).

### 7.3. Cover processing technique:

The sculptor adopted the technique of relief sculpture in processing the decorative composition prepared on the front of this cover, using the chisel tool, as we noticed its use in a number of places:

- On the level of hairstyle of geniuses, to highlight the hair strands and create a kind of shadow between the hair strands.
- We also noticed the same technique in dealing with the folds of Hebrew clothing, by using deep horizontal lines, separating the vertical folds represented at the level of the chest of the shirt, and those represented at the bottom of it, in addition to adopting deep engraving to highlight the folds of the shirt represented at the waist level.
- We observed the same technique at the level of the folds of the scarf and the wings of geniuses, where the sculptor adopted the deep incision technique to highlight the folds of the scarf and the wings of geniuses on the one hand, and the tongues of fire protruding from the oven on the other hand. Through the subject represented on the façade of this sarcophagus, the sculptor tried to come up with a light decorative formation, but he did not succeed in expressing its details.
- The characters were characterized by a lot of childishness and a lack of respect for dimensions, especially at the level of the hands, which were exaggerated in size compared to the size of the bodies.

### 8. Sarcophagus Cover: The Visit of the Magi Kings to Christ:

This sarcophagus was found in the Kaddour estate in the city of Chercell in the last century, and was transformed for display in the Louvre Museum. This sarcophagus suffers from several fractures that were repaired with plaster. This cover is missing several pieces, including the head of Christ and his left arm, in addition to the right hand. It is also missing the arms of the right Hebrew, and the head and left arm of the middle Hebrew, as well as the left arm of the left Hebrew. As for the other characteristics, they are documented in (Table No. 04)

The Name of piece	Ownership body	Forming material	Sizes	Conservation status
Cover of the visit of the Magi kings to Christ	Louvre Museum (Exhibition Hall 04)	White marble	Length: 80, 1 m Height: 32, 0 m Thickness: 065, 0 m	Broken into several pieces, restored with plaster

**Table No. 04, Cover of the visit of the Magi kings to Christ**

#### 8.1. The description:

This cover belongs to the group of sarcophagi with clypeus (Studer-Karlen, 2013), and on its front it bears a mixture of themes drawn from the book of the Torah and the Bible. In the middle of this collection is a circular frame devoid of writing, carried by winged geniuses with a diameter of 0.29 meters. It is bordered on both sides by two topics, one of which belongs to the topics of the book of the Gospel, and the second to the book of the Torah. To the left of the central frame is represented the theme of the Adoration of the Magi, which is dominated by the figure of the Virgin Mary in the left corner of the cover, sitting on a circular armchair and holding in her arms a young child, representing the figure of Christ in infancy. She wears a long dress topped with a robe that covers her entire body, the part of which surrounding the back falls over the right leg in the form of a wide fold. This scene also concludes on the left side of the sarcophagus, with a bearded figure standing facing away, leaning on the armrest of the chair on which the Virgin Mary sits, and wearing a long shirt topped with a loose, short-sleeved robe.

Directly in front of the Virgin Mary, a procession of trotting figures was represented, representing the Magi kings who came to offer some gifts to Christ. The first figure is represented facing up, pointing towards a star in the sky, which must have been represented on the upper edge of the lid on similar sarcophagi, as it has been found in other Roman provinces (Beaud, 2022, pp. 117-130). The first figure came wearing a Phrygian hood (Beaud, Les rois mages. Iconographie et art monumental dans l'espace féodal, 2013), and a short, long-sleeved shirt tied at the waist with a belt, topped with a short robe thrown over the left shoulder. This last character carries a gift in the form of a circular vessel containing Myrrh incense (Kempf, 2015). As for the two characters represented behind the first character, they came in the form of a trot, wearing the same clothes and carrying the same gifts.

In the second place to the back of this procession, three camels are shown, represented in profile, running towards the left side of the cover. Only the front hooves are visible from the first camel, while the second camel has no hooves, and the third and final camel only has one of its hooves visible. The right side of the cover is dedicated to representing the theme of the Hebrews in Hell, which is represented in a rectangular building, the front facade of which is provided with three ventilation outlets from which flames emerge, inside which stand three figures raising their hands towards the sky, in the form of supplication and worship. Their heads were crowned with Phrygian hoods, wearing short shirts tied twice with ribbons, the first towards the chest and the second towards the waist, and short coats whose traces were visible behind the back, along the oven to the right. A fourth figure is represented standing three-quarters to the right, preparing to put a piece of firewood into the oven. The latter is wearing a shirt tied at the waist with a belt (Images No. 13, 14, 15, 16).



**Pictures No.: 13-14-15-16 Cover of the sarcophagus of the Magi Kings**

### 8.2. Scene treatment technique:

On the front of this cover, the sculptor applied the technique of low-profile sculpture, using the chisel tool to highlight some details of the decorative composition, using some light lines to express the folds of clothes, the wings of geniuses, and some details of the gifts carried by the Kings of the Magi, as well as to define the scarf carried from The tip of geniuses, and the circular frame represented in the center of the collection. However, this collection did not take care of the facial features, as they were trimmed superficially, especially when it came to the lines of the eyes, noses, mouths, and hairstyles. In this collection, the perforator tool was not used to show the core of the eyes, as this method of treating the figures is similar to that which we observed on some sarcophaguses, such as the Diporbo model in the Petriano Museum in Rome (Bovini, *I Sarcophagi Paleochristiani*, 1949, p. 27. Fig. 11), and Sebastiano' sarcophagus (Bovini, *I Sarcophagi Paleochristiani*, 1949, p. 220. Fig. 234).

### 8.3. Iconographic study:

In this cover, the sculptor wanted to combine two themes. The first on the left is drawn from the book of the Gospel, and represents the visit of the Magi to the Virgin Mary. While the second book of the Torah is represented by the theme of the three Hebrews in Hell, where the latter symbolizes God's providence, where the Christian artist usually combines the two subjects on the same sarcophagus, and other times one of them is present and the other is absent, and we mention examples of this:

- The presence of the two subjects on the same façade in a sarcophagus discovered in the Domicia cemetery in Rome (Wilpert, *I sarcophagi cristiani antichi*, 1932).
- On the sarcophagus Marcia Salsa, in the Old Museum of Arles (Dresken weiland, 2013, pp. 247-258).
- The presence of the first theme with other themes such as Eve and Adam, and Daniel in the Pit of Lions, on Aurelian's sarcophagus, in the cemetery of Saint Lorenzo in Rome (Bovini, *I Sarcophagi Paleochristiani*, 1949, pp. 191- fig.197).
- The presence of the two subjects on the sarcophagus covers of Marcus Claudianus, in the National Museum of Rome (Dresken weiland, 2013, pp. 247-258).
- On the facade of the sarcophagus Basilica of Sant'Ambrigio, Milan in Rome (Bovini, *I Sarcophagi Paleochristiani*, 1949, pp. 235- fig.252).

Some researchers in the field of Christianity have emphasized the popularity of the theme of the Magi's cult, as it is represented on a number of sarcophaguses, church capitals, frescoes, mosaics and miniatures on ivory and stained glass. This scene has long attracted the attention of researchers, as it has been interpreted as symbolizing the pagan world's honoring of the birthplace of Christ and the Christian religion. They also noted the precise details of the differences that distinguished the many versions of this subject, where Christ was sometimes represented at birth, lying in bed, and at other times at childhood, sitting on his mother's knees, and the star that led them was sometimes accompanied by an angel, and at other times it was replaced by a swastika carried by two angels.

The costumes of the Magi kings were often identical to the Persian miter (Phrygian hat), kalamide, chiton (short tunic), and anaxyride (tight trousers), as an imitation of the dress of the eastern regions. They also sometimes wear a type of crown that takes the form of a round block, thick and hollow in the middle, and these gestures appeared since the fourth century, and continued until the end of the Byzantine Empire at the very least.

Among the gifts offered by the Magi to the Christ Child, we mention gold, incense and myrrh, and sometimes someone presents an inscription narrating the promise of salvation in this world and the hereafter, before the feet of the child who will fulfill the ancient promise.

As for the gifts and offerings presented to Christ by the Magi kings, each one carries a different symbolism, represented by: pieces of gold as a symbol of ownership, Incense as a divine essence, The courtyard is for myrrh, which is often represented in boxes or vases. As for myrrh, it is represented in the form of round loaves of bread, and incense in the form of small balls, which the Magi often offer with hands covered with the sides of their cloaks, as it is an Eastern custom that represents a sign of submission and reverence, or it can also be a way to protect gifts from contamination, or to prevent any contact with hands (Benoit G. D., 1952).



## Conclusion:

The sarcophagi selected in this research paper are considered among the rare examples in North Africa, in terms of the decorative themes formed on their façade, as they are unique in their architectural facade and sculptural style that belong to the end of the third and fourth centuries AD, and it can also be considered among the most important material documents of this period, given the decorations it contains that fall within the activities of religious life, specifically the second stage of the development of Christian art.

The number of sarcophagi dating back to the Christian period in Algeria is eighteen (18) sarcophaguses, including six complete sarcophaguses, four of which are decorated with twisted bands called strigils, while the rest are front or side pieces, representing historical figures drawn from the books of the Torah and the Bible, such as "The Prophet Daniel among the lions", "Moses and the miracle of water, cover the Hebrews in hell", "Worship the Magi", currently on display in the Louvre Museum. At the top of this group is the Sarcophagus, the sarcophagus of Christ's miracles, which represents the pinnacle of Christian art, as its subjects were organized within architectural curvatures to avoid the process of confusion in which the Christian artist often stumbled. Other times, he may resort to organizing the scenes without resorting to the use of barriers, by avoiding crowding the scenes, as is the case in both the cover of the Hebrews in Hell, and the worship of the Magi.

The decorations represented on these sarcophagi are rich in their multiplicity of themes, as it happens to find one theme represented on the front of two or three sarcophaguses. As examples of this, we mention the icons of "The Good Shepherd," "The Hebrews in Hell," "Jonas' Miracle," and "The Miracles of Christ," which we sometimes find represented on the lids and sometimes on the front of the basins. As for the technical aspect, we have noticed that most of the sarcophagi were carved using the bas-relief technique, to the point that some details are completely separated from the background of the sarcophagus, as is the case in the sarcophagus of the miracles of Christ and the pieces of Daniel and Moses. In general, we noticed that the degree of protrusion on the side facades is completely different from the front facades, as the technique of low-profile to flat sculpting was applied to the former, which we also noticed at the level of the covers, and according to researchers, this difference is due to the process of organizing work within the sculpture workshop, where work on the side facades and covers is left to sculptors of varying skill.

Through the above, it becomes clear to us the historical value that characterizes this type of source in introducing ancient religions, and monitoring several concepts related to the artistic and technical aspect, as it is possible to identify the techniques and methods of sculpture adopted in their decoration according to well-known techniques such as drilling, notching, hammering, lathe and planing. It also enables us to extrapolate artistic forms and understand the nature of decorative themes that carry within them connotations and perceptions imbued with symbolism associated with religious and funerary life.

By studying these models, we arrived at their classification as a group of sarcophagi known as the realistic stage, which is unique in its characters drawn from the Holy Books, whose themes the Christian artist tried to organize within an architectural façade, decorated by columns with Ionic capitals, raising semicircular or pyramidal arches in the style, and it was called the sarcophagi with an architectural facade, which became very popular in the third century, and continued until the fifth century, and this type of burial is considered among the most important and oldest material documents, which include very rich topics that symbolize the elements of the Christian religion, the intensity of its spread in the countries on the banks of the Mediterranean, as well as the extent of its influence on The inhabitants of these areas follow this religion.

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