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An Early Christian Reliquary in the Shape of a Sarcophagus in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Art Collection

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AN EARLY CHRISTIAN RELIQUARY IN THE SHAPE OF A SARCOPHAGUS IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE ART COLLECTION

by

A. O'Connor

A Thesis Submitted in
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ABSTRACT

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN MARBLE RELIQUARY IN THE SHAPE OF A SARCOPHAGUS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE ART COLLECTION

by

A. O'Connor

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor Richard Leson

This paper seeks to introduce a relatively unknown example of a small fifth or sixth century AD reliquary object in the shape of a sarcophagus now in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Art Collection. Its material – mostly likely Prokonnesian marble – a highly prized stone in the Roman Empire – speaks to strength, permanence, endurance, and the concept of *romanitas*. The form, as derived from Roman burial practice, provides apotropaic powers for the viewer and for the holy person whose remains were contained within. Its design also facilitates the offering of votives and veneration, as well as requests for intercessions between the earthly and the divine – a sort of Christian proxy substituting eschewed pagan sacrifice. The sarcophagus shape reflects the emotional, cultural, and theological concerns of Roman and early Christian funerary practice, such as mourning, loss, fear, remembrance of the dead and hope for

the afterlife. Its miniaturized scale suggests fragmentation of the body as well as portability and transfer, as attested to by a relic translation ceremony depicted on the Trier Ivory including a similarly shaped reliquary.

The absence of intricate carving of the piece has parallels in early Christian architecture, such as Saint Sabina, where exterior modesty opens up to reveal a precious interior – a spiritual metaphor underscoring the beauty of the inner soul. Very likely used to consecrate an altar or a newly built church, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee reliquary also testifies to the sanctification of sacred space and the expansion of holy topography in conjunction with the spread of the early Christian church.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE

Are these the bones of John the Baptist? A CNN headline posed this question with the discovery of a reliquary on the Bulgarian island of Sveti Ivan, or St. John, where a church dedicated to the eponymous saint was built in two phases during the fifth and sixth centuries (**Figure 1**). The island lies near the ancient city of Sozopol, formerly part of the Byzantine Empire. A reliquary in the shape of a sarcophagus was unearthed on July 29, 2010 by archaeologists excavating the site (**Figure 2**). A second smaller stone vessel with the text, "God, save your servant Thomas. To St. John" along with the date "June 24", (the feast day of John the Baptist) was discovered nearby (**Figure 3**).

The St. John reliquary was subsequently opened in the presence of representatives from the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture and the National Museum of History in Sofia.¹ Upon opening, six bone fragments were discovered and delivered to the Orthodox Church for additional scrutiny (**Figure 4**).² National Geographic contracted to film the scientific testing of the relics. In a follow-up report a month later, CNN reported that the bone fragments, after undergoing radiocarbon and DNA testing, were those of a Middle Eastern male who lived during the first century AD.³ This conclusion, along with the epigraphical information provided by the small stone box accompanying

¹<http://www.focus-fen.net/?id=f2370>.

² Simon Hooper, "Are These the Bones of John the Baptist?," CNN World. Accessed December 12, 2011. www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/08/12/bulgaria.john.baptist.relics/index.html.

³ http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/22/bulgarian-bones-could-be-john-the-baptists-as-claimed-scientists-say/?hpt=hp_bn13.

the reliquary, supplies new evidence in support of the use of similar minimally carved reliquaries. The apparent simplicity of such objects therefore seems to simultaneously belie and express their actual complexity and the significance of the objects they contain.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Art Collection includes one of these earliest surviving forms of reliquaries – an object that resembles a miniature sarcophagus (**Figures 5-10**).⁴ This paper serves to introduce this little known example. Made of stone, possibly Prokonnesian marble (from ancient Prokonnesos in the Sea of Marmara), its rectangular form measures 11 cm wide, 15 cm high, and 19 cm long. Its lid features a saddle-style roof with four acroteria as seen on full-size burial sarcophagi, which were modeled on the pitched roofs common in ancient Graeco-Roman architecture. Greek crosses are incised on the two shorter sides of the lid. It is not immediately clear if the crosses were added shortly after quarrying or later by a regional stonecarving workshop. The base has been hollowed out to receive the reliquary material, now lost, and each long side also bears an incised Greek cross. The lid is placed on top of the base to close the box but without the slide mechanism that exists in some analogous examples of the same type.⁵ The stone shows some signs of crystallization and discoloration, most likely from moisture, which is not unusual given that the box could have been buried in the initial stages of its use.

⁴ The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has owned the piece since its gifting in 1985 by Frederick Van Dusen Rogers, a friend of the university and son of noted collector Charles Bolles Rogers. At the time of this writing, of reliquary sarcophagi documented throughout the world, I am aware of five such objects in the United States, including the UWM piece.

⁵ See figures 8 and 9.

In this paper I seek to position the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (hereafter UWM) reliquary within its original cultural context and in doing so to answer a number of questions related to its form, material, iconography, and function. The objective of this research is therefore to present the reliquary and to engage the current scholarly discourse surrounding analogous objects, to clarify its place in late Roman and early Christian burial practice, and finally to consider its role in contemporary museum culture.

IA. THE FORM AND DATE OF THE UWM RELIQUARY: ANALAGOUS FULL-SIZE SARCOPHAGI

The UWM reliquary evidently takes its form from ancient Roman and early Christian burial sarcophagi. Such sarcophagi were used throughout the Roman Empire (including Ravenna, Constantinople, the Black Sea region, etc.) to contain bodies, and sometimes ashes of one or more persons. Sarcophagi production peaked between the second and fifth centuries, though it continued past the fifth century for members of the elite classes in areas such as Ravenna and Constantinople.⁶ Sarcophagi, when carved, typically received decoration on one to three sides and only occasionally on all four sides.

Indeed, most of the full-sized sarcophagi for which information is readily available feature highly-ornamented and intricate carved decoration. The field of *Sarkophagstudien*, or sarcophagus study, has traditionally been divided into two areas

⁶ Guntram Koch, *Early Christian Art and Architecture* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996), 107-124.

of inquiry: pagan and Christian based on decorative content.⁷ Some sarcophagi, however, exhibit both pagan and Christian features. Others include Jewish iconography, although these tend to be discussed in the literature on Christian sarcophagi (**Figure 11**).⁸ Within these areas, the sarcophagi are further distinguished by decorative or iconographic content. Guntram Koch's comprehensive catalogue of Christian sarcophagi attempted to categorize all surviving examples according to decorative program or themes (for example frieze, column, tree, fluted, or chest).⁹ Koch's work also reveals an iconographic repertoire that ranges from elaborate Old Testament friezes to simple Chi Rho symbols confined to just the lid.

A fair amount is known about the sculpting process, and a rare surviving monument depicts the method of sarcophagus making. A Roman sculptor in the process of carving a lion's head on a sarcophagus is portrayed on a grave (loculus) slab which is now in Urbino (**Figure 12**).¹⁰ Polychromy is assumed, though few painted examples survive. It is believed the colors would have been vibrant, with certain elements picked out in gold.¹¹

It is likely that the use of such sarcophagi was confined to the upper classes, who could afford such a commission. To date, only one instance of sarcophagi pricing has been discovered. An undecorated limestone sarcophagus from the late third-century

⁷ Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson, *Life, death and representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2011), 1.

⁸ Guntram Koch, *Fruhchristliche Sarkophage* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2000), 423, 427, 585, 591-599.

⁹ Guntram Koch, *Early Christian Art and Architecture* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996), 108-109.

¹⁰ Guntram Koch, *Early Christian Art and Architecture* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996), 113-114.

¹¹ Guntram Koch, *Early Christian Art and Architecture* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996), 114.

was marked with an amount that equates to approximately five times the annual subsistence level of the time.¹² This does not include the price of carving, which would add significantly to the final cost. It is probable also that if the sarcophagus had been made of marble - a more highly desirable material than limestone – the cost would have increased accordingly.

The UWM reliquary has more in common with the form than the decorative carving or iconographic trends visible in decorated burial sarcophagi; however, unadorned sarcophagi were also produced throughout the Roman Empire. These objects would appear to offer important precedents for the UWM reliquary and others like it, but a general lack of information about plainly-carved burial sarcophagi makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions. The extent to which simply-carved full-size burial sarcophagi were produced is unclear, since sarcophagi with intricate carvings and elaborate scenes have attracted the most academic attention and (perhaps not coincidentally) more have been published.¹³

Thanks to Ben Russell's recent work on the Roman sarcophagus industry, we know of a repository of plain-sided sarcophagi, along with roughed-out garland sarcophagi, from the necropolis on the island of Prokonnesos (modern Marmara) where

¹² Ben Russell, "The Roman Sarcophagus 'Industry': a Reconsideration" In *Life, Death, and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, by Huskinson et al. Elsner, 119-148 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG., 2011), 122.

¹³ Adding to our understanding of the challenges of interpreting undecorated sarcophagi, is a story that Elsner relates regarding an 1885 excavation of ten sarcophagi in underground chambers beneath Rome. Seven of the sarcophagi were exported to Baltimore, two remained in Rome, and one – an undecorated sarcophagi – was destroyed shortly after discovery. Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson, *Life, death and representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2011), 6.

Prokonnesian marble was quarried (**Figure 13**). As Russell explains, “all of these types were useable as they were, without further ornamentation, and were certainly valued in this form....But these chests typically received some level of further carving at sculpting workshops elsewhere around the Mediterranean, where they could be decorated according to local tastes.”¹⁴ Russell goes on to give an additional example of quarries on Thasos. Roughed-out tub-shaped sarcophagi with rounded ends have been found at the site, a type also known as *lenos* that were primarily sent to Rome for additional carving in a popular *Lowensarkophag* (“lion sarcophagus”) style. Russell concludes, “certain quarry-based workshops specialized in the production of roughed-out stone objects, sarcophagus chests and lids amongst them, and this suggests further specialization at the workshops that received these roughed-out objects.”¹⁵

Perhaps this same quarry-to-workshop system was behind production of other “roughed out stone objects” –like the UWM reliquary –which is likewise made of Prokonnesian marble. We can thus search for full size burial sarcophagi that are comparable to our smaller piece in general form. It is possible that the general proportions and outward silhouette would be shared by both large and small marble forms produced in the same quarry, with the surface decoration similarly applied at a later stage in regional workshops in accordance with regional tastes. We can test this

¹⁴ Ben Russell, "The Roman Sarcophagus 'Industry': a Reconsideration" In *Life, Death, and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, by Huskinson et al. Elsner (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2011),132.

¹⁵ Ben Russell, "The Roman Sarcophagus 'Industry': a Reconsideration." In *Life, Death, and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, by Huskinson et al. Elsner (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2011),132-133.

hypothesis through examination of Russell's photographic evidence of roughed-out sarcophagi at Prokonnesos. In one photo of the quarry, at least nine full or partial plain-sided sarcophagi are visible, clustered together in what is now an area strewn with rubble and overgrown with brush. All of the sarcophagi exhibit a rectangular base, gabled lid, and chunky corner acroteria that compare favorably with the shape, angles and proportions of the UWM reliquary.¹⁶ This allows for at least the possibility that the UWM reliquary began its life as a roughed-out form in the quarries of Prokonnesos.

Other compelling comparisons are found in Istanbul. I provide three examples, beginning with a fourth-century Prokonnesian marble sarcophagus now in the Istanbul Archeological Museum. This Istanbul piece provides a useful parallel to the UWM reliquary, primarily for its marble and form, but also for its absence of abundant carvings. The pitch of the roof shaped lid and the chunkier acroteria of the Istanbul sarcophagus are very similar to the UWM reliquary. Koch observes that the Istanbul sarcophagus is similar to some of the very earliest sarcophagi examples. He writes, "in

¹⁶ Norman Herz, a pioneer in utilizing scientific methods to determine marble types, in his 2005 introduction to Donato Attanasio's "The Isotopic Signature of Classical Marbles", admonishes archaeologists and art historians for largely ignoring the body of marble provenancing work produced in scientific labs in Europe and North America. He cites what he finds to be a particularly egregious example of a fraudulent marble statue estimated at seven million dollars that had been authenticated by experts using visual analysis but was eventually found to have had an altogether different point of origination, suggesting the sculpture's "checkered past" (Attanasio 2006). To give an American-based example of marble research, a collaboration between L. Peter Gromet, Brown University, Donato Attanasio, ISM-CNR Rome, Robert Tykot, University of South Florida, and Norman Herz, and Frances Van Keuren, University of Georgia, utilized physical observation of texture, color, and maximum grain size, as well as electron paramagnetic resonance and stable isotopic composition analyses to provenance the marble of three sarcophagi in the Rhode Island School of Design. (Van Keuren 2009) Since then, if UWM was to demonstrate an interest in definitively provenancing the marble of the reliquary that is the topic of this thesis, some of these scholars could perhaps be engaged for visual analysis and recommendations regarding cost, methods, and potential outcomes of scientific tests to be conducted on the piece.

its proportions, the form of the roof-shaped lid and the acroteria, it is very close to examples from the late second century.”¹⁷

When compared with examples of contemporary carved sarcophagi such as the renowned fourth-century sarcophagus of Junius Bassus from St. Peter’s in the Vatican, the Istanbul sarcophagus is more simply carved (**Figure 15**). Its base features a centralized Chi Rho monogram accompanied by two small fleurettes and an undulating vine against a plain ground. The acroteria, incised with a leaf motif, are the sole carvings on the lid. As Koch observes, there is some speculation that the sarcophagus has been re-used, which could assign the piece to earlier than the fourth century, but the carving is certainly fourth century in date.¹⁸

Using the Istanbul Archeological Museum sarcophagus as a point of comparison for its similarities in marble, form, and reserved decoration, we can begin to propose a date range for the UWM reliquary. According to Koch, “the latest [full-scale sarcophagi] (sixth/seventh centuries) are very humble and narrow and bear simple crosses as decoration....”¹⁹ Therefore based on Russell’s work on the Prokonnesian quarries,

¹⁷Koch, Guntram. 1996. *Early Christian Art and Architecture*. London: SCM Press Ltd:121.

¹⁸ Guntram Koch, *Fruhchristliche Sarkophage* (Munchen: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2000),14, 60, 67, 131,390,411, 423, 427,585.

¹⁹ Guntram Koch, *Early Christian Art and Architecture*.(London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996),120-121 and Guntram Koch, *Fruhchristliche Sarkophage*(Munchen: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2000),423, 427, 585. In Koch’s encyclopedic work on full size Christian – note that this does not include so called “pagan” burial sarcophagi - we are presented with just a few simply decorated examples that seem to fall outside of the categories with which Koch places other sarcophagi. It is important to recognize that the search for undecorated or plainly decorated full size burial sarcophagi is partially hindered by the predominant division of sarcophagi scholarship into Christian and non-Christian themes. Koch’s classifications within Christian sarcophagi are such: frieze sarcophagi; column sarcophagi; tree sarcophagi; fluted sarcophagi; and chest sarcophagi- all of which rely on their surface decoration for placement within a category. Koch goes on to acknowledge the somewhat problematic nature of these divisions by introducing three other

evidence of the Istanbul sarcophagus, and Koch's observation regarding simple cross sarcophagi from Constantinople, we can reason that the form of the UWM reliquary may have been based on full -size sarcophagi found near Constantinople, quarried from Prokonnesian marble, and date anywhere from the late second to the seventh century.

We can perhaps narrow this date range further through a consideration of the reliquary's iconography since the UWM reliquary's cross decorations also find parallels in relatively unadorned full-scale sarcophagi. Another sarcophagus in Istanbul, this one now in Hagia Eirene, has a similarly pitched roof and comparably proportioned acroteria to the UWM reliquary (**Figure 16**). The Hagia Eirene sarcophagus is made of porphyry, an imported purple marble, use of which was restricted to emperors and kings. Koch identifies this sarcophagus as "imperial" and suggest that holes in the lid may have held bronze adornments, possibly gilded. The only carving visible is that of a modified cross – an *ankh* or *crux ansata* - on the end of the lid.^{20 21} Based on analyses of Justinian

factors for consideration: the reuse of pagan sarcophagi; sarcophagi with "neutral themes"; and sarcophagi from the early Christian period with pagan themes. The UWM reliquary sarcophagus does not closely parallel any of these proposed categories for full sized burial sarcophagi, which are classified according to decoration, rather than form. Though it is compelling to impose order on extant sarcophagi by assigning them to a classification, the weaknesses of this system are exposed when attempting to deal with examples that defy categorization. The lack of a category that addresses plain or simple cross sarcophagi makes it difficult to assess with what sort of frequency and in under what sort of circumstances plain or simple cross sarcophagi were used. Simple cross sarcophagi would of course provide the closest analogies to the UWM reliquary. The absence or silence of scholarship on these pieces forces us to look at literature on the few available similar pieces, such as the Istanbul sarcophagi.

²⁰Guntram Koch, *Fruhchristliche Sarkophage*(Munchen: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2000),423, 427, 585.

²¹ A. A. Vasiliev, "Imperial Porphyry Sarcophagi in Constantinople" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers Vol. 4*, 1, 1948),24.

imperial sarcophagi by Koch and others we can assign a probable date for this example within the sixth century.²²

A final example of a relatively unadorned, full-scale sarcophagus is found in the narthex of Hagia Sophia. It exhibits lid proportions and acroteria very close to those of the UWM reliquary (**Figure 17**). It is decorated with a simple cross on the lid, although this one is encircled. The material has been identified as *verde antico* (or *Marmor Thessalicum*) a rare green stone. This sarcophagus contains the remains of Empress Irene (c.752-803) who interestingly, is associated with the restoration of icons in the Byzantine Empire after the first iconoclastic period.²³

IB. THE FORM AND DATE OF THE UWM RELIQUARY: ANALAGOUS RELIQUARY

SARCOPHAGI

Reliquaries like the UWM piece survive in relatively high numbers throughout museums, churches, and private collections. Only a handful are in North American collections, making the UWM reliquary something of a rarity on this continent. They are traceable to the Mediterranean, the Black Sea region, and North Africa, all areas that were once part of the Byzantine Empire, allowing us to conclude that use of these unadorned pieces was widespread. Significantly, in some cases, the find location is known and archeological evidence substantiates use in a church or sacred place.

²² Glanville Downey, "The Tombs of the Byzantine Emperors at the Church of the Holy Apostles" *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* Vol. 79, 1959, 27-51 and A. A. Vasiliev "Imperial Porphyry Sarcophagi in Constantinople" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* Vol. 4 1, 1948, 25. and Guntram Koch, *Fruhchristliche Sarkophage* (Munchen: Verlag C.H.Beck, 2000), 420-423.

²³ Guntram Koch, *Fruhchristliche Sarkophage* (Munchen: Verlag C.H.Beck, 2000), 60, 67, 131, 411, 425.

Absence of intricate carving would seem to be the rule rather than the exception in the case of reliquaries in the shape of sarcophagi. Examples with plain cross decoration and/or a lid with acroteria can help to determine both the age and place of origin of the UWM piece.

The most comprehensive account to date of such reliquary sarcophagi is Helmut Buschhausen's *Late Roman Metal Boxes and Early Christian Reliquaries*, published in 1971.²⁴ Almost seventy stone reliquary sarcophagi, whole or fragmented, are catalogued. Most of those compare favorably to the UWM reliquary with respect to their material (marble), size, and configuration, with pitched roofs and corner acroteria. Some bear comparably carved crosses, but a number of them are not decorated at all. A few are inscribed. The UWM reliquary is not included in Buschhausen's publication; at the time, it was owned by Frederick Van Dusen Rogers and thus likely not known to him.²⁵ Using Buschhausen's system of typology, the UWM reliquary can be classified

²⁴ Helmut Buschhausen, *Die Spätromischen Metallscrinia und Frühchristlichen Reliquiare.*, (Wien: Hermann Bohlaus Nachf, 1971). A new catalogue that attempts, in part, to append and archaeologically contextualize Buschhausen's efforts was published in 2012. Comte, Marie Christine. 2012. *Les Reliquaires du Proche-Orient et de Chypre à la période protobyzantine (IVe-VIIIe siècles): formes, emplacements, fonctions et cultes.* . Brepols: Turnhout.

²⁵ In my search for additional provenance information for the UWM piece, I corresponded with a one-time gallery owner who had assisted in the cataloguing of the New York collection of Charles Bolles Rogers, the father of collector Frederick Van Dusen Rogers, the donor of the UWM piece. In the scope of her work with Charles Bolles Rogers, she was not aware of the reliquary piece. She did acknowledge that some of the Rogers pieces came as gifts from European elites, such as the King of Greece with whom Bolles Rogers was friendly, while other pieces were collected during shorter trips or extended stays abroad. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee library archives holds the supporting documentation for the Bolles Rogers and Van Dusen Rogers gifts to the university. These include letters of correspondence between the donors and university officials and records of appraisal, but information on provenance prior to gifting is absent.

amongst those from the Black Sea, coming from present day Western Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, or southern Ukraine.²⁶

The UWM object resembles early Byzantine reliquary sarcophagi in both material – marble – and form: sloped roof lid, rectangular base, and four corner acroteria. Two Byzantine reliquary sarcophagi now on display at the Metropolitan Museum in New York compare favorably to the UWM example.²⁷ The first is made of marble (14.3 x 18.9 x 9.8 cm) and is dated ca. 400-600 (**Figure 18**). Its base has smoothly carved, rounded striations on three sides, but the fourth side is blank, which suggests that the plain side was perhaps not intended to be seen – perhaps placed against a wall? The lid has a pitched roof similar to that of the UWM reliquary, but differs where it meets the base of the reliquary in that it has been notched so that it might slide onto the base. The four corner acroteria have suffered some damage. At the peak of the gable, in the center of the roof, a hole pierces the lid. This opening probably facilitated creation of secondary relics by means of a rod and cloth plunged through the hole to make contact with the relics or by oil poured through the opening and collected by visitors to the relics.²⁸

²⁶ Georges Kazan, PhD, University of Oxford in e-mail correspondence with the author, October 5, 2011. Professor Kazan has been conducting comprehensive research on reliquaries. I am indebted to Prof. Kazan for responding to my request for insight regarding the UWM reliquary. His assistance has helped in my understanding of the piece. At this writing Prof. Kazan's full publication is forthcoming.

²⁷ The Met utilizes the Helibrunn Timeline of Art History and generally uses Byzantine to refer to the period between 330 and the mid-fifteenth century AD to include at varying times during this period, geographic regions of Anatolia, the Caucasus, Greece, Asia Minor, the Eastern Mediterranean & Syria, the Balkan Peninsula, and parts of Italy and Europe. For our purposes, because reliquary sarcophagi generally derive from cultural practice associated with the Roman Empire, this paper generally uses the words Byzantine and Roman to refer to objects and practices tracing their inheritance back to the broadest sense of Roman Empire.

²⁸ <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/468311?img=1>.

A second Byzantine reliquary at the Metropolitan Museum provides another good comparison. Its dimensions are comparable (14.3 x 14.0 x 21.6 cm), it is carved from marble and it is dated to the fifth or sixth century (**Figure 19**).²⁹ Like the first example from the Metropolitan Museum, the lid is notched to slide on to the base. The lid is gabled, and the four corner acroteria are intact. The only decoration visible is a text carved on one side of the lid. This inscription provides an excellent opportunity to discover how the piece functioned within its original setting, as discussed below.

A final analogous piece can be found in a very unusual and well known set of three nesting reliquary boxes dating from 350 – 450 AD that were discovered beneath an altar near Varna, Bulgaria (**Figure 20**).³⁰ They were excavated from a brickwork crypt below the altar in the apse of an early sixth-century Christian church.³¹ In part because of the precious materials of the innermost piece, they have received a fair amount of academic attention and were prominently featured in the *Treasures of Heaven* exhibition of 2011.³² The outer marble box is similar in its lack of intricate carving to the UWM reliquary. The pitch of the roof is similar, though the acroteria are smaller and more refined. The base has two bands of striation, which continue around on all four

²⁹ This piece was not included by Buschhausen, having been held in a private collection until 2002. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/2002.483.3a,b>

³⁰ A small sampling of the stone reliquary have been found along with rectangular, circular, or oval metal, usually silver containers.

³¹ Alexander Minchev, *Early Christian Reliquaries from Bulgaria* (Varna:Stalker,2003),15.

³² After the excavation of the St. John reliquary and before it was opened, there was conjecture as to whether or not the find would contain another similarly jeweled piece. It did not. Perhaps, in part because of the jeweled find however, the original Varna excavation site was damaged in 2008 by illegal treasure hunting. Bulgaria has become an epi-center for reliquary study, with thirty-five reliquaries extant in that country (not all stone nor sarcophagus shaped). Bulgaria was also the host of a 2003 conference dedicated to the topic of the cult of martyrs and relics, which builds upon German scholarship and has contributed much research on the subject.

sides. At the peak of the gabled lid, a recessed area suggests an opening, though it does not actually pierce through the roof. Snuggled inside the marble piece was a silver box, which bears similarly incised crosses to the UWM piece, and the pitch of the lid, and the proportions of the acroteria and base are similar to the UWM reliquary as well. The silver box, in turn contained a gold box, wrapped in silk, and adorned with garnets and other precious stones. It is within the inner gold box that the relics themselves were held: fragments of a finger, a shoulder blade, and a small piece of wood.³³ Just how typical this nested arrangement was seems to be largely unknown. Did the UWM reliquary, in addition to holding relics now lost, ever contain ever smaller boxes of precious metals and jewels?

The incised crosses on the UWM reliquary can also assist in our dating of this piece as the symbol of the cross does not become a public emblem of Christian victory until well after the death of Christ. In fact it does not become a public emblem in a real palpable sense until after the Edict of Milan (313 AD) when for the first time Christianity is legal within the confines of the Roman Empire. The evidence of the Edict of Milan, the quarries of Prokonnesus, the three Byzantine sarcophagi and reliquary sarcophagi cited here, as well as numerous other examples of similar reliquary sarcophagi listed in Buschhausen, allow us to confidently date the UWM reliquary between the fifth and sixth centuries, and perhaps even earlier if compared to the Varna trio. Also based on

³³ Georgi Parpulov, "Set of Reliquary Boxes" In *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, by Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, James Robinson eds. Martina Bagnoli (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 39.

these three specific examples as well as multiple others listed in Buschhausen, we can securely assign the term “Byzantine” if we wish to conform to current museum practice.

II. SARCOPHAGI AND THE VENERATION OF THE DEAD IN ROMAN AND EARLY CHRISTIAN CULTURE

In light of the Roman rituals attached to the process of dying and the subsequent months and years when a family continued to honor the dead through feast days and visits to the tomb, the sarcophagus form and its iconography can be interpreted as both a memorial to the deceased and as a sight where familial and cultural identity was maintained. Surviving documentation attests to the fact that sarcophagi were often used for multiple family members and sometimes passed on within a family. As Ben Russell points out “.....sarcophagi were not simply functional containers for corpses. They were monuments, more akin to tombs than coffins.”³⁴ This suggests a special regard for the place where the family was interred; multiple visits to the place of burial would perhaps prompt careful consideration of the appearance of the family sarcophagi.³⁵

Romans, and later Christianized Romans, no doubt understood the configuration of sarcophagi as an expression of family or communal mourning, grieving, and remembrance. To be sure, as Jas Elsner noted, decorative carvings on sarcophagi such

³⁴ This speaks to the memorial aspect of sarcophagi, a quality which should be kept in mind when discussing the commemorative aspect of the UWM reliquary.

³⁵ Ben Russell, "The Roman Sarcophagus 'Industry': a Reconsideration" In *Life, Death, and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, by Huskinson et al. Elsner (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2011), 140.

as garlands responded to elements of funerary practice (tombs were adorned with garlands) and served to create a perpetual funerary ritual.³⁶ Elsner and others have also suggested that sarcophagi iconography functioned on an apotropaic level to protect the dead. Yet the overall shape or configuration of the sarcophagus was of equal importance for what it connoted. Edmund Thomas perhaps describes the matter best: “With the heavy recent emphasis on the pictorial content of sarcophagus reliefs it is easy to forget that Roman sarcophagi are also architectonic structures.”³⁷ He goes on to explain, “Through their funerary purpose they answered some emotional needs like medieval micro-architecture, and accordingly some early forms of the latter incorporated ancient Roman sarcophagi.”³⁸

I would thus argue that the configuration of Roman sarcophagi, along with decoration and ritual practices, functioned didactically to relate the rituals of Roman funerary culture to the viewer. As an example, in some instances the deceased were offered libations through openings in graves or sarcophagi. We are privy to the sentiments and emotions attendant to such offerings in a fourth-century Ausonian verse that speaks to the relationship between the gifts proffered to the dead and the preparations they provided for the afterlife:

³⁶ Jas Elsner and Janet Huskinson, *Life, death and representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG., 2011), 7.

³⁷ Edmund Thomas, “‘Houses of the Dead’? Columnar sarcophagi as ‘micro-architecture’” In *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, by Huskinson et al. Elsner (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG., 2011), 388.

³⁸ Edmund Thomas, “‘Houses of the Dead’? Columnar sarcophagi as ‘micro-architecture’” In *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, by Huskinson et al. Elsner (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG., 2011), 388.

Sprinkle my ashes with pure wine and fragrant oil of spikenard:
 Bring balsam, too, stranger, with crimson roses.
 Tearless my urn enjoys unending spring.
 I have not died, but changed my state.³⁹

This verse points to the belief that funerary and honorific libations offered by visitors to tomb sites helped to nourish the departed person in their transformed state of life after death.

Jocelyn Toynbee has described the elaborate practices associated with the burial and subsequent honoring of Roman dead. Mourning began with funerary processions in which family members escorted the dead to the place of cremation. The cremated remains were then gathered by the family and brought to the place of burial. The dead were accompanied by mourners wearing masks or carrying busts which were then placed around the remains, but subsequently removed to the home. A series of rites were performed after the death of a family member, such as the sacrifice of a pig, to sanctify and officially denote the area of burial. Food was left to nourish the deceased and sometimes eaten by hungry mourners. Libations were poured into holes or point of entry to the grave. Surviving family members then ritually cleansed the home and took part in rituals of purification.

With respect to the frequency of post-funerary visits to the tomb site, Toynbee discusses several Roman festivals that focused solely on the dead or included elements

³⁹ J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*(London and Southampton: Thames and Hudson, 1971),63.

of commemoration as part of their ritual. A May/June festival, the *Rosalia* or *Rosaria* might have included the spreading of roses at tombs and grave sites. Similar to Elsner's likening of sarcophagi decoration to a perpetual performance on behalf of the dead, Toynbee points to paintings of roses on tomb walls and vaults as acts of perpetual offering.⁴⁰ Other festivals that focused on remembrance of the dead included the deceased's birthday, *dies natalis*, *Parentelia*, or *dies Parentales*, an official, annual, and multi-day commemoration that terminated with offerings brought to the dead on the day of *Feralia*.

All of these rituals underscore the interaction between the living and the places of the deceased. Since there were no doubt multiple occasions during which the living were obligated to visit and view the sarcophagi of their departed family or friends, we can speculate as to what meanings sarcophagi and their decoration held for viewers. At multiple times during the year, gifts made to the dead reinforced the offertory nature of visits to tomb sites and sarcophagi. These practices helped contribute to the picture, though still incomplete, of the importance that Romans assigned to sarcophagi as part of religious and cultural practice.

Early Christians were also buried in sarcophagi, and the funerary practices and rituals associated with Christian tombs were clearly indebted to Roman precedents. Although cremation seems eventually to have fallen out of fashion among Christians, there are early instances where cremated remains, rather than the bodies of the

⁴⁰ J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (London and Southampton: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 63-64.

deceased, were interred within sarcophagi. One of the earliest documented cases of Christian burial and veneration of the dead comes to us from Smyrna around the year 156. After the martyrdom and cremation of bishop and eventual Saint Polycarp, his followers:

took up his bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and deposited them in a suitable place. There gathering together, as we are able, with joy and gladness, the Lord will permit us to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom in commemoration of those who have already fought in the contest.⁴¹

This early account of relic gathering and veneration speaks to the need of the followers of Polycarp for a physical epicenter where spiritual and religious celebration of the Saint's life and martyrdom could take place, not unlike a traditional Roman tomb site. This was "the suitable place" where Polycarp's bones were deposited. The placement of the Saint's remains became a site of purpose, a place to gather as Christians and to celebrate in a community.

As Gregory Dix observed, feast days in the early church calendar were often associated with the birth or death of saints and martyrs. Indeed, St. Polycarp's feast was among the first official holy days established in the Christian calendar. Like numerous other saints, the date of Polycarp's martyrdom became an annual observance for early

⁴¹Derek Krueger, "The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium" In *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, by Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, Mann C. Griffith and James Robinson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 7.

Christians. Over time, the feast days of saints were added to a standardized Christian liturgical calendar. The earliest holy day celebrations conformed to regional and localized traditions of veneration and worship practiced at the grave site of the saint in question. Eventually, the annual rites observed at saints' tombs became more standardized and elaborate. Once a year, on the anniversary of a saint's birth or death, pilgrims traveled from afar to visit the saint's tomb. On the eve of the anniversary, those present held all night candlelit vigils, fasting and praying for purification. Sermons on the life of the saint were delivered to crowds who brought offerings, chanted and sang hymns, as accounts were read of the passion of the saint (the *passional*) and from the Holy Scriptures. This was the one occasion of the year in which the liturgy took place upon this site.⁴² As Dix noted, Christian holidays, such as those commemorating the life of the Virgin, were not added to the Christian calendar until much later. This was because the Virgin's Assumption into heaven left behind no bodily remains with which to mark or define a sacred site.⁴³ In other words, the observation of holy days was to some extent *dependent* upon the presence of bodily remains.

Just as the early Christian calendar developed around the feast days of locally and regionally venerated saints, early Christian geography of built public worship sites primarily followed the pattern of venerated saints and martyrs. According to Anne Marie Yasin, "As communities began to define Christian sacred landscapes

⁴² Alexander Minchev, *Early Christian Reliquaries from Bulgaria* (Varna:Stalker,2003),7.

⁴³ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*(London: Dacre Press, 1945),303-396.

architecturally and rhetorically, they frequently turned to saints.”⁴⁴ Evidence from as early as the second century suggests that places of Christian worship were synonymous with the place of a saint’s martyrdom. In other instances, as seems to have been the case with St. Polycarp, the site of worship was a “suitable place” to which the relics had been removed. Many of these sites were outside of the city walls of established urban centers like Rome. It was at these *extra muros* sites that the first Christian martyria were constructed. Rather than a choice meant to disassociate Christianity from centralized Roman pagan belief and practice, the location of the earliest Christian gravesites of saints underscored connections between the earthly and the divine. Christian geography and liturgical time was thus determined by associations with the physical remains of holy men and women.

The fact that the Roman sarcophagus configuration was employed for early Christian reliquaries like the UWM reliquary exemplifies an important continuity between Roman and early Christian culture. For Kurt Weitzmann, “the art of both cultures, the pagan and the Christian, ran parallel throughout these centuries, and indeed penetrated each other so thoroughly that they must be viewed against a common cultural background.”⁴⁵ Even the Christian honoring of saints and the attendant veneration of relics can be understood in terms of Roman civic life. As Gregory Dix observed, “The new *cultus* of the local martyrs of the past as the patrons of

⁴⁴ Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), 209.

⁴⁵ Kurt Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), 1.

their own cities and provinces enabled the church to give a Christian turn to the local patriotism and civic spirit which were still the healthiest elements in the decaying political life of the empire.”⁴⁶ Thus, the nod to traditional Roman funerary rituals signified by reliquary-sarcophagi helped to fulfill Christian desires and cultural imperatives ultimately based in Roman practice. To put the matter another way, the configuration of the reliquary sarcophagi suggested a need to fulfill the same “emotional needs” that Thomas associated with the architectonic forms of full-size sarcophagi. A more detailed discussion of early Christian relic culture will help to delineate those “emotional needs” with respect to objects like the UWM reliquary.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN CULTURE OF RELICS AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE BODY

Use of full-size sarcophagi by Christians and the creation of miniature, reliquary sarcophagi like the UWM example was coincident with the emergence of the Christian culture of venerating saints and the burgeoning Christian practice of fragmenting holy bodies. A brief overview of the rise of the culture regarding the veneration of saints will help to contextualize further the configuration and function of the UWM reliquary. A critical moment in this history was the legalization of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine in the year 313, legislation known as the Edict of Milan.

Constantine’s endorsement of Christianity facilitated and encouraged the practice of relic veneration. His use of bodily remains to formalize religious ritual and to

⁴⁶ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 333.

define sacred space is evident in his foundation of several important churches. In particular, Constantine's foundation of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople called to attention the growing importance of material artifacts—and specifically human remains—for the sanctification of Christian space. Constructed as Constantine's final resting place on earth, the Church of the Holy Apostles was, in effect, a reliquary writ large. In addition to the body of the emperor, the church was slated to house the bodies of those closest to Christ on earth, the twelve disciples, although this objective was never accomplished in full. By proximity and association to the disciples' remains, then, Constantine hoped to benefit from the many prayers that would be said there by pious Christians.⁴⁷ Elsner equates the hoped-for apostolic relics to architectural spolia: "sometime after the erection of the empty apostolic tombs... they began to be filled with a new kind of spolia whose significance as a model for medieval patterns of piety can hardly be overrated."⁴⁸ Elsner thus argues that relics, like spolia, contributed a sense of cultural history and sacred continuity to the new capital of Constantinople. Like spolia, relics granted the new capital a palpable connection to the places and persons of the Christian past.

Constantine's relocation of earthly remains of the disciples to his intended place of eternal rest affirms belief in the capacity of bodily relics to provide a link between

⁴⁷Vita Constantini IV.60 in Jas Elsner, "From the Culture of Spolia to the Cult of Relics: The Arch of Constantine and the Genesis of Late Antique Forms" *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. 68, 2000, 157. The emperor's intentions are not entirely clear; some argue that Constantine wished to present himself as the thirteenth apostle, others, as a centralized, Christ-like figure.

⁴⁸Jas Elsner, "From the Culture of Spolia to the Cult of Relics: The Arch of Constantine and the Genesis of Late Antique Forms" *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. 68, 2000, 158.

earth and heaven. Incorporating the relics of the saints into the Church of the Holy Apostles, as occurred in 357 and 358 with the relic translations of Saints Timothy, Andrew, and Luke, Constantine could implant a historic presence into a new space with a new purpose. Constantine brought relics from the Holy Land to connect Constantinople with Jerusalem and to connect the earthly present with the heavenly future.

Why did Christians, including Constantine, employ bodies (relics) to differentiate Christian spaces from pagan? An explanation is often sought for the willingness of early Christians to use remains of the dead for theological purposes. Perhaps bodily relics were, in their nature, an anti-authoritarian phenomenon. After all, the bodies of holy martyrs had been sundered by pagan, Roman authorities. By celebrating and centralizing defiled and dismembered bodies, the bodily suffering of saints could be inverted for soteriological purposes. Fragmentation would thus carry symbolic and sacrificial associations. The Christ-like parallels are obvious. Since eternal salvation could be found through the bodily suffering of Christ and the martyrs, the physical remnants of such holy persons became a unifying rather than a divisive or shameful force for the Christian community. Relics were thus symbols of solidarity, stimuli for spiritual reflection, and a call to action.

Caroline Walker-Bynum has done much to refine our understanding of the theological impulse behind the Christian fragmentation and veneration of bodies and attendant issues of church politics and memorial practice. According to Bynum, "Jerome and Vitricius had confronted bodies divided by the persecutors and hence had argued,

against the abusers, that God viewed his tortured and divided martyrs as if they were whole and already in heaven.”⁴⁹ The fragmentation of bodies was not only palatable, therefore, but proof of salvation. To the faithful, fragmented bodies were evidence of the inability of unsympathetic regimes to oppose the will of God.

The Christian inclination to cherish and venerate fragmented bodies therefore can be understood as an expression of a desire to achieve a heavenly afterlife by following in the steps of those who had achieved eternal life through their suffering on earth. Following in these footsteps was achieved through proximity to and veneration of bodily remains; physical contact with such remains allowed contact with the heavenly. Thus, Christianity, initially condemned by mainstream and dominant forces, turned to the minute, marginal, and mundane to express broader concepts of spiritual growth.

IV. RELICS, RELIQUARIES AND THE CREATION OF SACRED SPACE

Following Constantine’s legalization of Christianity relic culture became increasingly more complex. From the practice of the collection and physical division of sacred bodies arose highly formalized centers of worship and pilgrimage. A geography of holy sites founded upon the remains of saintly persons extended from Spain to Jerusalem. The vital role of relics and reliquaries in the larger scope of Christian culture is reflected in the doctrine of the early Church. For example, the prevalence of gatherings focused upon saintly remains was acknowledged and defended at the Local

⁴⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. (New York: Zone Books, 2011):180.

Council of Gangra (in present day Turkey) in 340 AD when Canon 20 decreed, "Whoever out of haughtiness, being disgusted, condemns the assemblies in honor of martyrs and the services performed there in their memory, let him be anathema."⁵⁰

It would seem that, by the fifth century, those places of worship where relics were kept were given primacy over sites lacking any remains of saints or martyrs. In 419 CE, for example, Canon 94 of the Council of Carthage declared that *extra muros* sites where rituals still occurred without the presence of relics should be destroyed:

*"Decreed is also the following: all altars built either in fields or in vineyards in memory of martyrs if no bodies or parts of relics are deposited in them should if possible be destroyed by local bishops; and if it is not possible because of popular disturbances, in such a case people should at least be instructed not to gather in these places. And those who think rightly should not superstitiously attach themselves where there is no body or relics of theirs or it has not been proved by a reliable ancient tradition that it used to be their dwelling, or property, or place of martyrdom. And those altars, which are situated wherever it be according to dreams and vain revelations of some people should be destroyed in every way."*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Todor Enchev, "The Belief in Martyrs and Relics in the Light of Church Canons." In *Early Christian Martyrs and Relics and Their Veneration in East and West*, 2003):44.

⁵¹ Todor Enchev, "The Belief in Martyrs and Relics in the Light of Church Canons." In *Early Christian Martyrs and Relics and Their Veneration in East and West*, 2003):45.

Clearly such sites were of concern to church authorities because they were unregulated. Their lack of relics seems to suggest problematic, superstitious, or even heretical beliefs. It is also worth noting that the term “altar” seems to serve as a metonym for “church”. In this decree, the formula is such: church equals altar equals relics. It is in such decrees that we find evidence for both the popularity and power of relics and a growing recognition of the function of saintly remains in the creation of legitimate, centralized sites of worship. By 787 CE, the church would actually mandate the presence of relics in churches.⁵²

Reliquaries in the form of sarcophagi like the UWM example represent the largest surviving type of reliquaries from the early Christian period. They were the physical repositories of relics that marked authorized spaces for saintly veneration and Christian worship. They thus resonate with the dictates of the decrees discussed above, and were no doubt used throughout Byzantium to demarcate legitimate holy spaces. Placement of reliquary sarcophagi within pilgrimage shrines and churches is in fact supported by archaeological evidence. As demonstrated by their discovery in excavations of early churches of the fifth and sixth centuries, reliquary sarcophagi were material articulations of the church’s intention to formalize both doctrine and the nature of those places where doctrine was observed.

⁵² Alexander Minchev, *Early Christian Reliquaries from Bulgaria* (Varna:Stalker,2003): 8.

V. MATERIAL AND FUNCTION OF RELIQUARY SARCOPHAGI

Based upon the discovery of pieces *in situ*, such as the extraordinary Varna find as well as numerous other Bulgarian examples, several scenarios can be described with respect to where reliquary sarcophagi were positioned and how they functioned generally within relic culture. These scenarios were best summarized by Alexander Minchev who discusses them in terms of accessibility. Thus, reliquary sarcophagi were either 1) inaccessible and invisible in a sealed space in or beneath an altar; 2) partially accessible or half hidden in a cave or crypt, accessed only during particular occasions or experienced alongside the tombs of the elite (either lay or religious); or 3) always accessible in the public area of a church or on a non-central altar.⁵³

Drawing upon Minchev's work, we might speculate as to how reliquary sarcophagi were understood and used in early Christian places of worship or pilgrimage. To this end a consideration of the material and form of reliquary sarcophagi is in order. The account of Polycarp's relics considered above is important to an understanding of the relationship between the unadorned, modest exterior of many of the reliquary sarcophagi and their relic contents. The fact that Polycarp's remains, which were "more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold," receive mention rather than the furnishings of his tomb illustrates the value placed on the physical remains themselves. The same sentiment is borne out by the absence of ornate carving for early reliquary sarcophagi. Instead, these objects rely on their material and configuration to

⁵³Alexander Minchev, *Early Christian Reliquaries from Bulgaria* (Varna:Stalker,2003):9.

extoll the importance of the relics within, much like the imperial sarcophagi considered above.

According to Minchev, “for Christians of the 4th – 6th c. AD it was not so important in what reliquaries they kept their relics but whose relics were there.” He cites the example of some relics of the apostle Thomas kept in a humble clay box, while those of a comparatively little known saint, Asklepia, were kept in a silver box.⁵⁴ Perhaps this disparity in material is not solely a matter of disregard for material, however, but a signifier of the development of reliquaries which are destined to become more ornate as the centuries progress. Also, as we have seen in study of the sarcophagi industry, the choice of material, such as limestone or marble, is often a regional function of markets and availability. We have also seen in the sarcophagus industry, the deliberate selection of material such as Prokonnesian marble, porphyry, or verde antico to confer special status as in both imperial sarcophagi examples from Istanbul.

VI. THE OFFERTORY FUNCTION OF THE UWM RELIQUARY SARCOPHAGUS: THE DEBT TO ROMAN FUNERARY PRACTICE AS EVIDENCED BY ANALAGOUS PIECES

Once again in our examination of this transition of form from sarcophagus to reliquary, it is useful to reference Edmund Thomas’s point regarding the “emotional needs” as fulfilled by sarcophagi. In the same way, reliquaries, in their miniaturized sarcophagus form served as a visual mnemonic, helping to meet the spiritual and

⁵⁴ Alexander Minchev, *Early Christian Reliquaries from Bulgaria* (Varna:Stalker,2003):13.

emotional needs attending the veneration of relics. To continue to explore what those needs were, we look back to early descriptions of relic practice and look for areas of overlap between Roman funereal use of sarcophagi and Christian reliquary use of sarcophagi. Two parallel practices are found most obviously in the form of sarcophagi: 1) the ritual of libations and 2) the ritual of offerings.

Reliquary sarcophagi, such as the UWM piece, can be understood as offertory pieces. The offertory nature of reliquary sarcophagi is illustrated with one of our examples at the Met. The ritualistic creation of secondary relics is identified by the hole in the reliquary created to receive oil, cloth (*brandea*) or water (**Figure 18**). In some examples of reliquaries, a secondary hole in the base of the container creates an obvious exit point for the oil or water that has been sanctified by contact with the primary relic in the box.⁵⁵ Concomitant with the Christian desire to venerate relics was the impulse to possess them, to take a piece of the holy site or body back home. Oils and waters collected after having been in contact with primary relics, were applied to cloths (*brandea*) or bottled in ampullae and distributed as souvenirs. Such secondary relics functioned as reminders of a visit to a holy place as well as sources of prophylactic powers for the owner. Physical health and spiritual well-being in this life and the next were aided by the possession of such “contact” relics.⁵⁶ Reliquary sarcophagi, such as

⁵⁵ Holger Klein, "Reliquary Sarcophagus with Libation Opening." In *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, by Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, James Robinson eds. Martina Bagnoli. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010):32.

⁵⁶ Holger Klein, "Reliquary Sarcophagus with Libation Opening." In *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, by Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, James Robinson eds. Martina Bagnoli, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010):32.

the second example from the Met discussed above, facilitated the creation of such secondary relics with openings to receive oils and cloth (**Figure 18**).

In the reliquary sarcophagus at the Met, the additional second opening near the bottom does not exist (**Figure 18**). The way in which contact or secondary relics could have been created then, is through the rod or cloth inserted and removed from the top opening. In this example at the Met, it would seem that lacking a second hole for liquids to exit, the oil that was most likely added would have pooled in the reliquary in a style similar to that of offering libations, in addition to being a mechanism for creation of secondary relics. Therefore, in this particular example the application of liquids to primary relics held within sarcophagi not only descended from the act of offering libations to the deceased, but still functioned in that capacity as an act of veneration of the relics.⁵⁷ Instead of replacing the act of proffering nourishment to the dead, the reliquary with its shape of a funereal sarcophagi, offered another variation on libation ritual. The reliquary form of the sarcophagus provided continuity with the practice of libations for the dead and built upon associations of sustenance given to the deceased. The spiritual benefits for the pilgrim derived not only from what the faithful took away from the relic, but also from what the believer came to offer. Because the offering of libations to the deceased was culturally understood in a funerary context, the sarcophagus form of the reliquary coaxed out this particular nuance of ritual, finessing it from conventional Roman social custom to early Christian practice. With some reliquary

⁵⁷ Holger Klein, "Reliquary Sarcophagus with Libation Opening." In *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, by Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, James Robinson eds. Martina Bagnoli. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010):32.

sarcophagi, such as the Varna example, the configuration at the top has diminished into a swale that is no longer an actual opening (**Figure 20**). With other reliquaries, such as the UWM reliquary, there is no opening, nor even a hint of one. Despite the absence of an opening, the sarcophagus shape alone implies use for Roman burial and along with the sarcophagus shape comes the suggestion of Roman funeral rites and practice. I argue that the shape of the UWM reliquary sarcophagus is still an indication, at least in part, of associations with offerings left for the dead in a Roman funerary context.

Following is additional evidence for the ability of reliquary sarcophagi like the UWM piece to facilitate transition between the late Roman and the early Christian. We have two examples of votive inscriptions, again emphasizing the offertory nature of reliquary sarcophagi inherited from Roman funerary tradition.

An inscription in sandstone found near the St. John reliquary sarcophagus provides an excellent opportunity to discover how the piece functioned within its setting (**Figure 7**). A Byzantine Greek dedication from the donor is inscribed on the lid, “In fulfillment of a vow of bishop John.”⁵⁸ The occasion of the gift seems to be either the hope for a miracle or cure or the acknowledgment of such an event already having taken place. The reliquary was then placed at a church or shrine, presumably by the faithful person who venerated the holy person whose relics were contained in the sarcophagus shaped box.⁵⁹ Similar to the lid opening on the first Met example, the

⁵⁸ Translation provided by Prof. Derek Counts, Dr. Mark Leson, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art “Reliquary in the Shape of a Sarcophagus”. Accessed October 5, 2011. www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/170014088.

⁵⁹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art “Reliquary in the Shape of a Sarcophagus”. Accessed October 5, 2011. www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/170014088.

inscription on this piece is evidence for the votive use that accompanied relics in early Christianity. The sarcophagus form of the reliquary helped facilitate the Roman practice of funerary votive offerings and translated it into early Christian terms regarding veneration of relics, all of which gives us great insight into how and why the UWM reliquary may have been used.

Similar evidence is supplied by an inscription found in conjunction with the most recent reliquary sarcophagus discovery in Bulgaria. The alabaster piece recently found on St. John in 2010 was uncovered near a small sandstone box also bearing an inscription to a saint, John the Baptist, whose remains are purported to be in the alabaster reliquary sarcophagus. The dedication on the sandstone box implores, “God, save your servant Thomas. To St. John. June 24 **(Figure 3)**.”⁶⁰ The 24th of June is celebrated as the feast day of St. John the Baptist, providing further corroborative evidence that the site from which the pieces were excavated was indeed once a site of importance associated with John the Baptist. The inscription is further evidence that pieces were given in veneration as votive offerings to saints who were believed to be conduits of healing and salvation.

With these two specific examples of inscriptions accompanying reliquary sarcophagi, I would like to draw attention to a (not so?) subtle theological transition that I believe is also facilitated by the sarcophagus form. A factor that distinguished early Christians, in fact sometimes leading to their persecution and death, was their

⁶⁰ Simon Hooper, “Are These the Bones of John the Baptist?,” CNN World. Accessed December 12, 2011. www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/08/12/bulgaria.john.baptist.relics/index.html.

refusal to provide (animal) sacrifice as part of pagan worship.⁶¹ But the human desire - to make offerings in hopes of blessings, favors received in return – remained. In the absence of sacrifice to pagan gods, the impulse of offering and worship found partial voice in the veneration of Christian saints and martyrs, especially because of the sacrificial nature of the lives of holy men and women. The difference between pagan and Christian devotion therefore represents a transference of sacrifice from animal to human and from unwilling sacrifice (animal) to a sacrificee demonstrating volition (saints and martyrs). The human impulse to appeal for intercession and make votive offering to deities, is therefore transferred from the worship of pagan gods to the veneration of saints. This transfer of focus can be defended from accusations of impropriety by conflating itself with memorial practices accepted by pagans and Christians alike – the practices of burial ritual. While its miniaturization suggest fragmentation, the sarcophagus form of the reliquary emphasizes the funereal.

Sarcophagi and reliquary sarcophagi like the UWM piece were a place where memory was shaped and performed. This is indicated in part by their form, material, decoration, and function. While reliquaries in the shape of sarcophagi rely heavily on preceding and concurrent use of full size burial sarcophagi for context, these type of reliquaries also look to the future to fulfill requirements as necessitated by new and emerging Christian practices. Reliquary sarcophagi establish a form of invention as evidenced by at least two observations 1) the reduction of scale of full size sarcophagi -

⁶¹ Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*(Downers Grove:InterVarsity Press, 2010),16-17

or the miniaturization of form and 2) the addition of carvings on all four sides. Both of these innovations suggest usage that incorporates and builds upon funerary practice, but these alterations also indicate significant differences in usage between burial sarcophagi and reliquaries shaped like sarcophagi. The object becomes smaller, more portable, more easily transferred and suggests viewership if not in-the-round, than at least on multiple sides as was not always the case with the predominantly one-sidedness of full size burial sarcophagi. An argument for viewership in the round can be made by examining a relic translation ceremony as depicted on the Trier Ivory, which features a reliquary not unlike the UWM piece.

VII. PORTABILITY AND FOUR-SIDED DECORATION OF THE UWM RELIQUARY: RITUAL EVIDENCE AS SUGGESTED BY TRANSLATION CEREMONIES

So far we have seen that reliquary sarcophagi like the UWM reliquary engaged sarcophagus form, drawing upon funereal practices and memorial rituals, in order to facilitate veneration of saints and martyrs. We have identified the reliquary's performative use within early Byzantine churches to designate sacred space. Additionally, the four-sided nature of the UWM reliquary suggests viewership in the round, and its small size suggests portability and transfer. Aside from ritualistic use by congregations within a church space on occasions where viewers on multiple sides of the piece may have experienced the reliquary in motion, there is also indication that sarcophagi-shaped reliquaries passed through crowds assembled for the celebratory transfer of relics between sacred spaces. These very public ceremonies have witness in

numerous accounts of translation ceremonies, as well as the visual account provided by the Trier Ivory.

The transport of reliquaries was most likely done with great pomp and ceremony, as is attested to by both written and artistic tradition. For visual evidence, we turn to the Trier Ivory, now in the cathedral treasury at Trier (**Figure 21**). The relic translation, as portrayed on the ivory, is based on an imperial Roman adventus ceremony of emperors who were triumphantly received by exuberant citizens at the city gates, followed by more formalized, ritualistic processing through city streets to a destination such as a triumphal arch, or in the case of a relic translation, a church. The Roman imperial tradition has its biblical parallel in the story of Christ's triumphant return to Jerusalem upon a donkey, greeted by the faithful who waved and prepared the streets with palm branches – the foundation for the Christian celebration of Palm Sunday.

The fifth century Trier Ivory, a panel itself once part of a reliquary box, has alternately been interpreted as depicting the relic translation of the Forty Martyrs, St. Stephen, Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, or relics of the True Cross.⁶² It is of interest to us for the gabled reliquary held by two ecclesiastic officials in a horse drawn wagon as it generally resembles the form of the Byzantine reliquaries we have examined

⁶²Holger A. Klein, *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, Edited by Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann and James Robinson. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 38. Kenneth G. Holum and Gary Vikan, "The Trier Ivory, "Adventus" Ceremonial and the Relics of St. Stephen." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 33 113, 115-133. Suzanne Spain, "The Translation of Relics Ivory, Trier." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 31, 1977: 279-30

thus far. In appearance it is not entirely unlike the UWM reliquary (**Figure 22**) . In most of the research leading to the multiple theories as to which relic translation ceremony is depicted, there seems to be little expressed concern by scholars regarding the seemingly simplistic style of the reliquary in contrast with the elaboration of the surrounding proceedings. Is scholarly silence on the reliquary somehow related to the large inventory of known examples of reliquary sarcophagi throughout the Mediterranean and the former Byzantine empire?

In one of the few specific remarks on the reliquary in the Trier Ivory, Spain argues that the reliquary in the scene may compare to a much later tenth-century manuscript depicting the Ark of the Covenant. Spain promotes the idea of the Trier Ivory as a representation of True Cross relic translation, but admits, “there was no pictorial tradition for the primary reliquary of the True Cross, and secondary reliquaries of the Cross are numerous and diverse in form.”⁶³ As noted above, other than Spain’s observations, there is generally very little mention of the box at all except to mention its presence. This may speak to the accepted anonymity of these pieces and the ability of reliquary sarcophagi to be non-specific as to contents – what relics were inside – as well as being non-specific to context – where they would eventually reside. This keeps the door relatively wide open for the kind of relic the UWM reliquary may have held as well as the Byzantine location in which it most likely was used.

⁶³ Suzanne Spain, "The Translation of Relics Ivory, Trier." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1977, Vol. 31:301.

Returning to the scene on the Trier Ivory panel, we see that the reliquary is held by church bishops in a procession that is led by imperial courtiers carrying candles while being relayed past a watchful crowd bearing censers. Near the destination of the newly built church – so new that builders are still atop the structure affixing tiles and attending to windows – the emperor and empress await, dressed in their ceremonial finest.⁶⁴ In contrast to all this pomp and display is the seemingly undecorated reliquary box – the relics themselves obscured from view by the container. The focus of the Trier Ivory seems to rest on the process of translation and its related performative aspects – the implied smell of incense and candles, the glitter of imperial jewels, the chanting of verse and the singing of hymns. The space portrayed on the ivory is packed with figures, suggesting the significance of the moment through movement, energy and intent. The builders of the basilica seem to be preparing the church for this exact instant when the emperor and empress assemble and the much-awaited, much-planned-for relics arrive. We witness the culmination of events as the relics appear, as they apparently have just passed beneath an architectural arch that has sometimes been identified as the Chalke gate of Constantine's imperial palace.⁶⁵

Once brought inside the church, which appears to the right of the scene, the reliquary will be associated with a different ritualistic performance – no longer a triumphant *adventus* ceremony, but the repeated performative act of liturgy. The altar

⁶⁴ Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schmidt; Trier Cathedral Treasury, Accessed November 17, 2011. www.dominformation.de/internet-en/nav/337/3377062d-4947-8e01-54ab-d11d8bc1d2b3.htm.

⁶⁵ Kenneth G. Holum and Gary Vikan, "The Trier Ivory, "Adventus" Ceremonial and the Relics of St. Stephen." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 33, 1979: 113, 115-133.

plays a central role, and based on archaeological evidence from the region, the reliquary sarcophagus will most likely be near, or beneath that altar. The burial or partial obscurity of the sarcophagus connotes that it is not the actual seeing of the reliquary that is important but knowledge of the relic's presence that is desirable. The opaqueness of the box reinforces the lack of necessity of seeing the relic within. The relic's powers are understood and transmitted through ceremony instead, both processional and liturgical.

Although scholars are typically in disagreement regarding which relic translation is portrayed on the Trier Ivory – and therefore which relics are contained in the gabled reliquary, we can agree that relic translations were a pervasive enough part of culture to have merited documentation on multiple occasions. Numerous relic translations are recorded in historical chronicles. These include the relic translation of St. Babylas from Antioch to Daphne under Caesar Gallus in 351 AD; translation of relics of St. Timothy to Holy Apostles in Constantinople in 356; translation of the relics of Saints Andrew and Luke to Holy Apostles in Constantinople in 357 AD; the translation of head of St. John the Baptist to Constantinople by Theodosius in 392 AD; the translation of relics of Zachariah (father of John the Baptist) to Constantinople in 415 AD; the translation of St. Stephen to Constantinople by Empress Pulcheria and Emperor Theodosios II in 421 AD, the translation of relics of the True Cross to Jerusalem in 630 AD, and the translation of relics of the True Cross to Constantinople in 638 AD.⁶⁶ These high profile ceremonies,

⁶⁶ Suzanne Spain, "The Translation of Relics Ivory, Trier." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vo. 31, 1977:302.

many of which took place in Byzantium, the new Rome of the Constantinian empire, may have influenced the production of the UWM reliquary which has as its closest analogues, reliquaries from this region and this same time period. The imperial nature of the translation ceremony on the Trier Ivory may speak to the form of reliquaries like the UWM piece. As with the imperial sarcophagus from Church of the Holy Apostles, carving is kept to a minimum. The sanctity of the UWM reliquary, as with these well-known imperial examples of piety: one in a relic translation ceremony and another in an imperial burial, is expressed through form, material, and ritual rather than elaborate decorative carving.

VIII. THE SACRIFICIAL NATURE OF RELICS: WHY THE UWM RELIQUARY SARCOPHAGUS FORM FACILITATES THE TRANSITION FROM PAGAN TO CHRISTIAN

So far we have seen that reliquary sarcophagi are heavily informed by Roman culture. Their form relies upon Roman sarcophagi used by pagans and Christians alike for burial purposes. Reliquary sarcophagi are ritually processed within *adventus* ceremonies based on their imperial prototypes. Reliquary sarcophagi contain or are buried adjacent to inscriptions attesting to the offertory nature of their relic contents. Their proximity to the altar in churches hearkens back to pagan use of altars for offerings and sacrifice, but the sarcophagus form allows it to be a repository for memory and memorial practice, converting pagan practice to the uniquely Christian. In conclusion to the other arguments put forth in this paper, I propose that the reliquary sarcophagus functions to transfer human desire for divine offertory from pagan to Christian. The sarcophagus form allows relics to perform as sacrifice in a way that could

be found acceptable to Christians who simultaneously borrowed from Roman pagan culture, yet wanted to carve a new landscape that was distinctively Christian.

Relics reinforce the sacrificial nature of Christianity. The concept of bodily sacrifice and blood shed at the hands of ruling authorities is a trope in Judeo-Christian literary traditions ranging from Maccabees to Eusebius, Augustine and Jerome, to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The theme is thus: God's faithful refuse to comply with pagan rituals; the faithful suffer bodily torture, fragmentation, and death at the hands of the authorities; the martyr, through their bodily testimony, has secured their place in the heavenly afterlife and serves as an example for other faithful who contest the political authority over religious practice. We find in 2 Maccabees, Chapter 7 a story that anticipates Christian martyrial sacrifice,

"seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges ... to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law.... he gave the order to cut out the tongue of the one who had spoken for the others, to scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of his brothers and his mother looked on...the brothers and the mother encouraged one another to die nobly, with these words: "The Lord God is looking on and truly has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song, when he openly bore witness, saying, 'And God will have compassion on his servants.'"...With his last breath he said: "Your accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to live again forever, because we are dying for his laws." ⁶⁷

The connection between human religious sacrifice, martyrdom, and reliquary sarcophagi is reinforced by reliquary sarcophagi's placement beneath or near the altar of a church. The altar serves as the centerpiece of worship with the sacrificial Eucharist

⁶⁷ <http://origin.usccb.org/bible/2maccabees/7/>.

performed there featuring as the core of Christian worship. The placement of reliquary sarcophagi near or under the altar underscores the sacrificial nature of relics. As we have seen previously with Canon 94, altar, church, and relics were all inter-reliant.

Jensen has noted an interdependence between the blood shed of martyrs and the Christian rituals that took place at the altar. She quotes Augustine in his explanation of the site at which the veneration of St. Cyprian took place, "It's called Cyprian's table, not because it was a place at which Cyprian ate, but because it was there that he offered, and by his sacrifice, he prepared this table not as one on which to be eat or be fed, but as one for a sacrifice to God."⁶⁸

Jensen also cites Jerome in his description of sacrifices offered by the bishop of Rome "to the Lord over the bodies of Peter and Paul, judging both of their tombs worthy to be Christ's altars."⁶⁹ Jensen goes on to observe the nature of the relationship between relics and altars and between shrines and Eucharistic assemblies by commenting, "the initial direction was from tomb to altar.....that direction began to be reversed and relics began to move into churches....this practice eventually blurred the distinction between martyria and churches that were purpose-built for regular community worship. Eventually pilgrims no longer needed to go to the tombs or cemeteries, since the martyrs (or some of their corporeal remains) had come to them."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Robin M. Jensen, "Saints' Relics and the Consecration of Church Buildings in Rome."n.d.:5.

⁶⁹ Robin M. Jensen, "Saints' Relics and the Consecration of Church Buildings in Rome."n.d.:5.

⁷⁰ Robin M. Jensen, "Saints' Relics and the Consecration of Church Buildings in Rome."n.d.:7.

Even the non-martyred saints, whose bodies were eventually fragmented for relics, still have lives nuanced with sacrifice even though they may not have been called upon to die for their faith. The sacrificial connotations with ascetic men and women are most obvious. In the fifth century, the lifestyles of St. Symeon the Stylite and other ascetic saints became objects of pilgrimage as they embraced solitary desert existence, eschewing the relative comforts of contemporary communal living. They were hailed for their piety and for the sacrifice inherent in the detachment of self from earthly pleasures, as Derek Krueger calls it, “living a sort of ‘*daily martyrdom*’.”⁷¹ In later time periods, with the materially wealthy, as in the case of some regal or aristocratic saints who some themselves following in a tradition of self-denial, the idea of earthly sacrifice was also implicit. By confessing faith, they chose an alternate life to the one of security and luxury that they would have led without spiritual inspiration. Their choice to embrace an existence dedicated to Christ transformed them into someone else. They have set aside, sacrificed, the non-Christian version of themselves to take up a life in Christ. This ability to sacrifice is manifest in both body and soul. Their eternal life with God has been attained through the strength of their actions and bodily fortitude and is rewarded through the life of the soul.

Dix cites an underlying philosophy to the acknowledgement of both body and soul as essential to worship in what he terms a “ceremonious conception of worship.”

⁷¹ Derek Krueger, “The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium.” In *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, by Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, Mann C. Griffith and James Robinson. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010):8.

He explains that “the foundation(al) principle is that worship as such is not a purely intellectual and affective exercise, but one in which the whole man – body as well as soul, his aesthetic and volitional as well as his intellectual powers – must take full part. It regards worship as an ‘act’ just as much as an ‘experience’.”⁷² Expanding on this Dixian theoretical approach, early Christianity may have embraced the body while at the same time superseding it. The body is the vessel through which spiritual fulfillment is achieved. By extension then, bodily remains represent the point of departure for the spiritual. It is impossible to disentangle the tangible from the spiritual – one leads to the other. Relics are a testament to eternal salvation of the soul via the physical.

Therefore this duality present in sacrifice also resides in the relics. The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice asked of every Christian are inherent in relics of holy men and women. The Christian viewer of relics is reminded of the sacrifices they must make in pursuit of eternal life. The placement of relics in a reliquary sarcophagus like the UWM piece, especially when placed near the altar used for repeated performance of Eucharistic sacrifice, accentuates the relics connections with death, sacrifice, and eternal salvation.

⁷² Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. (London: Dacre Press, 1945):312.

IX. CONCLUSION: FROM BODY TO FRAGMENT, PAGAN TO CHRISTIAN, ROME TO BYZANTIUM - THE TRANSITIONARY NATURE OF THE UWM RELIQUARY

The UWM Reliquary is above all, a piece emblematic of transition: transition between the pagan and Christian; transition between Rome and Constantinople; transition between spontaneous Christian veneration and systematized worship; transition between death and the after-life.

The piece is made in a style that imitates and miniaturizes a full size adult human burial sarcophagus, with large sarcophagi themselves architectural reductions of classical buildings. The outward form of the reliquary sarcophagus mimics a large scale human burial device, and therefore communicates not only death but interment. Its smallness suggests containment of human remains, but in fragmented and reduced form. The opacity of the stone only allows one to infer what its actual contents are. The sarcophagus form of the reliquary encourages viewers to transfer reverence accorded the dead to the relics of the martyr/saint whose fragment lies within.

With the sarcophagus form suggesting death and the grave, reliquary sarcophagi imply burial. Above I discussed the various forms of burial that early miniature reliquary sarcophagi took; beneath floors and altars and in crypts. As Christianity itself is a religion made relevant through the death and resurrection, so does the sarcophagus shape speak to the new life after one on earth: the grave literally serving as point of departure for the heavenly after-life. The sarcophagus style represents an important

early Christian theology not only of triumph over death, but triumph *through* death by sacrifice.

As we have seen, reliquaries like the UWM piece take their cue from late Roman and early Christian burial practices. The contents are obscured from sight. The sarcophagus form communicates the status of its holdings- what is inside is of the body and no longer alive. The size of the reliquary sarcophagus, miniaturized, tells the viewer that the body is no longer whole: only a fragment could fit within this small container. While small sarcophagi were created for children, the reliquary sarcophagus no longer conveys human proportions. And unlike ossuaries which were used to downsize human forms, the reliquary sarcophagus is even too small to be used for human reburial, as the largest of human bones or skulls would not fit into a box of these proportions.

The portability of the UWM reliquary sarcophagus suggests movement. It is small and light enough to travel distances or be carried processionally within a church. It may have originated somewhere nearby or possibly it travelled great distances. It may have been ceremoniously received with fanfare or perhaps quietly buried under more muted circumstances.

The UWM reliquary sarcophagus is intended to house the dead, as were large sarcophagi. The gabled roof form is itself a reference to Roman architecture where homes, temples, and government buildings shared similar rooflines and corner peaks, or acroteria. The sarcophagi architecture of death and burial is simultaneously the

architecture of life, and the UWM reliquary sarcophagus houses both the vocabulary of this world and the next.

**TABLE 1: IMPORTANT DATES THAT INFORM THE CREATION, USE, TRANSFER AND
DISCUSSION OF THE UWM RELIQUARY SARCOPHAGUS**

32 AD: Roman execution device of cross employed to put Christ to death – foundational event for cross imagery

First Century: Persecution of Christ's immediate followers – death imagery incorporated into Christian thought

First through Fourth Centuries: Persecution of early adopters of Christianity – aristocratic bone gatherers possess bones, provide for their burial on private grounds, sites become sacred

Second century AD: Use of full size burial sarcophagi proliferate as bodily inhumation supersedes cremation

Fourth Century: Earliest possible date of the UWM reliquary

313: Edict of Milan Persecution of Christians ends under Constantine. Symbol of cross gradually joins (supersedes?) earlier Christina imagery of fish, chi rho, lamb, shepherd, Jonah, furnaces, symbolism

325: First Council of Nicaea

330: Constantinople becomes the new capital

337: Death of Constantine

340: Local Council of Gangra (in present day Turkey) Canon 20 condones assemblies around sites related to martyrs

351: relics of St. Babylas translated from Antioch to Daphne under Caesar Gallus

356: Translation of relics of St. Timothy to Holy Apostles in Constantinople

357: Translation of relics for Saints Andrew and Luke to Holy Apostles in Constantinople

370: Consecration of Holy Apostles in Constantinople

386: Edict of Maximus Valentinian, and Theodosius issued at Constantinople to praetorian prefect of Italy, Illyricum and Africa declaring that it was unlawful to move, dissect, or market bodies of martyrs

392: Translation of head of St. John the Baptist to Constantinople by Theodosius

415: Translation of relics of Zachariah (father of John the Baptist) to Constantinople

419: Issued at the Council of Carthage in 419 AD, Canon 94 declaring presence of relics constitutes valid sites of veneration and worship

421: Translation of St. Stephen to Constantinople by Empress Pulcheria and Emperor Theodosios II

c. 440: Period of Christian Ascetics – Syrian saints like Simon Stylite acknowledged during their lifetime to be holy and merited pilgrimages from practicing Christians, confirming practices

550: Constantine's Church of the Holy Apostles rebuilt and reconsecrated under Justinian including placement of relics of Constantine and the three apostles, confirming importance of bodily relics

591-592: Translation of relics of St. Sebastian and St. Agatha in Rome

End of Sixth Century: Latest possible date of UWM reliquary sarcophagus creation

1919: Discovery of Varna reliquary trio – high profile reliquary sarcophagus discovery that include precious materials

1985: Reliquary sarcophagus gifted to UWM by Frederick Van Dusen Rogers

2010, 2011: *Treasures of Heaven* features similar reliquary sarcophagi in exhibit and accompanying communication materials, website, catalogue

2010: Discovery of John the Baptist reliquary in Bulgaria



FIGURE 1: Site of fifth/sixth century church on St. John, Bulgaria where a reliquary sarcophagus was excavated in 2010.



FIGURE 2: Archaeologist Kazimir Popkonstantinov cleans the reliquary sarcophagus after excavation.



FIGURE 3: The sandstone box found near the reliquary sarcophagus on St. John bearing the inscription, "God, save your servant Thomas. To St. John. June 24."



FIGURE 4: The relics inside the St. John reliquary sarcophagus.



FIGURE 5: The UWM marble reliquary sarcophagus with four incised crosses.



FIGURE 6: Alternate view, UWM reliquary sarcophagus.



FIGURE 7: Alternate view, UWM reliquary sarcophagus.



FIGURE 8: Inside view of UWM reliquary sarcophagus.



FIGURE 9: Alternate view of inside and lid of reliquary sarcophagus.



FIGURE 10: Detail, UWM reliquary sarcophagus, magnified view of incised cross



FIGURE 11: Jewish sarcophagus.



FIGURE 12: Grave (loculus) slab depicting a sculptor at work creating a lion's head sarcophagus



FIGURE 13: Roughed out garland and plain-sided sarcophagi at Prokonnesus

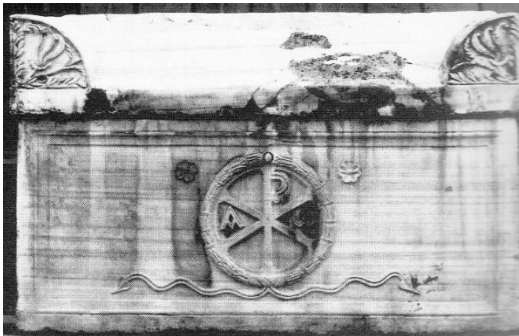


FIGURE 14: Sarcophagus, Istanbul Archaeological Museum

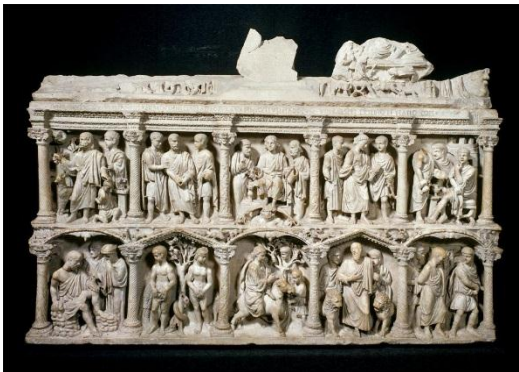


FIGURE 15: Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus



FIGURE 16: Imperial porphyry sarcophagus from Church of the Holy Apostles now at Hagia Eirene

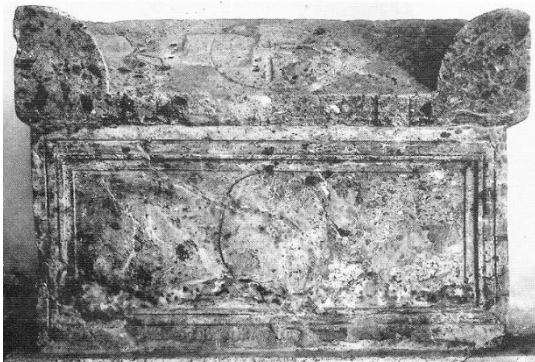


FIGURE 17: Imperial sarcophagus of verde antico at Hagia Sophia



FIGURE 18: Reliquary sarcophagus with hole for libations, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Byzantine, 400-600 AD



FIGURE 19: Reliquary sarcophagus, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Byzantine,



FIGURE 20: Nesting reliquaries from Varna



FIGURE 21: Trier ivory panel depicting relic translation



FIGURE 22: Detail of Trier ivory reliquary

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