# Searching for Evidence in Late Antique Visual and Material Studies

Klára Doležalová, Ivan Foletti

The concept of evidence in art history – especially concerning the fourteenth century onward – involves a series of tools specific to the field, such as comprehensive formal analysis. The more recent the epochs and monuments being studied, the greater the number of external pieces of evidence, such as archival documents, directly linked to cultural production. These provide additional information on the social background, intentions, perceptions, and the popularity of artists and their works. The figure of a work of art's creator – the *factor* and later the artist – can thus be viewed and studied from multiple perspectives, since his own thoughts and ideas, as well as the reception of his work by contemporary audiences, can be taken into account.

Art historians dealing with Late Antique material and visual culture usually have virtually none of this basic evidence. Instead, they face several fundamental limits in their research: first of all, the issue of the originality of the object, which is sometimes preserved only in decontextualised fragments or heavily reworked throughout the centuries. Another issue is the near inexistence of written sources related to physical monuments, apart from inscriptions on the monuments themselves and of the very problematic tradition of the *ekphrasis* – texts having mainly literary and poetic function which can be only hardly regarded as reliable description of artistic monuments. Naturally, the names of the *artifex* and his workshop are almost always absent (Kessler 2004, 45-64; Castelnuovo 2004). In terms of patronage, the situation is slightly more clear – bishops, emperors, or consuls are sometimes explicitly mentioned or 'present' on the objects. However, we usually have only very little information about them, and their role in the conception and creation of the work of art is oftentimes hard to determine.
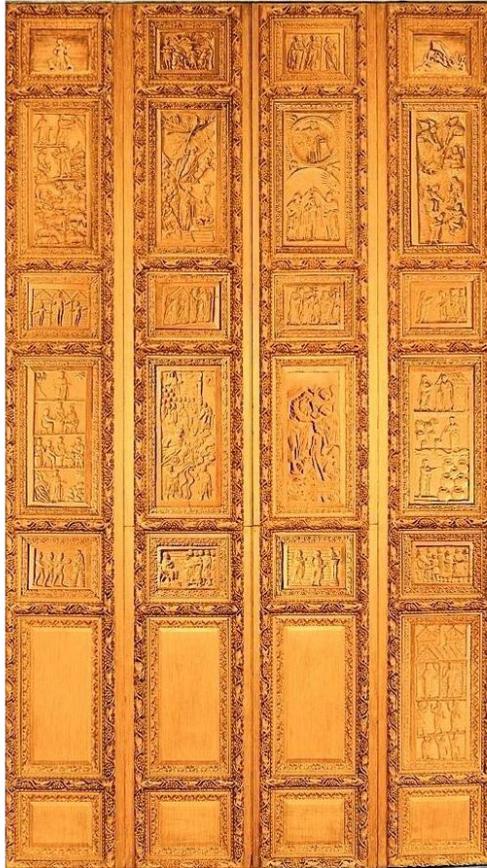
1 | Reconstruction of the original setting of wooden cypress doors, *c.*422–432, Rome, Basilica of Santa Sabina (© Ivan Foletti, Petr Vronský).

In some cases, dating the object is nearly impossible using formal analysis – an indicative example could be the church of Castel Seprio. Dated to somewhere between the sixth and tenth centuries based on its formal features, its true chronology was determined only through dendrochronology and C-14 analysis (Brogiolo *et al.* 2014). Another major issue in the field is the extremely limited number of surviving monuments and objects. Even being optimistic, only a small fraction of objects and monuments have survived. Thus, the issue of representativity itself must be revisited regularly. Last but not least, we cannot forget the limitations of previous research and the history of the field itself, which is still deeply rooted in sixteenth-century Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Throughout the centuries, catholic, protestant, marxist, neoliberal, and

multicultural concepts have been projected onto the study of cultural heritage (on the history of art history, see the recent overviews by Passini 2017; Wood 2019).

In a panorama as complex as this, the issue of evidence is turning into a question of the very purpose of scholarly inquiries. In some cases, the first aspect investigated is dating, in others, function, and still other objects are analyzed from the perspective of sponsorship or perception. Each of these issues under investigation requires a different approach. Of course, in most cases, the inquiry progresses gradually, step by step, by collecting and combining evidence on several levels. Any scholarly work in the field of medieval art history could then be compared to a sort of criminal investigation, dealing with very complex 'crimes', in which a single clue is almost never conclusive. We are forced to gather tiny bits of evidence from a wide range of indications to depict the 'crime scene' to the greatest extent possible.

In the following pages, we would like to illustrate the complexity that is searching for evidence in the Late Antique world, and to offer a few indicative examples we have come across in our research careers. We will begin with crucial pieces of evidence that provide valuable information on the question of dating, and then proceed to methods for determining the objects' functions. We will then attempt to understand methods used to find evidence to ascertain patronage, and will conclude with a few final remarks dedicated to the notion of bodily experience in front of works of art. Before we begin, we would like to once again emphasize the importance of epistemological reflection, mentioned above, in our field. Indeed, before starting any serious inquiry, one should ask why the monuments and objects under investigation were considered relevant in the past, why we consider them worthy of our attention today, and what the role of past and present historicity is in their understanding. In other words, we believe that any research into Late Antique and early medieval art history should be preceded by historiographical reflection.

Dating: From Text to Visual Evidence and Archaeometric Analysis
The wooden cypress doors preserved in the narthex of the Basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome provide an illustrative example of evidence in dating (Fig. 1). As early as the sixteenth century, the dating of this monumental

carved object was correlated to a similarly monumental inscription on the basilica's counter façade (Ugonio 1588, 8; Kondakov 1877; Berthier 1892; Wiegand 1900; Strzygowski 1893; Darsy 1957; Jeremias 1980; Spieser 1991; Foletti, Gianandrea 2015; Leardi 2006). The inscription mentions a patron, a certain Peter from Illyricum, as well as the acting bishop of Rome, Celestine. The latter has been identified as Pope Celestine I, who occupied the seat of Rome from 422 to 432. There is, however, no direct connection between the door and the inscription, aside from the fact that the former fits perfectly into the original marble frame. The door has been examined by art historians using formal analysis, revealing at least two very different 'styles'. The first belongs to a visual pattern common in Rome at the time and can thus be dated to the beginning of the fifth century, and the second has many 'Hellenistic' features, which have been considered a later, possibly Early Modern addition (Kondakov 1877, 372). Subsequently, however, it was determined that these two different styles must have coexisted in early fifth-century Rome, and their inclusion in a single object should be considered an element of visual rhetoric (Venturi 1901, 476; Foletti, Gianandrea 2015, 137-152). This reflection was partly speculative – too few objects survive from early fifth-century Rome. However, in a collaborative project involving specialists in wood analysis, the doors were subjected to a series of tests, combining dendrochronological data with C-14 analysis (Foletti *et al.* 2019). The results of this project proved, with considerable precision, that the previous hypotheses were actually true. The wooden panels belong to the early decades of the fifth century, the years of the basilica's construction, during the bishopric of Celestine I (422–432) (Gori 2000).

Another example is provided by the mosaic portrait of the Emperor Justinian on the western façade of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. This mosaic shows the bust of a figure in imperial clothing, and an accompanying inscription states his identity – IVSTINIANVS (Fig. 2). The inscription itself may be credited to nineteenth-century restorations conducted by Felice Kibel (Deliyannis 2010, 173; Baldini Lippolis 2000; on Kibel's restorations more in general, see Bovini 1966). Despite this, historical sources seem to confirm the interpretation. Agnellus of Ravenna, the author of the Ravennate *Liber Pontificalis*, specifically mentions a portrait of Justinian in gold mosaic on the counter façade of the basilica (Agn. Rav. *LPR* 86; Mauskopf Deliyannis 2003, 200). This is confirmed

again in later written records and drawings (Baldini Lippolis 2000; Ricci 1933, 100-106; Bovini 1954).
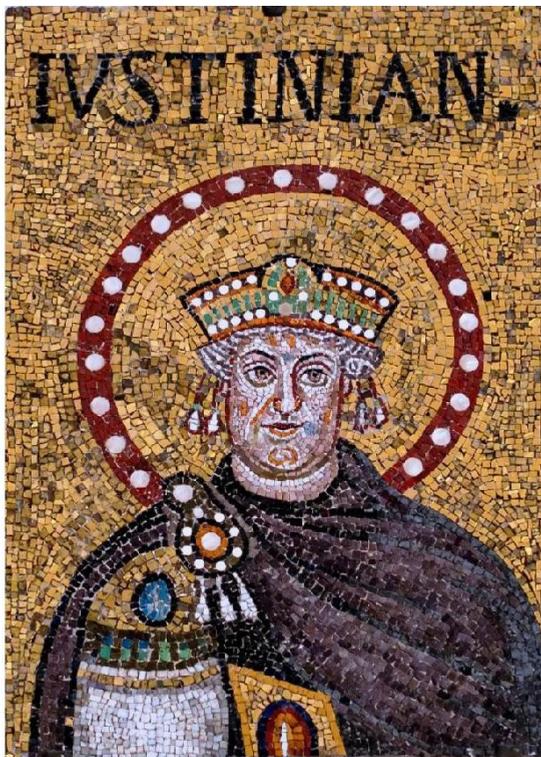
2 | Portrait bust of an Emperor Justinian/Theoderic the Great, *c.* 490–524, Ravenna, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (© Wikimedia free commons).

Nevertheless, comparing this bust to other known images of Justinian – for example, the one in San Vitale – the features are completely different. The panel was heavily reworked over the centuries, and it is impossible to determine its precise chronology. However, in 1992, Maria Andaloro suggested that the imperial insignia, in addition to the inscription, could be later additions, thus proposing a reading of the image as the Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great (r. 471–526), transformed into Justinian after his death in 526 as part of a process of *damnatio memoriae* (Andaloro 1993; for more about the *damnatio memoriae* in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo see Urbano 2005). In the end, Theodoric's body was cut into four parts and sent to four corners of the Empire to punish the heretical king

post mortem (Andaloro 1993). In this view, the mosaic could be dated to the pre-Justinian period.

We can conclude that the traditional tools of art history, such as formal and iconographic analysis, can be extremely useful in provisionally dating monuments, but at the same time, restorations and 'fakes' from the Early Modern period and nineteenth century can only be avoided by combining traditional art historical methodology with archaeometric analysis. Only a transdisciplinary approach like this can provide a truly solid base for further research. Still, we do not mean to glorify the fields of archaeology and the natural sciences. Using them can be highly problematic and they should always serve as a supportive tool. Their results should be verified and discussed, and not taken as an absolute and unquestionable truth.

Function: Literary Sources, Inscriptions, and Visual Indications
Ascertaining the function of Late Antique objects and monuments can sometimes be very straightforward. Take the example of the basilica, where – as in the case of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome (526–530) – its function is included in the apse inscription (Tiberia 1998; Davis-Weyer 1999; Wisskirchen 1999; Osborne 2008; Foletti 2017a). In other cases, however, it is much more complicated. This is especially true for mobile objects, such as Christian ivory diptychs, or specific areas of Christian cult buildings.

The Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna is an example of this. Built in the early fifth century and decorated only a few decades later by the Bishop Neon (c. 450–473), this building was obviously used for rites of Christian initiation, *i.e.* baptism (Ciampini 1690, 1, 233-238; Lanciani 1871, 7-8; Ricci 1889; Sangiorgi 1900; Mazzotti 1960; Kaspersen 1967; Kostof 1967; Deichmann 1974, 15-47; Wharton 1987; Rizzardi 2001; Foletti 2008; Tvrzníková 2016). What is trickier is the issue of exactly what kind of rituals were performed in this space. To provide a comprehensive description of the situation, it should be noted that there are no surviving liturgical texts or other evidence for fifth-century Ravenna (the general setup of the liturgical year was reconstructed only following the preachings of Peter Chrysologus; see Sottocornola 1973).

3 | The inscription of *John* 13:14–17, *c.* 451–458, Ravenna, Orthodox Baptistery (© CEMS, photo: Ivan Foletti).
4 | Scheme of floor decorations in Church 1, half of the 5th c.–beginning of the 6th c., Yasileh (Jordan) (photo from: Watta 2018, 307).

A clue, however, may lie in inscriptions that are preserved in the present-day building, and were well attested before any restoration. The inscriptions are taken from the thirteenth chapter of John's Gospel and address the moment when Jesus washes the feet of his Apostles (John 13:14–17) (Fig. 3). This passage leads us to believe that, very plausibly, the liturgy performed in the baptistery was not Roman liturgy. The writings of the Milanese Bishop Ambrose make it clear that, in Rome, they were quite skeptical towards the ritual of washing feet during the rite of baptism (Ambr. *De Sacr.* III, 5; Deferrari 1963, 291-292). On the contrary, we know that in Milan and Aquileia this ritual was commonly performed during the Christian initiation (Beatrice 1983; Foletti 2008; Menis 2001).

Further evidence may be provided by the position of the inscription in the space – the eastern part of the baptistery. We know that, in Aquileia, the washing of the feet was performed before the baptism, while in Milan, it happened *after* immersion in the baptismal waters. Since it is well established that the baptismal ritual progressed from West to East, it is very plausible that the Milanese from of baptismal ritual was performed in Ravenna. Thus, the neophytes would encounter John's verses after coming out of the baptismal font. The next step would be to examine the interaction between space, images and rituals in the Neonian baptistery in a truly innovative way.

In this case, the epigraphical evidence serves to better understand the arrangement and function of an ecclesiastical space. Furthermore, the interaction between ritual, texts, and images allows us to reconstruct the

building's possible perception by its beholders in a much deeper way. On the other hand, the monument and its epigraphy provide essential evidence for reconstructing Late Antique Ravennate liturgy.

Similar issues could be presented for Late Antique basilicas. Basilicas, as common examples of Christian cult buildings, had a quite clear purpose – they housed the Christian liturgy and accommodated Christian communities. However, examining the space of Late Antique basilicas in more detail, we suddenly find fairly hierarchized spaces with multiple spatial units and rich decorations, which helped to define the main focal points of the performed rituals. There are plenty of examples of internal decorations in direct relationship with liturgical practice: apsidal mosaics are a significant example (see *e.g.* the above-mentioned case of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome, where the apse decoration can be seen in interaction with both the regular Eucharist and the papal stational liturgy; see Foletti 2017a). Other interior areas, such as lateral naves, are however visually excluded from the liturgical epicenter, which of course raises the question of their use. This separation is further indicated by a series of 'tangible pieces of evidence': floor decorations indicating an interior division as visible in a number of churches from the Eastern Mediterranean in late Antiquity, *e.g.* the Church in Yasileh (Jordan) (Fig. 4), dated around the year 500, remains of physical barriers in marble, or traces of curtain rods (Watta 2018; Verstegen 2009; Peschlow 2006; De Blaauw, Doležalová 2019).

All these elements testify to a very peculiar use of lateral naves. These traces are quite exceptionally mentioned in written sources; however, a variety of texts can be found which describe the social and gender stratification of the Christian congregation (for a general overview, see Mathews 1971, 117-137; Taft 1998; Ruggieri 1993). Although these pieces of evidence are not explicitly correlated to each other, their combination leads us to a new way of viewing the basilican space and to explore the interaction between spaces and their use. Tangible decorations – present in the lateral naves, or visible from there – suddenly receive a very different meaning and can be interpreted in new ways (see, for example, the recent article of Anderson 2020). This perspective helps us better understand the basilican space, possibly also beyond its liturgical use.

In this particular case, the evidence comes mainly from the worlds of archaeology and philology. Its impact on visual culture can be, however, revolutionary.

5 | Ivory pyxis with Women at the Tomb, around the year 400, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (© Metropolitan Museum of Art).
6 | Altar with a gospel, *c.* 451–458, Ravenna, Orthodox Baptistery (© CEMS, photo: Ivan Foletti).

Some of the most complicated and important examples are mobile objects, free of any inscriptions or explicit images. Ivory pyxides are preserved in museum collections all around the world and were produced mainly between the fourth and sixth centuries, based on formal analysis and comparisons with well-dated ivory consular diptychs (Volbach 1976). If we consider the example of an ivory pyxis, now held in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 5), the object itself provides no evidence about its original use – except for its very nature as a container (Volbach 1976, 111, n. 177). It was postulated that it may have originally been used to store the Eucharistic bread without, however, any convincing evidence linking the Early Christian practice of the Eucharist with this specific object (St. Clair 1979).

In this case, further evidence is given by the object's iconography, depicting Women at the Sepulcher approaching the empty tomb of Christ, with an empty altar at its center. This clue may suggest a link between the ritual in the image and the function of the container. Logically, this could be the ritual unction of the dead, or the symbolic unction of neophytes' bodies during baptism, reenacting the death and resurrection of Christ (Foletti 2021). This hypothesis may be supported by further evidence,

including iconographic comparisons – similar depictions of an empty altar with a book are present in the above-mentioned Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna (Fig. 6). This may be another argument for placing the object within the ritual space of a baptistery. Simple iconographic comparison and a metaphorical understanding of the depicted scene have made it possible to imagine an entirely new interpretation and function for the object in question.

Patronage: From traces to concepts

7 | Medallion with an inscription of Bishop Theodore, first quarter of the 4th c., floor mosaic, Aquileia, Santa Maria Assunta (© CEMS, photo: Anna Kelblová).
8 | Honking Judas and the Crucifixion, Maskell casket, *c.* 440–460, London, British Museum (© British Museum).

It may be tempting to claim that evidence of sponsors, commissioners, or conceivers of this period's objects and monuments is relatively common. However, many of these clues are more 'traces' than significant proof of the work's sponsor. A representative example of this is the Early Christian complex of Aquileia. As part of the extensive floor decorations, there is a medallion ascribing the construction of the complex to a certain Theodor (Fig. 7):

> Happy Theodore, with the help of God Almighty and the flock given to you by Heaven, you have blessedly finished everything and gloriously dedicated [the pavement] ("XP / THEODORE FELI[X] / [A]DIUVANTE DEO / OMNIPOTENTE ET / POEMNIO CAELITUS TIBI / [TRA]DITUM OMNIA / [B]EATE FECISTI ET /

GLORIOSE DEDICAS / TI"; the English translation is taken from Leatherbury 2020, 111).

The information given about the patron is quite scarce. However, based on further analysis of Early Christian written sources, he has been identified as Bishop Theodore of Aquileia, who reportedly attended the Council of Arles in 314 (Bratož 2010, 20-27; Sotinel 2005, 72-89). This serves as a basis for dating the complex to the very beginning of the fourth century, making it one of the oldest surviving places of Christian (public) worship (Cuscito, Lehmann 2010; Bertacchi 2000; Lehmann 2013; Cat. Aquileia 2013). At the same time, we have a very limited idea about Theodore's life, his social and political background, his ideas or the intentions behind this commission. Therefore, we cannot connect his personal story, values, faith or political ambitions with this building in any solid way.

The very contrary example is the so-called Maskell casket at the British Museum (Fig. 8). Without any kind of inscription, this object has been dated and placed to the Roman context of the fifth century because of its formal features, resembling ivory diptychs of the same period, namely of the Roman consul Flavius Felix from 428 (Volbach 1976, 82, n. 116; Harley 2007; Ead. 2013). Apart from this very general observation, it is impossible to connect this lavishly carved object depicting the story of the passion of Christ with any individual figure. Nevertheless, a very impressive and non-traditional feature has been preserved on the box's front panel. Next to each other, side by side, Hanging Judas and Crucified Christ are represented. Such a parallel is terribly audacious: the death of the Savior is placed beside that of his betrayer. The only evidence to explain such a juxtaposition is a homily by Leo the Great (440–461), who thematizes the death of Judas with Christ's Crucifixion, putting these two events in direct relation:

> You stand out, Judas, as more wicked than all the rest, and more unhappy, for penitence did not call you back to the Lord, but despair drew you to the noose. If only you had waited for the completion of your crime until the blood of Christ had been poured out for all sinners, you would have put off the gruesome death of hanging (Leon. Mag. *Serm.* (Dolle) LIV, III, 41, 3, 1; Freeland, Conway 1996, 234).

In the absence of other possible explanations, this might reveal something more about the patron of this small object: the homilies of Leo the Great were regularly repeated throughout his pontificate every year. Thus, the person who conceived this marvelous object, very plausibly from a wealthy background, must have been aware of Leo's ideas and even partially shared them. This anonymous figure shows us the interaction between Christian theory and art practice in fifth-century Rome

A final example can be found in the monumental mosaic placed at the peak of the triumphal arch of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore (Fig. 9), where the inscription – *Sixtus episcopus plebi dei* – leaves little doubt as to the sponsor (and possibly also conceiver) of the sophisticated decorative program, but at the same time opens up the question of this figure's relatively unknown intellectual background (Menna 2006; Foletti 2017b). Crucial to coeval religious politics, the inscription provides very important evidence to link the monument with its patron, and is equally important to reconstructing the mentality of the Roman pontifical court of the time.

The scenes from the life of Christ depicted on the triumphal arch, as well the Old Testament stories in the main nave, provide a better understanding of the Christological position of Rome in the debate initiated at the Council of Ephesus (431). In this debate, Sixtus (432-440) held an anti-Nestorian position, recognizing Mary with the title of *Theotokos* (Marini Clarelli 1996). The pictorial narratives can be seen as a manifestation of the new position taken by the pope within the cityscape of Rome, while explicitly referencing the tradition of imperial arches (Bordi, Mancho 2020).

Like in the previous cases, the course of time has cast a shadow on the individuals behind Late Antique objects and monuments. Once again, however, carefully researching a large corpus of texts can provide tiny clues that allow us to, if not identify the figure itself, at least reconstruct the minds and ideas at the root of the visual cultures of the time.
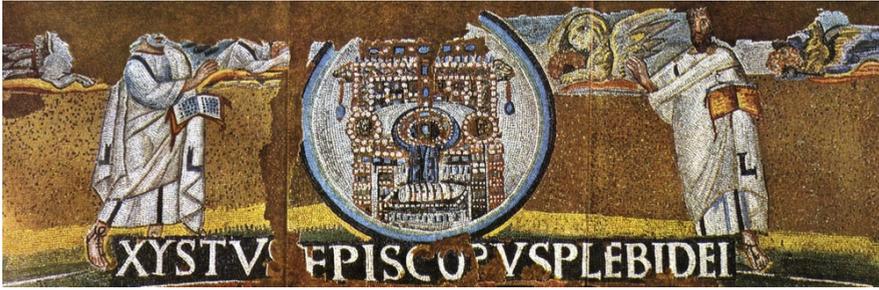
9 | Detail of the arch, *c.* 432–440, Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore (watercolour from: Wilpert 1917).

Perception: Literary Criticism and Embodied Experience

One of the main gaps in our understanding of the past, and especially medieval and Late Antique cultures, is how works of art and their ritual and performative context were perceived. On the one hand, of course, it is impossible to speak with coeval beholders, and on the other, monuments are oftentimes altered in such drastic ways – by the course of time, restoration work, formal reinterpretations, or damage – that it is very hard to even imagine their overall impact on the viewer. Still, especially in the last decades, the issue of perception is crucial in art historical studies (Lidov 2009; Pentcheva 2010; Palazzo 2014; Bagnoli 2016). One element providing a better understanding of past visual culture is certainly, once again, literary production – especially homilies, catecheses, personal testimonies, and hagiographical texts. The latter, as for example the iconic *Liber Peristephanon* by Prudentius, explicitly mention the viewer's experience in front of a work of art (Prud. *Lib. Per.* IX, Pas. San. Cass., 1-20; Bordino 2020, 230-233). Philological investigations have shown how complicated this evidence can be (Bordino 2020, 59-63).

Rather than describing a real feeling of facing the images, they should be understood as a rhetorical exercise, following very specific rules of Antique poetry and textuality. In this regard, something that may have been taken as evidence is actually the pretext for a more complex understanding of Late Antique society. Other texts, which do not explicitly refer to images, are no less problematic: with the very creative and metaphorical language of the Church fathers – high intellectuals producing normative speeches – should certainly not be taken literally. We are therefore faced with a very complex situation (for a selection of major

texts about images in Late Antiquity, see Bordino 2020). The art historian alone is basically 'unarmed' to deal with the vast and complex range of written sources. A proper understanding of the visual experience can be reached only through an interactive reconstruction of possible evidence, in dialogue with philologists, religious historians, and liturgists.

Another option for understanding the Late Antique experience of sacred space and its decoration includes a reconstruction of the original setting and the possible biological reactions it arouses in the human body (in medieval art, initial experimental research has been proposed by one of the authors of this text, with his research team: Foletti *et al.* 2018; for an investigation of pre-cultural and biological reactions in front of the images, see *e.g.* Kesner *et al.* 2018). Although this is still not a broadly accepted approach in the field of art history, the study of precultural bodily reactions to cultural elements may provide abundant evidence, explaining both the conception and reception of artworks. Once more, this reflection would be impossible without the collaboration of neurologists and other specialists in the medical sciences. For the interpretation of data emerging from this analysis, the fields of psychology and anthropology are needed to complete this interdisciplinary dialogue (Cavanagh 2013).

Conclusion: Collaborative Protocols and Research Groups as an Answer?
To sum up, if we think about what evidence means in our field, the answer is very simple. We are forced to work on two levels. On the one hand, we should work with the 'innate' information of the monument itself, its material nature, its decoration, its inscriptions, etc. However, at the same time, we should acknowledge its equally important external elements, which should be obtained at the crossroads of multiple fields: from archaeometry to psychology, archaeology to neurology, philology to epigraphy. Moreover, we would argue that contemporary art history focused on Late Antique heritage cannot move forward without evidence stemming from transdisciplinary research.

Of course, we are aware of the limits of such an approach. We are art historians by training, capable of dealing with iconography and iconology, but certainly not brain scans or dendrochronology. The answer to this situation appears to be both simple and, at the same time, complex. If we

want to collect new, essential evidence to propose revolutionary narratives in our fields, our future lies in the collaborative work with interdisciplinary research groups, similar to those in the natural sciences. Only at the intersection of all these fields will we be able to truly understand a time period as distant and, at the same time, as fascinating as Late Antiquity.

Bibliography

Sources

Ciampini 1690
G.G. Ciampini, *Vetera monimenta, in quibus praecipuè musiva opera sacrarum, profanarumque aedium structura, ac nonnulli antiqui ritus, dissertationibus, iconibusque illustrantur*, 1-2, Roma 1690-1699.

Deferrari 1963
R.J. Deferrari (ed.), *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works*, Washington 1963.

Mauskopf Deliyannis 2003
Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, ed. by D. Mauskopf Deliyannis, Washington 2003.

Leon. Mag. *Serm.* (Dolle)
Léon le Grand, *Sermons*, éd. par R. Dolle, 1-4, Paris 1964-1973.

Freeland, Conway 1996
St. Leo the Great, *Sermons*, ed. by J.P. Freeland, A.J. Conway, Washington 1996.

Ugonio 1588
P. Ugonio, *Historia delle Stationi di Roma: Che si celebrano la Quadragesima di Pompeo Vgonio all'Illvstrissima & Eccell. Sig. Camilla Peretti. Dove oltre le vite de santi alle chiese de quali è statione, si tratta delle origini, fondationi, siti, restaurationi, ornamenti, reliquie, & memorie di esse chiese, antiche & moderne*, Roma 1588.

Studies

Andaloro 1993
M. Andaloro, *Tendenze figurative a Ravenna nell'età di Teoderico*, in *Teoderico il Grande e i goti d'Italia*, atti del XIII congresso internazionale di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo (Milano 1992), 1-2, Spoleto 1993, 2, 555-583.

Andaloro, Romano 2006
M. Andaloro, S. Romano (cur.), *La pittura medievale a Roma, 312-1431*, 1-6, Roma 2000-2017, 1. *L'orizzonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini, 312-468*, 2006.

Anderson 2020
B. Anderson, *Images Down Low*, in S. Feist (ed.), *Transforming Sacred Spaces*, Wiesbaden 2020, 161-187.

Bagnoli 2016
M. Bagnoli (ed.), *A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe*, Baltimore 2016.

Baldini Lippolis 2000
I. Baldini Lippolis, *Il ritratto musivo nella facciata interna di S. Apollinare Nuovo a Ravenna*, in F. Guidobaldi (cur.), *Atti del VI colloquio dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio e la conservazione del mosaico*, Ravenna 2000, 647-658.

Beatrice 1983
P.F. Beatrice, *La lavanda dei piedi. Contributo alla storia delle antiche liturgie cristiane,* Roma 1983.

Bertacchi 2000
L. Bertacchi, *Le fasi architettoniche del complesso episcopale di Aquileia nelle variazioni dei mosaici*, in S. Tavano, G. Bergamini, S. Cavazza (cur.), *Aquileia e il suo Patriarcato*, atti del convegno internazionale di Studio (Udine 1999), Udine 2000, 67-74.

Berthier 1892
J.J. Berthier, *La Porte de Sainte-Sabine à Rome*, Fribourg 1892.

Bovini 1954
G. Bovini, *Beobachtungen zum sogen. Justinian-Mosaik in San Apollinare in Ravenna*, in *Atti del VI congresso di Studi sull'arte dell'Alto Medioevo*, Milano 1954, 37-39.

Bovini 1966
G. Bovini, *Principali restauri compiuti nel secolo scorso da Felice Kibel nei mosaici di S. Apollinare Nuovo di Ravenna*, "Corso di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina" 13 (1966), 83-104.

Bordi, Mancho 2020
G. Bordi, C. Mancho, *Con i santi nella Gerusalemme nuova. Il presbiterio di Santa Prassede tra pittura e mosaici*, in C. Bordino, C. Croci, V. Sulovsky (eds.), *Rome on the Borders: Visual Cultures during the Carolingian Transition*, Brno-Turnhout 2020, 206-235.

Bordino 2020
C. Bordino (ed.), *Teorie obrazu v raném křesťanství? Výběr textů pozdně antických myslitelů s komentářem*, Brno 2020.

Bratož 2010
R. Bratož, *La basilica di Aquileia nelle fonti letterarie dal IV al VII secolo*, in G. Cuscito, T. Lehmann (cur.), *La Basilica di Aquileia. Storia, archeologia ed arte*, 1-2, Trieste 2010, 1, 19-66.

Brogiolo *et al.* 2014
G.P. Brogiolo, V. Gheroldi, F. de Rubeis, J. Mitchell, *Nuove richerche su sequenza, cronologia e contesto degli affreschi di Santa Maria Foris Portas di Castelseprio*, "Hortus atrium medievalium" a. 20 (2014), 720-737.

Castelnuovo 2004
E. Castelnuovo (cur.), *Artifex bonus. Il mondo dell'artista medievale*, Roma 2004.

Cat. Aquileia 2013
C. Tiussi, *Costantino e Teodoro. Aquileia nel IV secolo*, catalogo della mostra (Aquileia 2013), Milano 2013.

Cavanagh 2013
P. Cavanagh, *Sciences cognitives et histoire de l'art, une coopération en devenir: points de vue de Patrick Cavanagh, Bevil R. Conway, David Freedberg et Raphaël Rosenberg avec Étienne Jollet*, "Perspective" 1 (2013), 101-118.

Cuscito, Lehmann 2010
G. Cuscito, T. Lehmann (a cura di), *La Basilica di Aquileia. Storia, archeologia ed arte*, 2 voll., Trieste 2010.

Darsy 1957
F.M.D. Darsy, *Le portes de Sainte-Sabine dans l'archéologie et l'iconographie générale du monument*, in *Actes du Ve congrès international d'archéologie chrétienne* (Aix-en-Provence 1954), Città del Vaticano-Paris 1957, 471-485.

Davis-Weyer 1999
C. Davis-Weyer, *"Discendete Loth a Sodomis": A Ticonian Reading of the Mosaic on the Arch of Ss. Cosma e Damiano in Rome (526–530)*, in A. Cadei (cur.), *Arte d'Occidente. Studi in onore di Angiola Maria Romanini*, Roma 1999, 743-753.

De Blaauw, Doležalová 2019
S. de Blaauw, K. Doležalová, *Constructing Liminal Space? Curtains in Late Antique and Early Medieval Churches*, in K. Doležalová, I. Foletti (eds.), *The Notion of Liminality and the Medieval Sacred Space*, Brno-Turnhout 2019, 46-67.

Deichmann 1974
F.W. Deichmann, *Ravenna. Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes*, 1-4, Wiesbaden 1969-1989, 2/1 (1974).

Deliyannis 2010
D. Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2010.

Foletti 2008
I. Foletti, *Saint Ambroise et le Baptistère des Orthodoxes de Ravenne: autour du "Lavement des pieds" dans la liturgie baptismale*, in I. Foletti, S. Romano (éds.), Fons vitae. *Baptême, baptistères et rites d'initiation IIe-VIe siècle*, Rome 2008, 121-155.

Foletti 2017a
I. Foletti, *Maranatha: Space, Liturgy, and Image in the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian on the Roman Forum*, in Foletti, Gianandrea 2017, 161-179.

Foletti 2017b
I. Foletti, Sicut in caelo et in terra*: Observations on the Cathedra Vacua in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome*, in I. Foletti, M. Gianandrea (eds.), *The Fifth Century in Rome: Art, Liturgy, Patronage*, Rome 2017, 41-62.

Foletti *et al.* 2018
I. Foletti, K. Kravčíková, S. Rosenbergová, A. Palladino (eds.), *Migrating Art Historians on the Sacred Ways*, Brno-Rome 2018.

Foletti *et al.* 2019
I. Foletti *et al.*, *Wiggle Matching Analysis of the Doors of Santa Sabina in Rome*, "RIHA Journal" (2019), 1-7.

Foletti 2021
I. Foletti, *Spaces and Objects of Initiation Expanding Our Perceptions of the Visual and Material Cultures of Late Antique Baptism*, in K. L. Bierbaum, S. Wittekind (eds.), *Baptism and Its Artefacts*, Cologne 2021 (in press).

Foletti, Gianadrea 2015
I. Foletti, M. Gianandrea, *Zona Liminare. Il nartece di Santa Sabina a Roma, le sue porte e l'iniziazione Cristiana*, Roma 2015.

Foletti, Gianadrea 2017
I. Foletti, M. Gianandrea (eds.), *The Fifth Century in Rome: Art, Liturgy, Patronage*, Rome 2017.

Gori 2000
F. Gori, *Celestino I*, in M. Bray (cur.), *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1-3, Roma 2000, 1, 406-415.

Harley 2007
F. Harley, *Ivory Plaques with Passion and Resurrection of Christ (the "Maskell Ivories")*, in J. Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible. The Earliest Christian Art*, New Haven 2007, 229-232.

Harley 2013
F. Harley, *The Maskell Passion Ivories and Greco-Roman Art: Notes on the Iconography of Crucifixion*, in J. Mullins, J. Ní Ghrádaigh, R. Hawtree (eds.), *Envisioning Christ on the Cross: Ireland and the Early Medieval West*, Dublin 2013, 13-33.

Jeremias 1980
G. Jeremias, *Die Holztür der Basilika S. Sabina in Rom*, Tübingen 1980.

Kaspersen 1967
S. Kaspersen, *La decorazione musiva della cupola del Battistero degli Ortodossi di Ravenna*, "Felix Ravenna" 96 (1967), 33-43.

Kessler 2004
H. L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art*, Peterborough-Ontario 2004.

Kenser *et al.* 2018
L. Kesner *et al.*, *Perception of Direct vs. Averted Gaze in Portrait Paintings: An fMRI and Eyetracking Study*, "Brain and Cognition" 125/8 (2018), 88-99.

Kondakov 1877
N. P. Kondakov, *Les sculptures de la porte de Sainte-Sabine à Rome*, "Revue archéologique" a. 33 (1877), 361-372.

Kostof 1967
S. K. Kostof, *The Orthodox Baptistery of Ravenna*, New Haven-London 1967.

Lanciani 1871
F. Lanciani, *Cenni intorno ai monumenti e alle cose più notevoli di Ravenna*, Ravenna 1871.

L'edificio battesimale 2001
L'edificio battesimale in Italia. Aspetti e problemi, atti dell'VIII congresso nazionale di archeologia cristiana (Genova, Sarzana, Albenga, Finale Ligure, Ventimiglia 1998), Bordighera 2001.

Leardi 2006
G. Leardi, *Mosaici della controfacciata: le due* ecclesiae*, l'iscrizione dedicatoria, le perdute figure di Pietro e Paolo e i simboli dei quattro evangelisti*, in Andaloro, Romano 2006, 293-297.

Leatherbury 2020
S. V. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity: Between Reading and Seeing*, New York 2020.

Lehmann 2013
T. Lehmann, *Neue Untersuchungen zu den frühchristlichen Mosaiken im Dombereich von Aquileia*, in O. Brandt (acc.), *Acta XV Congressus internationalis archaeologiae christianae (Toleti 2008): episcopus, civitas, territorium*, 1-2, Città del Vaticano 2013, 2, 1451-1464.

Lidov 2009
A. Lidov, *Hierotopy: Spatial icons and Image-Paradigms in Byzantine Culture*, Moscow 2009.

Marini Clarelli 1996
M. V. Marini Clarelli, *La controversia nestoriana e i mosaici dell'arco trionfale di S. Maria Maggiore*, in C. Barsanti *et al.* (cur.), *Bisanzio e l'Occidente: arte, archeologia, storia. Studi in onore di Fernanda de' Maffei*, Roma 1996, 323-344.

Mathews 1971
T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy*, University Park, PA 1971.

Mazzotti 1960
M. Mazzotti, *Il battistero della cattedrale di Ravenna*, "Felix Ravenna" 84 (1960), 255-279.

Menis 2001
G. C. Menis, *Il battesimo ad Aquileia nella prima metà del IV secolo*, in *L'edificio battesimale* 2001, 2, 685-708.

Menna 2006
M. R. Menna, *I mosaici della basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore*, in Andaloro, Romano 2006, 306-346.

Osborne 2008
J. Osborne, *The Jerusalem Temple Treasure and the Church of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome*, "Papers of the British School at Rome" 76 (2008), 173-181.

Palazzo 2014
É. Palazzo, *L'Invention chrétienne des cinq sens dans la liturgie et l'art au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2014.

Passini 2017
M. Passini, *L'Œil et l'archive. Une histoire de l'histoire de l'art*, Paris 2017.

Pentcheva 2010
B. V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, University Park, PA 2010.

Peschlow 2006
U. Peschlow, *Dividing Interior Space in Early Byzantine Churches: The Barriers Between the Nave and Aisles*, in S. Gerstel (ed.), *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, Cambridge, MA 2006, 52-71.

Ricci 1889
C. Ricci, *Monumenti Ravennati. Il battistero di S. Giovanni in fonte*, "Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia patria per le provincia di Romagna" 7 (1889), 268-319.

Ricci 1933
C. Ricci, *Tavole storiche dei mosaici di Ravenna*, Roma 1930-1937, 4/1. *Sant'Apollinare Nuovo: testo*, 1933.

Rizzardi 2001
C. Rizzardi, *I mosaici del battistero deglio Ortodossi e degli Ariani a Ravenna*, in *L'edificio battesimale* 2001, 2, 913-930.

Ruggieri 1993
V. Ruggieri, Katechoumenon*: uno spazio sociale*, in E. Carr (ed.), *ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΑ. Studies in honor of Robert Taft*, Rome 1993, 389-402.

Sangiorgi 1900
C. Sangiorgi, *Il battistero della basilica Ursiana di Ravenna*, Ravenna 1900.

Sotinel 2005
C. Sotinel, *Identité civique et christianisme. Aquilée du IIIe au VIe siecle*, Rome 2005.

Sottocornola 1973
F. Sottocornola, *L'anno liturgico a Ravenna nei sermoni di Pier Crisologo*, Cesena 1973.

Spieser 1991
J.-M. Spieser, *Le Programme iconographique des portes de Sainte-Sabine*, "Journal des savants" 2 (1991), 47-81.

St. Clair 1979
A. St. Clair, *The Visit to the Tomb: Narrative and Liturgy on Three Early Christian Pyxides*, "Gesta" 18/1 (1979), 127-135.

Strzygowski 1893
J. Strzygowski, *Das Berliner Moses-Relief und die Thüren von Sta. Sabina in Rom. Mit fünf Abbildungen im Text*, "Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen" 14 (1893), 65-81.

Taft 1998
R. F. Taft, *Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When and Why?*, "Dumbarton Oaks Papers" 52 (1998), 27-87.

Tiberia 1998
V. Tiberia, *Il mosaico restaurato. L'arco della basilica dei Santi Cosma e Damiano*, Roma 1998.

Tvrzníková 2016
V. Tvrzníková, *Ritual, Hierotopy and a Cognitive Perspective on a Late Antique Baptistery*, MA Thesis, Masaryk University, a.y. 2016.

Urbano 2005
A. Urbano, *Donation, Dedication and Damnatio Memoriae: The Catholic Reconciliation of Ravenna and the Church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo*, "Journal of Early Christian Studies" 13/1 (2005), 71-110.

Venturi 1901
A. Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, 1-11, Milano 1901-1940, 1. *Dai primordi dell'arte cristiana al tempo di Giustiniano*, 1901.

Verstegen 2009
U. Verstegen, *Die symbolische Raumordnung frühchristlicher Basiliken des 4. bis 6. Jahrhunderts. Zur Interdependenz von Architektur, Liturgie und Raumausstattung*, "Rivista di archeologia cristiana" 85 (2009), 567-600.

Volbach 1976
W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, Mainz 1976.

Watta 2018
S. Watta, *Sakrale Zonen im frühen Kirchenbau des Nahen Ostens. Zum Kommunikationspotenzial von Bodenmosaiken für die Schaffung heiliger Räume*, Wiesbaden 2018.

Wharton 1987
A. J. Wharton, *Ritual and Reconstructed Meaning: The Neonian Baptistery in Ravenna*, "The Art Bulletin" 69 (1987), 158-175.

Wiegand 1900
J. Wiegand, *Das Altchristliche Hauptportal an der Kirche der hl. Sabina auf dem aventinischen Hügel zu Rom*, Trier 1900.

Wilpert 1917
J. Wilpert (hg.), *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1917.

Wisskirchen 1999
R. Wisskirchen, *Zur Apsisstirnwand von SS. Cosma e Damiano, Rom*, "Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum" 42 (1999), 169-183.

Wood 2019
Ch.S. Wood, *History of Art History*, Princeton 2019.

English abstract

The present contribution aims to introduce different types of evidence in the field of Late Antique visual studies. On several examples of objects and monuments, the authors try to present different methodological approaches employed in the research on dating, patronage, functions, or perception of Late Antique works of art. Given the fragmentary nature of the objects themselves as well as the coeval reports preserved, the art historians are usually forced to gather the evidence at the crossroad of several fields, including not only the disciplines of humanities, but also of nature sciences. Thus, in the authors' opinion, the future of the field lies in the interdisciplinary collaboration, which could help to better understand the artistic production of Late Antiquity.

keywords / Evidence; Material Culture; Visual Culture; Late Antiquity; Function; Patronage; Dating; Perception; Transdisciplinary Research.