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BOGDAN ŻURAWSKI

The Anastasis Scene from the Lower Church III
at Banganarti (Upper Nubia)*

The seventh century Lower Church at Banganarti was found below the ruins of its successor, the so-called Raphaelion in 2002.¹



1. Banganarti in February 2003. Aerial photograph. (Phot. B. Żurawski).

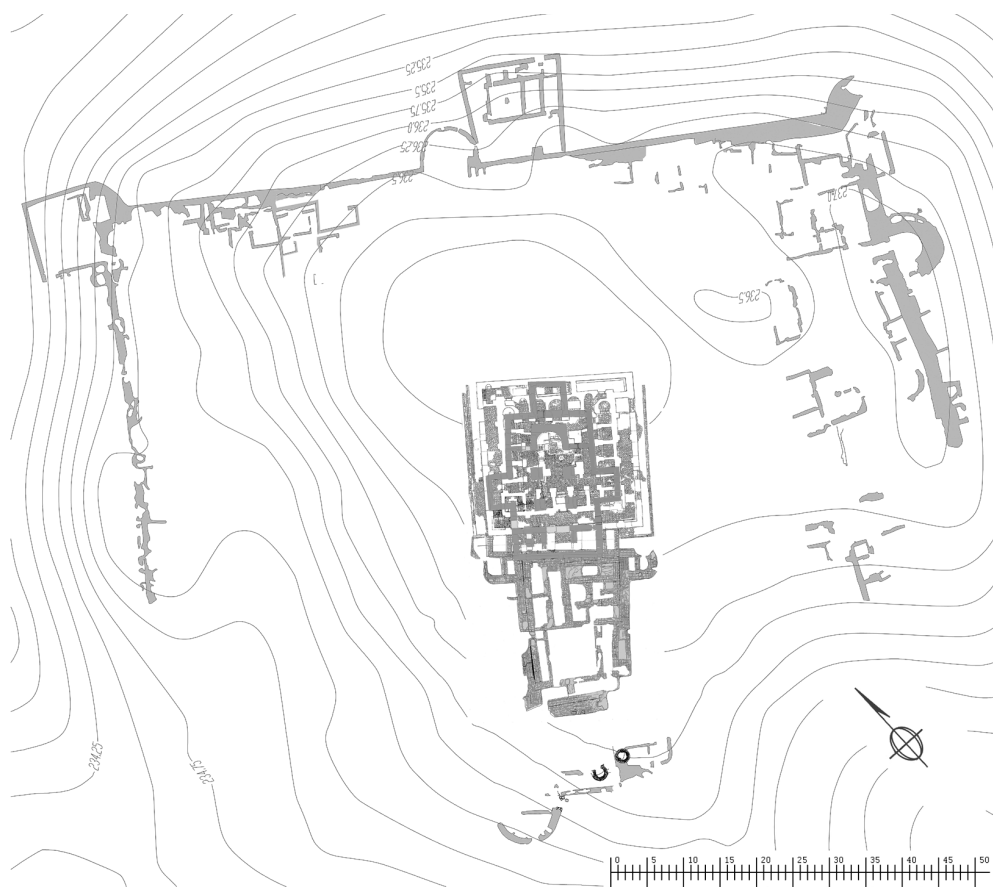
There are grounds to believe that the Lower Church was also dedicated to St Raphael the Archangel.² On the other hand, the inscription accompanying the mural representing the rider trampling the female demon, that begins with the invocation to ‘God of St George the Martyr’, is also indicative for the church in question, its part or the mural itself, was dedicated to St George.³

* In the eastern tradition Christ’s descent into Hell, to release the righteous who had died before the Crucifixion is labelled *Anastasis* (Resurrection). It is somewhat misleading (the term *Katabasis* would more adequately denoted the descending action of Christ into Limbo) however. Nevertheless in the Morgan Lectionary (Byzantine), c. 1050–1100, the scene depicting Christ’s descent into Hell is labelled as *Anastasis* (The Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York (Ms. M. G39, fol. Ir), cf. below, n. 18. See also: J. WILPERT, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg im Breisgau II 1916 [= *Die römischen Mosaiken*], p. 888, n. 2.

¹ Cf. B. ŻURAWSKI, *Nubia II. Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and Ez-Zuma, Southern Dongola Reach Survey I* [= SDRS 1], Warsaw 2003, pp. 140–153; ID., *Banganarti*, in: D.A. WELSBY, J.P. ANDERSON (eds.), *Sudan Ancient Treasures. An Exhibition of Recent Discoveries from the Sudan National Museum*, London 2004, pp. 220–226.

² The inscription has not been published so far. A. Łajtar’s personal communication.

³ J. van der Vliet’s personal communication.



2. Fortified enclosure at Baganarti, with the superimposed churches in the middle.
(Measures and drawing: R. Łopaciuk and W. Małkowski).

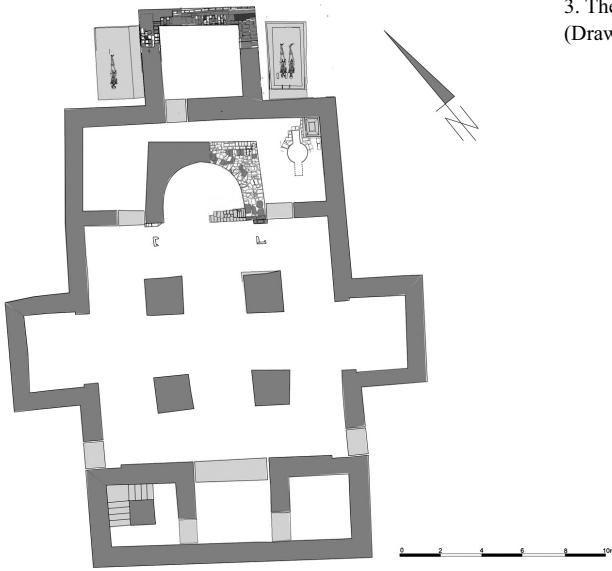
The Lower Church II was reconstructed in the mid-ninth century. Its original flat timber roof supported by four columns made of voussoir shaped stones (instead of drums) was replaced with the brick vaults. The dismantled stone elements from the former structure were used in the foundations beneath the four piers that supported the central dome of the remodelled church. Wherever these stones were accessible for inspection (in 2006) painting fragments were found. Dated to the seventh century they belong to the earliest Christian murals in Makuria. Holy riders and archangels were among the most popular subjects (as far as a dozen or so fragments allow any generalization).

The walls of the Lower Church III were plastered and painted twice.

The highlight of the painting decoration on the second layer of mortar⁴ is a diptych set in a black and red frame.

⁴ This layer is 'second' only on the walls that survived the reconstruction of the original church. Naturally on the other walls this layer is first.

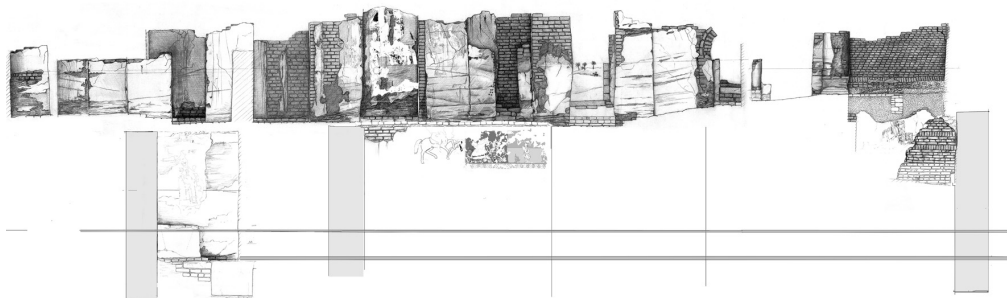
3. The Lower Church III at Banganarti.
(Drawing: B. Żurawski).



4. The so called St Sisinnios trampling naked female demon (Alabasdria?). (Phot. and drawing: W. Chmiel).⁵

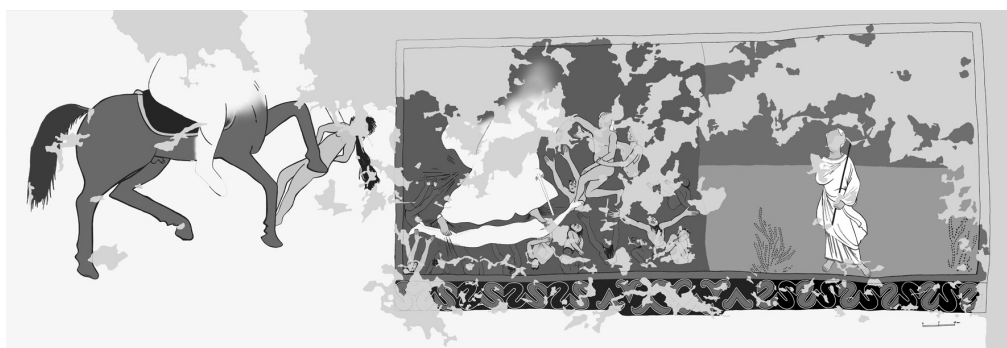
⁵ The black contour paint made probably of sooth peeled off almost everywhere it was applied. It left, however, quite distinctive traces that enabled the restorer, Wojciech Chmiel to draw it back into the photograph.

It occupies the ‘privileged’ position right to the entrance to the baptistery, on the western part of the southern wall of the central nave (behind the south-eastern pier) next to the mural representing a mounted warrior raiding on a chestnut stallion and pointing a spear at the naked, recumbent female figure.⁶



5. Section E-W through the Banganarti churches. The *Anastasis* diptych in the centre. (Drawing: M. Momot and B. Żurawski).

Both murals, painted in a row, occupy the uppermost register of the wall and belong to the last embellishment of the Lower Church III. The *terminus post quem* is a general refurbishment of the Lower Church II associated with laying of the new pavement and installing the vaults that took place *c.* mid-ninth century. The *terminus ante quem* is the final demolition of the Lower Church III that happened around the middle of the eleventh century.⁷



6. Ink copy of the decoration of the wall next to the entrance to the baptistery. (Drawing: W. Chmiel).

Both compositions executed probably at the same time are characterized by unusually vivid, captivating colours that focus spectator’s attention. The painter’s palette is rich,

⁶ With the dedicatory inscription painted in black below.

⁷ The church was levelled to the ground level, that grew almost 3 m since it was founded. One of the reasons behind such speedy grow up of the church surroundings was accumulation of the ceramic debris, mostly broken amphorae, that were thrown out of the church.

varied and somewhat alien to other murals found so far in both churches at Banganarti. There is no doubt that the diptych in question, because of its subject, coloration, and – most importantly – its situation within the church, was of paramount importance among the Lower Church religious decoration.



7. The framed diptych with the *Anastasis* scene (left). (Phot. and drawing: W. Chmiel).

Its left panel is filled with the *Anastasis* scene known in the West as *Harrowing of Hell* or *Descent into Limbo*. It illustrates the events of Easter Saturday, as they are recounted in the Apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 8–10⁸ and alluded in the *Questions of Bartholomew*, 6–20 as well as in the *Gospel of Peter*, 39–42.⁹

The position of the *Anastasis* on the wall next to the entrance to the baptistery seems to be essential for understanding the symbolical bearing of the scene in the sacral topography of the church.¹⁰ The theological association of the Resurrection of Christ with the rebirth of everyman through baptism is clear. Its relation, however, to the general iconographical programme (if any) of the Lower Church is unknown. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that it exists independently from any conceivable Christological cycle.

The religious art quite frequently draws a pictorial parallel between the baptismal ritual and *Anastasis*.¹¹ Baptism is profoundly associated with the symbolic of death and resurrection of Christ. The manifold parallels between the baptism ritual and the celebration of Easter cycle does not need to be discussed here in details. Easter was a most favourite

⁸ The relevant passage quoted in: D.R. CARLIDGE, J.K. ELLIOTT, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*, London 2001, p. 128.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128; G. McNEIL RUSHFORTH, *The Church of S. Maria Antiqua*, *PBSR* I, 1902 [= *S. Maria Antiqua*], p. 114; C. TISCHENDORF, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, Leipzig 1853, p. 370.

¹⁰ The *Anastasis* scene adorns the apses of some late funerary chapels, as e.g. in Karije Djami (Chora) in Constantinople.

¹¹ A.D. KARTSONIS, *Anastasis. The Making of an Image*, Princeton 1986 [= *Anastasis*], p. 174.

time for baptism, and the burial close to the baptisteries was regarded as a privileged one. The coincidence explained in the Pauline *Letter to the Romans: Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.*¹²

To what extent the theological motivation caused the construction of the huge tomb outside the baptistery and who was buried in it – remains conjectural.¹³

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A rectangular red frame that encircles the Banganarti diptych is doubled along its lower edge by addition of a broad decorative band composed of a painted frieze consisting (in the middle section) of wedge-shaped (upright and inverted) motives that are flanked on both sides by sections made of repeated S-shaped motives, painted alternatively in mirror reflexions. The motives are painted red and black, on the black background.

Strangely enough, the diptych filled with two totally different scenes that, apart from being framed together, have virtually nothing in common.¹⁴

The focus of the left panel *Anastasis* scene is unproportionately big figure of Christ painted in the middle section of the composition. The Redeemer radiates with light (as in Transfiguration scene¹⁵), however the typical mandorla of light is not seen. Holding a crossed lance(?) in the left hand¹⁶ he is shown aggressively bent forward in a dramatic effort to raise the naked figure of Adam.¹⁷ Such stress put on the forward bending of the Redeemer adds enormous dynamism to the scene. Similar altitude of doubled up Christ is found on many contemporary and later works of art. This convention seems to be a long lived one. The characteristic posture of Christ bending towards the *protoplastes* span the earliest eighth century visualisations with the full blown scenes of thirteenth century and later.¹⁸

¹² *Romans* 6:3–5.

¹³ Two males aged c. 35 and 50 years at the moment of death were buried in the burial chamber. One was originally buried in another grave and was translocated at an unknown date.

¹⁴ Interestingly enough the dividing line is not straight. Its winding appearance gives the feeling of the pulsing, hot air, not unusual component of the hellish landscape.

¹⁵ Cf. famous mid-sixth-century mosaic Transfiguration from the apse of the Justinian Church in St Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai (K. WEITZMANN, in: K.A. MANAFIS (ed.), *Sinai. Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, Athens 1990, pp. 61–62, Fig. 1); cf. also: J. LEROY, *Les manuscrits Syriaques à peintures conservés dans les Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, Paris 1964 [= *Manuscrits Syriaques*], Pls. 98,1–2; 109,1; 136,1.

¹⁶ Probably the 'patriarchal cross' would be a better designation.

¹⁷ The occurrence of the background colour in the upper section of the mural above Christ figure, makes the very fact of strong bending undisputable, despite the fact that the composition lacks details over there. The faintly preserved left hand (holding a crossed lance?) at the level of the knees is another argument for the unnatural curve of the Redeemer's body.

¹⁸ For the Fieschi-Morgan Staurotheke see: H.C. EVANS, W.D. WIXOM (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 834–1261*, New York 1997, Cat. No. 34, p. 74, Fig. 34. Cf. also



8. The *Anastasis* scene in the Lower Church III at Banganarti. (Phot. and drawing: W. Chmiel).

Only the protagonists, namely Christ, Hades and Adam are painted as full figures, whereas the others are depicted in half figures. It hardly can be regarded as a reflection of the general tenth century manner to represent the kingly prophets (the so-called Just of the Old Testament) as bust-length images.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the naked, half-figured bodies of the dead shown in the utmost contortion, withering with pain stand far away from the tenth century and later Byzantine convention of representing the Just as stiff, hieratic figures taken by the *rigor mortis*. The ambience of the scene, its expressionist aura, the nakedness

in this volume: the so-called Pliska cross, Cat. No. 225, pp. 331–332, Fig. 225; encolpion with the *Anastasis* (late tenth–eleventh century), Cat. No. 230, p. 342, Fig. 230; miniature from the Morgan Lectionary (1050–1100), Cat. No. 60, pp. 105–107, Fig. 60; miniature in the headpiece of the *Liturgical Homilies* of St Gregory of Nazianzos (c. 1150), Cat. No. 63, p. 110, Fig. 63; ivory diptych with *Twelve Scenes from the Life of Christ* (second half of the tenth–early eleventh century), Cat. No. 91, p. 144, Fig. 91; ivory icon with the *Meeting in the Garden* and *Anastasis* (mid-tenth century), Cat. No. 93, p. 148, Fig. 93.

¹⁹ A.W. EPSTEIN, *Tenth-Century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia*, Washington 1986, p. 65, Fig. 40.

of all figures (but Christ), also its didactic aspect point to the West as the possible source of artistic inspiration of the Baganarti *Anastasis* master. His main model was plausibly a Psalter miniature, ivory plaque or a minor art representation.

Apart from Christ and Hades, who are unquestionable protagonists of the scene, there are also sixteen other figures (the Firstborns included), eight of them are painted as white skinned (in fact light violet) and eight as black skinned.²⁰ The fact that the Redeemer is shown as saving eight souls of black man and eight souls of white men does not seem to be accidental. It is perhaps noteworthy that eight souls (Noah's family) was saved from the deluge. In the *First Epistle of Peter* (3:20–21) there is a clear allusion to that. Hades, painted white, who was the ruler of the Underworld and also Adam's master until the moment of the Christ's descent, lies prostrated on the ground beneath Christ's feet. He does not even try to fight being totally overpowered by the Redeemer. His only resistance is the hopeless effort aimed at stopping the firstborn by grasping his leg. He is interpreted as Hades, the lord and keeper of the dead and underworld on the basis of inscriptions that accompany the later visualisations of *Anastasis*.²¹ However, the interpretation of the figure trampled by Christ, as a personification of death is also plausible, the more so that it has many literary parallels, e.g. John of Damascus, who calls the person defeated by Christ either as 'tyrant' or 'death'.²² In a more eloquent style but in similar manner Pseudo-Epiphanius says of him as of a 'tyrant' that is 'the bitter and insatiable tyrannizing death', 'the snake trampled', 'the bitter dragon condemned'.²³ In the modern Greek folk traditions, deeply rooted in antiquity, the two conceptions of death, Charos (who is responsible for accompanying the dead to the Underworld)²⁴ and Hades (who is Lord of the Underworld) amalgamated into one.²⁵ Nevertheless the underworld is always labelled Hades.²⁶

The ritual meaning of Resurrection in the 'little tradition' of the Greek peasantry, lies not so much in the redemption of Adam's sins, but in the liberation of the dead from the torments of the Underworld. It is quite often perceived literally with no reference to the Last Judgment. The Holy Thursday is believed to be the day when the souls of the deceased are liberated, and come back to participate in the Resurrection feast with the living.

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Eve follows Adam, half hidden behind his back. Her skin is white, her gender is rather awkwardly marked by the left breast painted below the armpit. Painted in half figure, as purposely a minor performer of the spectacle, she stretches out her right hand to Christ in

²⁰ The symbolics of eight in the Raphaelion architecture is noteworthy. The reliquary in the middle section of the church that seems to be the crucial feature of the church is octagonal, as also are the piers and columns of ambo.

²¹ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 73.

²² JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa*, PG, 94.1096 (quoted here after: J.A. MACCULLOCH, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine*, Edinburgh 1930, p. 200; cf. also: KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 74).

²³ TISCHENDORF, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, pp. 304ff.

²⁴ M. ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Cambridge 1974 [= *The Ritual Lament*], p. 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 49–50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.



9. Adam and Eve from the *Anastasis* scene in Banganarti. (Phot. and drawing: W. Chmiel).

a gesture of supplication, while holding Adams' forearm with the other one. In a manner typical for the earliest *Anastasis* representations Christ maintains a respectable distance from her. She will not be treated as equal to Adam until the Late Byzantine Period.²⁷ In Banganarti she does not belong to the primary cast (made only of male protagonists). Strangely enough Eve is also inferior to Hades, who, although defeated and humiliated, is shown as a full figure.

Eve's physical proximity to Adam affiliates her with the scene's protagonists; her half body, however, puts her among the anonymous dead. Such hierarchical treatment of her affiliates the Banganarti scene to the Roman archetypal representations of *Anastasis* in which Eve, (...) is relegated to a secondary position, decisively excluded from the immediate action. Christ does not pull her by the hand. She goes wherever Adam goes, but as

²⁷ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 13.

a follower, not as equal. The content of the action and the image is determined by the remaining three figures: Christ, Adam, and Hades.²⁸

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The composition is centred at the group composed of the Redeemer, Hades, Adam, and Eve – *the first created... and the first dead amongst men*.²⁹ All are in physical contact, however, the ultimate focus of the scene is the right hand of Christ grasping the right forearm of Adam. The other figures errantly spread throughout the background are complementary to the protagonists. The hierarchy is underlined by sizes of the figures, Christ is, unproportionately high, Adam, Eve, and Hades also are ‘superhuman’ (as compared to the other dead).

The scene is rather ascetic, due to the lack of the ‘hellish’ attributes. The topography of the Underworld is also somewhat neglected, the adobe of the dead being visually defined only by the *tenebrae*. The background of the Baganarti *Anastasis* is dark grey. It evidently refers to the image of underworld as dark sunless pit being perfectly consistent with the classical descriptions of Hades.³⁰ The painter had ostensibly chosen that colour to reveal the very nature of the *tenebrae*, that are below the surface of the earth. It underlines the dramatic contrast between darkness and light. It also ultimately helped him to stress the juxtaposition between the Light that conquers the Darkness. The Light being the attribute of Christ, the Darkness – of Hades.

The motif of light entering Hell with the descent of Christ figures significantly in the *Apocryphon of Nicodemus*, an ‘unofficial supplement to the Gospel narrative’.³¹ In Coptic church the Holy Saturday, that commemorates the descent of Christ into Limbo is called *Saturday of Light*.³² Also the Easter rituals and beliefs, that are practiced elsewhere, use the symbolics of sun and moon. Enacting *Anastasis* in the verbal or visual layer is always connected with the ‘image’ of Christ perceived as the ‘Sun of Righteousness’ and primordial source of light. He descends to Hades shedding the light into the shadowy Underworld symbolised by the moon.³³

The greyish coloration of the scene also allowed the Baganarti master to emphasise the ‘glory’ of the radiating Christ, who brings conquering light to the Underworld. The dark greyish colour of Hell in Baganarti *Anastasis* distances this scene from the contemporaneous Eastern iconography motives since in the East, as a rule, the darkness of the Underworld was only verbally alluded but not manifested visually.³⁴

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁹ PSEUDO-EPIPHANIUS, *In Sancto et Magno Sabbato*, PG, 43.460f.

³⁰ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 83; H. BELTING, *Die Basilica die SS. Martiri in Cimitile und ihr frühmittelalterlicher Freskenzyklus*, *Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christliche Archäologie* 5, Wiesbaden 1962, p. 76, n. 153, Figs. 35–37.

³¹ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 29.

³² A.J. BUTLER, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt* II, Oxford 1884, p. 352.

³³ ALEXIOU, *The Ritual Lament*, p. 66; on this problem cf. H. RAHNER, *Griechische Mythen in Christlicher Deutung*, Zürich 1945 [= *Griechische Mythen*], pp. 125–215.

³⁴ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 84; *In the East, the tenebrae motif does not assume the iconographic importance it acquires in this group of western Anastasis images.*

The antique parallels of the light symbolism in the *Anastasis* was summed up by Dölger: *Der Descensus ad inferos als Glaubensbestand des Urchristentums fand bei seinem Eindringen in die griechisch-römische Kulturwelt die Meinung von der in die Unterwelt hinabsteigenden Sonne vor, und dieses Bild wurde dann bei der Missionspredigt unwillkürlich zur Ausmalung der Hadesfahrt Christi verwendet.*³⁵

The metaphor of Son–Logos as Sun, which is constantly emitting its rays, was used by Athanasius of Alexandria to explain one of the fundamental Christological dogmas namely the mystery of the generation of the Son–Logos by the Father. It seems to be consistent with the Baganarti image of resurrected Christ. The light is immanent component of the Resurrection. In a number of homiletical texts Christ resurrected instantly as the ‘Sun of Righteousness’³⁶ since he could not be kept under the yoke of Hades even for a while.³⁷ His soul flashed forth the light of his divinity in the Underworld, and destroyed the kingdom of Hades.³⁸ In the *Crucifixion and Resurrection* miniature from the *Rabbula Gospel* (composed in A.D. 586) the Resurrection of Christ is symbolized by the *radii* of light that came out from the tomb through its open door.³⁹

It is noteworthy that on the *Anastasis* representation known from San Clemente and another from San Giovanni e Paulo, the deep darkness of Hell (*caligo tenebrarum*) is stressed by black background, in striking similarly to the Baganarti manner of portraying the darkness of Hell with greyish paint.⁴⁰ One can not avoid conclusion drawn by Kartsonis that in the East *the tenebrae motif does not assume the iconographic importance it acquires in this group of western Anastasis images.*⁴¹

In terms of the theological attitudes towards eternal punishment, Last Judgment, and Hell perceived as the place of sojourn of the Just and the dead (who should or should not be tormented by fires and flames) the Baganarti scene is ambivalent. It presents the horror of the Underworld through the pain and utmost discomfort of the figures without showing the reasons behind. It lacks the tormenting flames, the cruelty of Hades’ accomplices, snakes, torture tools etc. The dead suffer simply because they simply are in Hell, not because they are actually harassed by the demons, serpents, monsters etc.

Other frequent attributes of the Underworld, that abound in later *Anastasis* scenes also lack. There is no *disiecta membra*,⁴² coiled serpents, devils, so-called *Mumiengruppe*, shattered gates of Hell, monsters, angels, and, more importantly, the Just. The hellish fire is also not marked, at least there is no visible trace of it. The scene apparently lacks flames and fire that is a vital feature of the Underworld in the ninth century Psalters and their

³⁵ F.J. DÖLGER, *Sol Salutis*, Münster 1925, p. 354 (quoted after: RAHNER, *Griechische Mythen*, p. 159).

³⁶ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa*, IV, PG, 94.1101.

³⁷ ATHANASIUS, *De incarnatione. Contra Apollinarium*, I, PG, 26.1117.

³⁸ THEODORE ABUCARAS, *Opuscula*, PG, 97.1469; cf. on this point the commentary by J. SCHAPER, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter*, Tübingen 1995, p. 166.

³⁹ LEROY, *Manuscripts Syriaques*, Pl. 32; KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 22.

⁴⁰ WILPERT, *Die römischen Mosaiken II*, p. 894.

⁴¹ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 84.

⁴² The *disiecta membra* floating in Hell, so common in later representations of *Anastasis* are to some extent personalised into the half-figures of the sinners.

later copies.⁴³ It fully confirms Brenk's thesis that the Old Testament Kings and shattered gates of Hell were not yet included in the earliest *Anastasis* scenes and were added at a later period.⁴⁴

The lack of some of the diagnostic attributes of the *Anastasis* is an important dating factor for the Banganarti scene. The motif of the Broken Gates of Hell is absent from the early representations (e.g. Ciborium of St Mark's – *vide infra*, Chapel of John VII in Old St Peter's, Santa Maria Antiqua, San Clemente, Chludov Psalter).⁴⁵ It first appears in the tenth century as the Chekmoukmedi enamel might indicate.⁴⁶

The cross-staff (if any in the Banganarti scene)⁴⁷ is a very dubious chronological diagnostic. It emerged as Saviour's attribute in the *Anastasis* depicted in the Lower Church of San Clemente in Rome.⁴⁸ It is also present in Christ's hand in the *Anastasis* contained in the eleventh century Psalter kept in the British Museum.⁴⁹

The mandorla that surrounds Christ definitely indicates the early date, as also does the Redeemer's movement to the right instead of the opposite direction.⁵⁰ Other *Anastasis* diagnostics as e.g. Hades in chains and the symmetry of the composition (both motives absent in Banganarti scene) were not staged before the tenth century.⁵¹

From the tenth century on, the *Anastasis* started to be employed independently from the Christological cycle.⁵² In fact it was detached from this context a century earlier as is demonstrated by the marginal miniatures in the ninth century Psalters.⁵³

In broader iconographic categories the Banganarti *Anastasis* shares most of the diagnostics with the Kartsonis' type I (the earliest of the three types of *Anastasis* singled out by her in 1986).⁵⁴ It is also a mixture of Weitzmann's older variety of the so-called 'narrative type', dated to the pre-iconoclastic period, that *shows Christ entering Hell and extending either his right or left hand to raise Adam*.⁵⁵ The later variety, attributed by Weitzmann to

⁴³ E.g. in fol. 29 of the Stuttgart Psalter in the early ninth century: KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 85.

⁴⁴ B. BRENK, *Tradition und Neuerung in der christlichen Kunst des ersten Jahrtausends*, Vienna 1966, n. 162, p. 82.

⁴⁵ CH.R. MOREY, *Notes on the East Christian Miniatures*, *ArtBull* XI/1, 1929 [= Notes], pp. 5–103.

⁴⁶ N.P. KONDAKOV, *Histoire et monuments des émaux byzantins*, Frankfurt a/Main 1892, Fig. 43.

⁴⁷ The painting is blurred. In this point the supposed cross lance could be also the roll.

⁴⁸ MOREY, *Notes*, p. 58.

⁴⁹ McNEIL RUSHFORTH, *S. Maria Antiqua*, p. 116, Fig. 10.

⁵⁰ MOREY, *Notes*, p. 58.

⁵¹ *Loc.cit.*

⁵² KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 177.

⁵³ *Loc.cit.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 151, 165; Weitzmann proposed in 1960 the name 'narrative type' for the first type of *Anastasis*, whereas he called 'the renaissance type' the second one (K. WEITZMANN, *Aristocratic Psalter and Lectionary*, *Record of the Art Museum Princeton University* 19, 1960 [= *Aristocratic Psalter*], p. 99). In the third ('dogmatic') type *artist seems to have placed Christ above physical contact, in this way avoiding a purely narrative and temporal interpretation and stressing the aspect of eternal truth* (*Loc.cit.*). It was first manifested in the Chludof-Psalter in Moscow and therefore the second half of the ninth century is the most likely date for the origin of this type (*Ibid.*, p. 102).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

the Macedonian Renaissance shows: *Christ leaving Hell and dragging Adam behind him, just as Heracles once dragged Cerberus*.⁵⁶

The cornerstones of Kartsonis' type I of *Anastasis* are the decorations on the so-called historiated reliquaries⁵⁷ of the ninth century⁵⁸ or probably earlier.⁵⁹ The best example of this group is the *Harrowing of Hell* depicted on the *niello* Fieschi-Morgan Staurotheke in which the Redeemer is shown moving to the right, holding a scroll, and raising a half-kneeling Adam. Eve, similarly to Baganarti scene, stands behind in supplication.⁶⁰ The Fieschi-Morgan *niello*, also provides the earliest example of Hades shown as a prostrate figure stretched flat on the ground and humiliated by Christ, while attempting to maintain a hold on Adam.⁶¹

This basic model survived in many variants. On the *encolpia* from Vicopisano and Pliska the mandorla of light manifests its presence around the Christ body by the X-shaped radiation of light (as is the case in Baganarti scene).⁶²

The type I probably was born in the seventh/eighth century. It manifested its full blown iconography in the first decade of the eighth century in mural representations known from Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome⁶³ and flourished in the ninth and tenth century. The type II made its appearance in the eleventh century.⁶⁴

In fact the murals from Rome represent the turning point in the development of the scene. The type I uses *Anastasis* more like a separate motif with the self-contained message of its own that fits more to the late antique political theology rather than a Christian theological dogma. As compared to its chronological followers (the second and third type), the first type is more 'Hellenistic' and evidently more affiliated to the Late Roman tradition of portraying the triumphs of the deified rulers over the Evil Forces materialized by the defeated enemies. Christ trampling Hades is a Christianized version of a pagan motif of a solar God triumphing over the Idol of Darkness. As a visualisation of victory of the Good over the Evil it rather belongs to the universal vocabulary of symbols than to the Christian iconography. That is mostly through its universalistic, well understood, ideographic messa-

⁵⁶ ID., *Das Evangelion im Skevophylakion zu Lawra, SemKond VIII*, 1936, pp. 87ff; ID., *Aristocratic Psalter*, p. 99.

⁵⁷ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 151.

⁵⁸ Fieschi-Morgan reliquary is dated by Kartsonis to the first quarter of the ninth century: *Ibid.*, pp. 94–125, esp. p. 123. This date is at least disputable. The piece is rather firmly associated with the late seventh century work. In the light of analogies from Santa Maria Antiqua this date is more probable than Kartsonis ninth century. Nevertheless the early ninth century dating for the Fieschi-Morgan Staurotheke has been confirmed by D. BUCKTON, *Byzantine Enamel and the West, ByzForsch* 13, 1988, pp. 235–244.

⁵⁹ Cf. M. ROSENBERG, *Geschichte der Goldschmiedekunst auf technischer Grundlage, Zellschmelz I und II*, Frankfurt a/Main 1921, pp. 31–38, where a late seventh century date is proposed; cf. also: C. DAVIS-WEYER, *Die ältesten Darstellungen des Hadesfahrt Christi, des Evangeliums Nikodemi und ein Mosaik der ZenoKapel-le [= Die ältesten Darstellungen]*, in: *Roma e l'età Carolingia. Atti delle giornate di studio 3-8 Maggio 1976*, Roma 1976, p. 184.

⁶⁰ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 96.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

ge, it became an iconographic emblem of the tenth and eleventh century *with amendments that clarify rather than alter the content*.⁶⁵

Having in mind its pagan antecedents and imperial model one should not doubt that the motif of the *Harrowing of Hell* originated at some point in the pre-iconoclastic era.⁶⁶ Such assumption seems to be well rooted in the liturgical tradition, despite the fact that earliestmost of its pictorial representations originate from the seventh/eighth century.

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Replacing the Old Testament Just by the anonymous dead imbued the Baganarti *Anastasis* with an ethnic flavour and provided it with universal message of the Resurrection and Deliverance that is available to everybody through the sacrifice of Christ. The didactic message of the scene, addressed to the local community, is obvious. It promises salvation through the strength of the Biblical precedence pointing at the same time at the role of baptism and the intercession of the saints. In its deepest theological substratum it drew parallel between the resurrection of the *protoplastes* and the future rising from the dead of the commonfolk. Replacing the highly conventional Biblical reality with the picture of the real world is a convention alien to the Byzantine theology and iconography. The eschatological *status quo* depicted on the wall of the Lower Church II is immaculately pure in its message, the lack of attributes and visual didascalia makes it even purer and more understandable for the illiterate commonfolk. It successfully translated the highly intellectual dogma into the visual ideogram. Such translations from the dogmatic theology into simplified iconography were omnipresent in the Lower Church painting decorations. The holy riders vanquishing the evil forces symbolized either by an apostate emperor or naked female demon, belong to the popular imagery abundantly scented with apothropaic efficacies commonly attributed to such representations.

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The birth and acceptance of the *Anastasis* scene as the illustration and the epitome of the Resurrection was closely related to the Christological conceptions agreed during the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–681) and the Council in Trullo in 692.⁶⁷ It became the literary visualisation of the formulation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787: *He rose from the dead on the strength of his own divinity after despoiling Hades, and after freeing those who had been prisoners for ages*.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁶⁶ M. GUARDIA, Una obra bizantina de Ciudad Real y el tema de la Anástasis, *D'Art* 12, March 1986, p. 95 (with bibliography in n. 19).

⁶⁷ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 96.

⁶⁸ G.D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*, 12.1138; the Greek text quoted in: KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 62, n. 63.

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The 'Painter Manuals' formulate only the general guidelines for painting the Resurrection.⁶⁹ The motif probably entered the realm of official Christian iconography at the same time (or slightly earlier).⁷⁰ However, apart from the archaising Cappadocian murals and Italian compositions (known mostly from Rome), the visual illustrations of Christ's descent into Limbo are rare in Byzantine art prior to the eleventh century and are almost entirely absent in the mosaics and mural decorations of the churches of that period.⁷¹ That makes Baganarti *Anastasis* an important element in the evolution of the motif from the minor to monumental art.

The earliest known representations of the *Anastasis* are associated with the centres outside Constantinople. To the earliest belong the *Anastasis* from the sculptured alabaster colonnettes that support the canopy of the high altar (*ciborium*) in St Mark's at Venice that are still regarded by some to be *not later than the sixth century*.⁷² It must be said at this point that such early dating of the colonnettes in question by Baumstark⁷³ and Wilpert⁷⁴ have been contended on various occasions by different scholars.

According to the modern 'state of mind' the columns are the eleventh–thirteenth century copies of the early originals.⁷⁵ Demus, the most prominent opponent of their early dating has withdrawn from his positions after getting acquainted with the argumentation of C. Anti⁷⁶ who favoured the originality of all colonnettes.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, some more

⁶⁹ CH.R. MOREY, *East Christian Paintings in the Freer Collection*, London 1914, p. 45.

⁷⁰ The motif is said to enter the Christian iconography in the eighth century and to assume its classic form by the eleventh century (The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, s.v. *Anastasis*, I, 88).

⁷¹ The only exception to the rule are the ninth century mosaics in the Roman churches.

⁷² McNEIL RUSHFORTH, *PBSR* I, 1902, p. 116; A. VENTURI, *Storia dell'Arte Italiana*, Vol. I, Milan 1901, pp. 444ff, Fig. 266; W. LOWRIE, *Christian Art and Archaeology: Being a Handbook to the Monuments of the Early Church*, New York 1901, p. 269; P.R. GARRUCCI, *Storia della Arte Cristiana nei Primi Otto Secoli della Chiesa*, Vol. VI, Prato 1880, p. 498, 3.

⁷³ He considered the *Descent* to be the Palestinian invention, from the time of Constantine (!), due to a record of the scene in the Martyrion at Jerusalem (A. BAUMSTARK, *Palaestinensia. Ein vorläufiger Bericht, Röm.QSchr.*, XX-1, 1906, p. 125: *Auf ein Mosaik im Rahmen der konstantinischen Bauten am Heiligen Grabe, wahrscheinlich auf das Apsismosaik des Martyrion, geht die orientalische Anastasis zurück*; cf. WILPERT, *Die römischen Mosaiken II*, pp. 889–890; M. BAUER, *Die Ikonographie der Höllenfahrt Christi von ihren Anfängen bis zum XVI Jahrhundert*, (typescript of 'Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades') Göttingen 1948 [= *Die Ikonographie*], p. 29). Baumstark did not, however, specified the sources of his conviction, since this mysterious mosaic neither survived nor was documented in any reliable way.

⁷⁴ He thought that the very fundamentals of the *Anastasis* iconography originated during Constantine reign, however, not in Palestine but in Rome (WILPERT, *Die römischen Mosaiken I*, pp. 202, 376; criticised by BAUER, *Die Ikonographie*, pp. 29–31).

⁷⁵ E. LUCCHESI-PALLI, *Die Passions- und Endscenen Christi auf der Ciboriumssäulen von S. Marco in Venedig*, Prague 1942; O. DEMUS, *A Renaissance of Early Christian Art in Thirteenth Century Venice* [= *Renaissance*], in: K. WEITZMANN (ed.), *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honour of A.M. Friend Jr.*, Princeton – New Jersey 1955, pp. 349–350; CH.R. MOREY, *The Early Christian Ivories of the Eastern Empire*, *DOP* 1, 1941 [= *Early Christian Ivories*], p. 52, n. 38; KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ C. ANTI, *La tomba del Doge Marino Morosini nell'atrio di S. Marco*, *Arte venete VIII*, 1954 [= *Tomba del Doge*], pp. 17–21.

⁷⁷ O. DEMUS, *The Church of San Marco in Venice*, Glückstadt 1960, p. 166, n. 135.

modern scholars fiercely advocated the authenticity of all four columns.⁷⁸ The middle course is that only two rear columns and all the inscriptions originated in the thirteenth century.⁷⁹ The (earlier) forward pair (with *Anastasis* scene) were supposed to be a part of the loot brought to Venice after the sack of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, there are firm grounds to believe that the motif, as represented in Venice, was in the repertoire of the sixth/seventh century ivory workshops in Constantinople. It is hard to imagine that the thirteenth century ivory carvers could simply create the scene *ex nihilo*. It was plausibly copied from another (original) scene or part of it. Nevertheless, the monumental illustrations to the Holy Saturday cycle were well known in Italy in the seventh/eighth century.

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The *Anastasis* from the Lower Church finds no parallel in the vast repertoire of the images of *Anastasis* known from the period prior to the very beginning of the eleventh century (that is the oldest possible date for the Baganarti diptych⁸¹). The model for the general scheme of composition remains unknown. It was probably composed of two or more motives amalgamated into one. The mural represents a curious stylistic and ideological amalgam of the local tradition with the Carolingian type of *Anastasis* known from Psalter miniatures and the monumental ninth century paintings from Italy.

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The paramount feature of the Baganarti *Anastasis* scene is its independence from the Christological cycle. In defiance to the dominant iconological trend of the ninth and tenth century, it represents an archaising tradition being also different to its sole Nubian analogy from Faras.⁸²

However, according to Kartsonis the *Anastasis* started to be employed independently from the Christological cycle from the tenth century onwards, the process being heralded already in the ninth century (as is demonstrated by the marginal miniatures in the Psalters).⁸³

⁷⁸ ANTI, *Tomba del Doge*, *passim*; especially G. COSTANTINI, *Le colonne del Ciborio di S. Marco a Venezia*, *Arte Cristiana* 3, 1915, pp. 8ff, 166ff, 235ff. The discussion have been summed up by DEMUS, *Renascence*, pp. 166–167, n. 135.

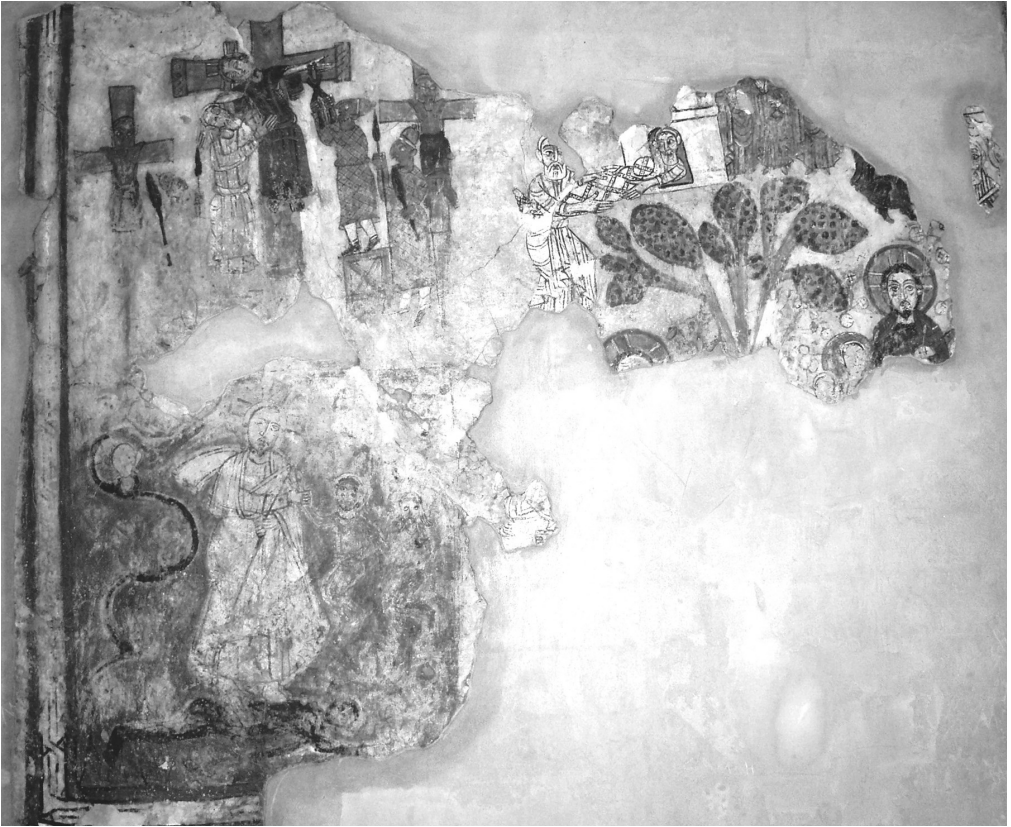
⁷⁹ And all four assembled in place in the thirteenth century.

⁸⁰ MOREY, *Early Christian Ivories*, n. 53.

⁸¹ In the eleventh century a new church was built on top of the levelled Lower Church II. It is highly improbable that the mural was executed in the last moment of the church use. More plausible date is ninth/tenth century.

⁸² Raising the question of possible influences of Muslim eschatology upon the *Beatus* imagery, J. Yarza stresses the motif of serpents as the vehicles of punishment in the Hell that are typical in the Muslim images of hell, cf. J. YARZA, *El "Descensus ad Inferos" del Beato de Gerona y la escatologia Musulmana*, *BSEAA* 43, 1977, p. 143.

⁸³ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 177.



10. The *Anastasis* from the Faras Cathedral (now in the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum). (Phot. B. Żurawski).

The Baganarti scene is probably a copy after a ninth century Western Psalter illustration or a somewhat anachronistic visualisation of an early, pre-iconoclastic, unpreserved Byzantine archetype. The latter case, however, seems less plausible.

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The Baganarti *Anastasis*, being independent of Christological cycle on the one hand, is tremendously influenced by the imagery of the Last Judgement – on the other. The theological link that associates *Anastasis* with Last Judgement, more perceptible, however, in later examples, is visually manifested in way of painting the dead. The anonymity of the naked figures, who were reduced to their bare corporeal, sinful essence, stripped of any individuality and requisites, that stay afar from the fully uniformed Byzantine Just definitely corroborate such an interpretation. The analogy to such stylistic integration of two spheres of Christological cycle is found among the mosaics on the western wall of the church of Santa Maria Assunta at Torcello where the artist (or artists) successfully

managed to integrate the two episodes. Another winning attempt at such amalgamation is the illustration on fol. 44 of Man. Vat. Gr. 752 and the so-called ‘francized’ decoration on the western wall of the of the early tenth century Armenian church at Tat’ev. Both images belong to the iconographic hybrid group of Last Judgment scene that managed to include also the *Anastasis* scene.⁸⁴

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Having the above said in mind we must admit that Banganarti *Anastasis* shares both Eastern and Western diagnostics of the subject. The nakedness of the anonymous dead, as well as Adam and Eve, on the grounds of the Byzantine theology can be explained only as the influence of the Last Judgement eschatology. In the West such feature (i.e. the nakedness of the Firstborns and the dead) is self-contained element of the Resurrection dogma, that is fully acceptable even outside the Last Judgement iconography. In the Eastern imagery of the subject the iconographical idioms of the Underworld and Hell were treated instrumentally. They were permitted to differ considerably since their visualisations served the apologetic message. The Underworld used to take different visual shapes, from the fiery abyss to the civilized abyss peopled by the fully dressed ‘candidates’ for resurrection. Even in the Eastern visualisations of the *Anastasis* Hell is a far cry from the Underworld of the Last Judgements.⁸⁵ It usually lacks the attributes of the place of suffering and punishment. In the ninth century copy of *Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, kept at the Vatican, the Underworld is depicted in a manner that is hardly distinguishable from the terrestrial and celestial spheres.⁸⁶

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The mandorla (‘which explodes with light’)⁸⁷ is in Banganarti scene reduced to the radiating rays of light that symbolize Christ’s divinity and his aspect of the ‘Sun of Righteousness’.⁸⁸ The use of radiating light (as a mandorla substitute) also defines Christ action in Hell as the deed of the Logos Incarnate.⁸⁹ The conquering light that emanates from the Redeemer, together with the cross lance (?) that he holds in his left hand are two divinely inspired weapons that helped Christ to overpower Hades. Mandorla of light also figures predominantly in the two representations of *Anastasis* in Exultet Roll in Bibliotheca Vaticana⁹⁰ and on the

⁸⁴ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 159.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸⁶ Its true function as an adobe of the dead is manifested through its position at the bottom of the stratified cosmos. *Ibid.*, p. 84, n. 12, Fig. 18.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71, n. 97, 98.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹⁰ DAVIS-WEYER, *Die ältesten Darstellungen*, Figs. 192, 193. The Exultet Roll in Vatican was composed in Benevent between A.D. 985 and 987; cf. H. BELTING, *Studien zur beneventanischen Malerei, Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archaeologie 7*, Wiesbaden 1968, p. 167–183.

Basilevski Situla in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.⁹¹ The Eve's hair in the Basilevski Situla stream down loose on the shoulders (*notabene* in a manner most similar to the Banganarti scene).⁹² This led Davis-Weyer to the conclusion that the artist *eine Vorlage mit unbedeckten Stammeltern vor sich hatte*.⁹³ The mandorla of light is also marked on mosaic in the Chapel of Zeno in Santa Prassede in Rome.



11. The anonymous dead from the *Anastasis* scene from Banganarti. (Phot. and drawing: W. Chmiel).

In Banganarti *Anastasis* the dead are stretching their hands towards the blinding rays of light that radiate from Christ. Nevertheless, only Adam could face that explosion of divine light. The same omnipotent, blinding light makes Eve to hide behind his back. She stretches her hand towards Christ in supplicative gesture at the same time feeling the presence of the majesty of light that virtually blinds her with its tremendous glitter. Her gesture in equal measures is full of fear and hope.

Due to the imperfect state of preservation of the painting it is impossible to say with conviction that Christ in Banganarti scene holds a cross lance.⁹⁴ The situations gives

⁹¹ DAVIS-WEYER, *Die ältesten Darstellungen*, p. 187, Fig. 191.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁹³ *Loc.cit.*

⁹⁴ A scroll is an alternative. He certainly holds something. The copyist has drawn it as a long staff rather than a short scroll. Nevertheless the doubts remain.

a dubious hint at the dating of the scene since in the earliest examples of the subject Christ is 'unarmed'. He holds a scroll, while later he is painted with a cross lance that he uses at times as a weapon for stabbing Hades.⁹⁵ Wilpert argued that cross in the hand of Christ had not much sense at all and according to his opinion was excluded from the early Roman representations of *Anastasis* (that is apparently not true!).⁹⁶ The cross-staff (if any) of Christ, which might appear in Banganarti, may be traced to earlier Western examples of *Anastasis* or the scenes that were thematically related to the subject.⁹⁷

In the Eastern art the aggressive use of the cross in the visualisations of the defeat of Hades by the resurrecting Christ appears as late as eleventh century. This iconographical detail is of utmost importance to the Banganarti *Anastasis* hermeneutics. It puts an important *unctim* with the tradition that, regardless its birthplace, grew up and matured in the West. Naturally the sources of this visual convention may be traced back to the Early Christian period.

When considering the origin of the cross held by Christ in the Middle Byzantine *Anastasis*, it is logical to point to the West. Moreover, as Kartsonis stated: *this motif seems to be most at home with the mid-eight-century western illuminated cycle of Nicodemus, in which it is first encountered and in which it was possibly bred.*⁹⁸

The cross lance (if any) is being hold by the Banganarti Christ in a somewhat awkward manner. It definitely does not fit the well balanced and well proportioned figure of the Redeemer. It disturbs his stance, makes his pace awkward. Christ who drags Adam out of the abyss by the right hand had to stab at the same time Hades with the left hand. Both for Christ and the painter that was an almost impossible venture. The painter has done his best, nevertheless the artificially elongated left arm (hidden behind the right one) gives the Christ figure some awkwardness. In other words the crossed lance (or a scroll) was a later addition to the original 'better balanced', and better studied figure. It was an *extra* that was necessitated by the reason that had more to do with the theology of the scene and its didactic message than with pure aesthetics. Such awkwardness with which Christ tramples Hades (while trying to lift Adam up) at the same moment must be viewed as an indication that in the eighth/ninth century the cross-lance or a scroll was a quite recent addition. In the later examples of the subject (in the eleventh century and later) the size and importance of the cross grew, however the stance of Christ also changed accordingly. In post-twelfth-century depiction of the *Anastasis* it becomes a monumental attribute of Christ's divinity and the sign of his victory over death.⁹⁹ Christ holds it ostensibly in a way that did not unbalance his posture.

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⁹⁵ M.E. FRAZER, Hades Stabbed by the Cross of Christ, *MMJ* 9, 1974, pp. 153–161.

⁹⁶ WILPERT, Die römischen Mosaiken II, p. 894.

⁹⁷ KARTSONIS, *Anastasis*, p. 85.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

It is also noteworthy that *Anastasis* was employed as an illustration of *Gospel of St John* in the tenth century.¹⁰⁰ The coincidence between the *Anastasis* and the incipit of the *Gospel of St John* was already observed by many scholars.¹⁰¹ *Anastasis* was a customary illustration for the Gospels or, more precisely, for the lectionaries: *for the readings for Easters with which the lessons of John commence and thus is usually the first miniature in this type of Gospel Book after the evangelist portrait*.¹⁰² The evil warding, apothropaic efficacy of the incipit of the Gospel according to St John is well known. The literature on this subject is enormous. I also leave apart the reason behind putting the initial verses of the *Gospel of St John* on amulets, exorcisms, invocations, incantations etc.

It is important, however, that *John* 1:1–19 is the lection and the *Anastasis* is a pictorial illustration for Easter Saturday.¹⁰³ The mural fully corresponds with the scripture quotations and illustrates the liturgical feast at which the beginning of the *Gospel of St John* is read.

Bogdan Żurawski
Zakład Archeologii Śródziemnomorskiej
PAN, Warszawa

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁰¹ K. WEITZMANN, *An Illustrated Greek New Testament of the Tenth Century in the Walters Art Gallery*, in: *Byzantine Liturgical Psalters and Gospels*, London (Variorum Reprints IX) 1980, p. 19; cf. SH. TSUJI, *Byzantine Lectionary Illustration*, in: G. VIKAN (ed.), *Illuminated Greek Manuscripts from American Collections*, Princeton 1973, pp. 34ff.

¹⁰² MOREY, *Notes*, p. 57.

¹⁰³ The *Anastasis* is the great Easter picture whereas the beginning of St John is read on Easter Sunday. C. MEREDITH, *The Illustrations of Codex Ebnerianus*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courland Institutes*, XXIX, 1966, p. 420, Fig. 69.d. *Anastasis* is simply a pictorial exegesis for *John* 1:1ff.