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From seeking a function to setting artistic role

IV. From seeking a function
to setting artistic role

Two ivory panels from the Treasury of the Cathedral in Milan are described without exception in the literature as the "binding of Evangeliary"[154] considering the presence of the four Gospel writers and their symbols in the corners. Their format and size (37,5×28,3 cm) could also refer to the original purpose, which was to be the luxurious binding for a manuscript unpreserved today. The absence of any proof that it was ever the case was first indicated by David H. Wright in his review of the third edition of Volbach's catalogue[155] in 1981.[156] He compares the basic five-part model of similar diptychs with the Barberini Diptych (Fig. 20)[157] and considers the Milan Diptych as the "earliest example of its Christian variant". Wright proposes a hypothesis that the church adopted the custom of displaying the diptychs of high officials as symbols of their power, without the ivory panels ever containing manuscripts. The author does not present any convincing arguments and admits that just like Volbach he is working on the hypothetical level.[158] Nevertheless, he indicated a path of a further study of the above-mentioned relation of Christian diptychs with profane diptychs which was taken by Marco Navoni in 2007. In his study, *I dittici eburnei nella liturgia*, he presents not only a synthesis of the history of ivory diptychs from their profane use to sacral, but also a synthesis of the functions and their transformations that these objects underwent within Christian liturgy itself.[159]

The primary function of the Milan Diptych, just like similar objects used in the liturgy, is hence not as clear as it might seem at first sight. We cannot derive the method of its use from the written reports, because the earliest

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154   Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 1976, p. 84; Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible*; Navoni, I dittici eburnei.
155   Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 1976, pp. 84–85.
156   Wright, [Review:] W. F. Volbach.
157   Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 1976, entry No. 48, p. 47; James D. Breckendridge, entry Diptych leaf with Justinian as Defender of the Faith, in: Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of spirituality*, pp. 34–35; Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux,* entry 9, pp. 49–54.
158   Wright, [Review:] W. F. Volbach.
159   Navoni, I dittici eburnei.

preserved records do not come until the 12[160] century.[160] It has not been ruled out that certain rituals with the use of sacral objects could have endured for centuries in the church, but it is just as likely that their functions mutually transformed without one excluding another one. Besides the more than six-hundred-year absence of written reports, another certain obstruction in the study is also the manner, in which the panels were stuck on the modern wooden underlay[161] and hence the impossibility to investigate its back side. Their modification could be absolutely essential for the knowledge of their original function.

The significance, which this luxurious artefact and other similar monuments had in the context of Christian liturgy, is hence impossible to know other than by following the development of the use of ivory panels beginning with their profane counterparts, consular diptychs, which were abundantly produced precisely in the 5[162] and 6[162] centuries[162] and played an important role in the collective memory of Late Antique society. If we understand how these luxurious objects were perceived by Late Antique society, it might be possible to determine the original function of the Milan Diptych of Five Parts.

The beginnings of the use of ivory diptychs and consular diptychs

The purely practical use of the panel for taking notes, numbers or names from various materials is a known custom already from the Antique Period. The word Diptych (Latin *Diptychum*) is simply a label for an object that is assembled from two parts. It is thus only natural to use this work for a type of book or notebook assembled from two panels joined by a hinge and furnished with a lock on the side. The exterior part was most often decorated with ornaments, the inside was impregnated with wax, in which notes were carved with the tip of a quill.[163]

The word *Diptych* is also used for the description of a special class of luxurious monuments, so-called consular or imperial diptychs, whose practical function receded into the background in favour of their representative decoration. Consular diptychs are generally considered to have been created at the commission of

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160   Bossaglia; Cinotti, *Tesoro e Museo*, p. 49.

161   Richard Delbrück, *Denkmäler spätantiker Kunst*, Berlin 1927.

162   Capps, The Style of Consular, pp. 60–101; Alan Cameron, Consular diptychs in their social context: new eastern evidence, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 11, 1998, pp. 398–400; Marilena Abbatepaolo, Rassegna generale di fonti e studi sui 'Diptycha eburnea' della tarda antichità, *Bollettino di studi latini* XXXIV, 2004, pp. 169–209; Cecilia Olovsdotter, *The consular Image. An Iconological Study of the Consular diptychs*, Oxford 2005; Elisabetta Ravegnani, *Consoli e dittici consolari nella tarda antichita*, Roma 2006; David (ed.), *Eburnea Diptycha*; Marilena Abbatepaolo, *Parole d'avorio, fonti letterarie e testi per lo studio dei dittici eburnei*, Bari 2012.

163   Henri Leclerq, entry Diptyques, in: Fernand Cabrol (ed.), *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*: D – Domestici, Tome IV., par. 1., Paris 1920, pp. 1045–1170, esp. pp. 1045–1046.

high officials in memorial of the day of their appointment to the office of consul and served as a gift for friends, emperors or other important people.[164] The issuance of diptychs could also be a way of inviting people to a consular inauguration or on the contrary diptychs could have been handed out at them as souvenirs. That is testified to for us by Claudius' poem describing Stilicho's consular inauguration in Rome in 400. The Roman poet describes the ivory panels "inlaid with gold forming a shining inscription of the consul's name, carried in a procession of honourable men".[165] After this presentation, probably at the very least some of the panels were given to those present as a souvenir.[166]

The first known of these diptychs is dated to 406, the last to 541; but we can speak with certainty of their general popularity already from the 4th century. This fact is proved for us by the law of Emperor Theodosius from 384 that forbid the distribution of ivory diptychs to anyone other than *consules ordinarii.* Most researchers have assumed that this law was genenrally valid and that for instance the non-consul Rufius Probianus (*vicarius Romae*), who issued ivory diptychs, must have either ignored the law or acquired some special permission.[167] In fact, this act was aimed exclusively at the Senate in Constantinople and dealt exclusively with ceremonial games in the circus and regulated the expesnes for them. Their organization was the consul's only obligation when entering the office.[168] The functions of the consular diptychs, where in the upper register the consul is depicted and in the lower register the course of the games (e.g. Liverpool Diptych, 1st half of the 5th century;[169] Fig. 41) is hence chiefly a reminder of the games that the high official organized, rather than a notification of the office itself.[170] Edward Capps also showed using several examples that the commission and donation of ivory diptychs was so popular that this custom was adopted also by other dignitaries and even private persons. These had diptychs made on the occasions of family holidays, e.g. weddings.[171]

The studies by Anthony Cutler[172] or Alan Cameron[173] confirm that any efforts to categorize ivory diptychs in terms of their use has not yet led to any certain conclusions. The question of the differences between consular, imperial or private types is not clear, just like the little attention paid to the custom and need of their

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164 Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux,* p. 30.
165 Cameron, Consular diptychs, p. 399; Dale Kinney, First-Generation diptychs in the Discourse of Visual Culture, in: in: Bühl, Cutler, Effenberger (eds), *Spätantike und byzantinische*, pp. 149–166, esp. p. 149.
166 Ibidem.
167 Capps, The Style of Consular diptychs, p. 62; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 1976, p. 29.
168 Cameron, Consular diptychs, p. 399.
169 Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 1976, entry 59, p. 53.
170 Cameron, Consular diptychs, p. 400.
171 Capps, The style of Consular diptychs, p. 62.
172 Anthony Cutler, Five Lessons in Late Roman Ivory, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 6, 1993, pp. 167–192.
173 Cameron, Consular diptychs.

distribution.[174] Who were the diptychs trying to flatter; the donor or its recipient? Some diptychs bear the name in the genitive (e.g. the Boethius Diptych;[175] Fig. 5), some in the dative (e.g. the Probus Diptych bears the name of the commissioner but the figure depicted on it is Emperor Honorius;[176] Fig. 42). It seems that it is not certain if the essential criterion for its production was whom it was addressed to or its commissioner. It continues to be necessary to be satisfied with the statement that the commissioning of ivory diptychs were a political practice, a sign of the good position, wealth and refinement of the commissioner. Their issuance was a necessity arising from the position of influential men as an ostentatious expression of their power. They were issued in commemoration of a certain event, whether it was a consul's inauguration, the organization of games in the circus or a family event deserving a suitable keepsake.

From the end of the 5th century until the end of the office of consul before the middle of the 6th century, ivory diptychs became not only symbols of the political power of a consul but also an official image of the Roman Empire.[177] A triumph and victory of a consul becomes a triumph and victory of the empire, his wealth is a promise of general bounty and prosperity. Especially in the last decades of the 5th century consular diptychs increase in their propagandistic strength. At the time of the collapsing empire, diptychs increasing divert from the individual to the depiction of imperial authority; triumph and power are symbolized by the eagles, prosperity and victory by the horns of plenty, the fruit, garlands and laurel leaves, connect with the famous past, then the *imago clipeata* with dead ancestors.[178] Consular diptychs at that time were an effort to present publically the traditions and continuity at times of the declining fame of the Roman Empire.

Two large tablets, each of which is assembled of five smaller panels, as in the case of the Milan Diptych, are a separate category. Some researchers have labelled this composite format of profane determination as a consular Diptych, whose recipient was to have been the emperor himself.[179] However, in my opinion, it is not possible to accept this hypothesis. The only preserved monument of a five-part format labelled in the literature as an imperial Diptych is the famous Barberini Diptych (2nd quarter of the 6th century, Constantinopolis; Fig. 20).[180] Not even in this case do we know its original function. From the

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174 Cameron, Consular diptychs, p. 398.

175 Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 1976, entry 6, p. 32.

176 Ibidem, entry 1, pp. 29–30; Clementina Rizzardi (et. al.), *Avori bizantini e medievali nel Museo nazionale di Ravenna*, Ravenna 1990, p. 34.

177 Abbatepaolo, *Parole d'avorio*, p. 22.

178 Ibidem, p. 23.

179 Ormonde Maddock Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, London 1911, pp. 185 and 196; Capps, The style of Consular diptychs, pp. 62–63; Volbach, *Avori di scuola ravennate*, p. 15; Cutler, Five Lessons, p. 16.

180 Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux*, entry 9, p. 49.

current state of the art of knowledge, it is not possible to create any special group of monuments in this sense. On the contrary: the preserved five-part diptychs or their fragments coming from the 5th and 6th centuries are exclusively of Christian determination. Not even the Barberini Diptych can be labelled as of purely profane origin, because the upper panel depicts Christ in a bust blessing the emperor. It seems that the commissioner could have purposefully addressed this Diptych of a profane character in a certain way directly for sacral use.[181]

Nevertheless, the Barberini Diptych deserves special attenion if we discuss the function of ivory diptychs. The central panel presents Emperor Justinian on a horse in high relief.[182] The idea of a triumph is accented by the horizontal panels; the lower one depicts the figure of Victory subjecting a defeated people, who bring their tax, the upper presents Christ in a bust carried by two angels. The side panels show an official in armour at the moment when he hands the emperor a statue of Victory. If the Barberini Diptych was a real Diptych, the subject comprised of the two panels is not entirely clear. Danielle Gaborit-Chopin proposes the hypothesis that it could be a Diptych, but she does not rule out the possibility that it could be an imperial "icon".[183]

That such objects could really have their function connected with representation proves an interesting fact. The Poet and Muse Diptych at Monza (Fig. 43) and the Asclepius-Hygieia Diptych at Liverpool (Fig. 44) are the central figures standing on pedestals. Anthony Cutler believes that this detail can come from a monumental model. Ivories depicting important people could be understood in Late Antique society as the equivalent of their bronze counterparts, which for instance Emperor Constantine II had made to honour his court orators. In Justinian's time, the prefect of the city, Eustathius, commissioned a statue for the hippodrome, whose description proposes noteworthy parallels to the Barberini Diptych: "(...) warhorse of your victory, Victory bearing the victorious wreath and the emperor sitting on his warhorse, which is as fast as the wind."[184] Richard Delbrück speaks of the consular character of the Barberini Diptych; according to him, the consul could be the figure of the official from the side panel,[185] but no inscription marks it nor is any other Diptych of this type preserved.[186] In this sense, the Barberini Diptych could really have been understood rather as an imperial icon as proposed by Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, with the same representative

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181 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, pp. 303–304.
182 Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux,* entry 9, pp. 49–54 with the complete bibliography.
183 Ibidem, p. 54.
184 Cutler, Five Lessons, p. 18.
185 Richard Delbrück, Constantinopler Elfenbein um 500, *Felix Ravenna*, 1952, pp. 5–13.
186 Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux*, p. 54.

function as that fulfilled in Late Antiquity by bronze statues; whether it was a Diptych[187] or a unique item.[188]

The reuse of consular diptychs

A large number of the above-mentioned consular diptychs of profane determination from ivory have been preserved in the treasuries of cathedrals and in important churches or from there came to be in public institutions such as museums, art galleries or libraries. That could be explained by the fact that at the beginning of the 5th century the bishops of large dioceses increased in importance and reached the level of the higher imperial officials. So, even they could become the recipients of similar gifts or themselves be their commissioners. So, the objects of originally profane use could be reused within Christian liturgy. Not only their function changed, but also the form, so the rare panel could if possible in accord with the liturgical aim also have a new content. For the reuse of a consular Diptych within the liturgy, it was necessary to adjust it; to change the iconography closely connected with the civil official, who had commissioned and donated the Diptych.[189]

Several examples of diptychs with the original secular iconography thanks to the content recorded on the inner side of the panels prove their reuse in liturgy. The famous Stilicho Diptych, preserved today at the cathedral in Monza, presents the celebrated imperial general with his wife Serena and son Eucherius. The iconography is clearly profane, but we know from the inventory from the 9th and 10th centuries and local traditions that on the backside there could be a short text engraved in Greek drawing from Paul's epistles.[190] The liturgical use of the already mentioned Barberini Diptych is clearly shown by the 350 names arranged in six columns written in ink on its back side. We are probably seeing one of the earliest exampels of prayers for the dead through the public reading of their names during the celebration of the Eucharist.[191] Also the Barberini Diptych is sometimes discussed as the binding of a book like in the case of the Milan Diptych. The first to propose this hypothesis was Émile Molinier in 1896.[192] The names written down, however, did not come until the 7th century, so at least until that time the ivory

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187   Gaborit-Chopin, Les ivoires, p. 66; Eadem, *Ivoires médiévaux*, p. 54.

188   Anthony Cutler, Barberiniana: Notes on the Making, Content, and Provenance of Louvre OA. 9063, *Tesserae: Festschrift für Josef Engemann*, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 18, 1993, pp. 329–339, esp. p. 339.

189   Navoni, I dittici eburnei, pp. 300–301.

190   Ibidem, p. 303.

191   Ibidem.

192   Émile Molinier, *Histoire générale des arts appliqués à l'industrie du Ve à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, I. Les ivoires, Paris 1896.

could not have served as a book binding. On the contrary, the traces of scratches for gluing are later than the inscriptions,[193] corresponding to this reusage.[194]

Another group comprises a specific type of diptychs differing from those before by their iconography having been changed. One of the certain examples of such a transformation is the Diptych from Brescia, which depicts the consul Boethius, which is proved by the date written on it (487; Fig. 5). On the other side of the Diptych, a scene swith the resurrection of Lazarus and with the figures of three church fathers has been painted; Jerome, Augustine and Gregory the Great (Fig. 45). Some inscriptions have been interpreted as a list of the names of the dead of the holy church in Brescia for memorial during the liturgy. The painting of the back side seems to be from the 7th–8th centuries, i.e. from the "Lombard" period. The dating would explain also the absence of Ambrose, a bishop who fought Arianism, whose cult was censured precisely at that time. The Diptych thus becomes also the bearer of a certain political message.[195]

Another interesting example of a similar iconographic change is the David and St Gregory Diptych from the treasury of the cathedral in Monza (Fig. 46). On two identical panels, people in consular robes are depicted in the presence of eagles; the symbols of the Empire and the august nature of a consul. Interventions directly on the ivory from the 9th–10th centuries transformed the figures into King David and St Gregory with the addition of the names and crosses between the eagles. The standing figure was made a cleric by a tonsure and a sceptre was put in his hand. These panels were used in the 9th century as a cover of a rare purple Psalter written in silver ink. It was precisely at that time that the recutting took place and it also explains the selection of King David, the author of the book of Psalms according to Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Carolingian period, these ivory diptychs were popularly used as the bindings of hymnals, which contained the texts and melodies, or the Psalms and verses of Hallelujah. They are proved for us by rarely preserved notes of the medieval liturgist Amalarius (*De ecclesiasticis officiis* - III, 16), written around 830. According to them, the singer, although he knows the text by heart and does not need to read it, holds the panels in his hands. We can assume that they were with certainty ivory diptychs, because Amalarius later specifies them: "*Tabulas quas cantor in manu tenet solent fieri ex osse*".[196]

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193 Cutler, Barberiniana, p. 331; Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux*, p. 54.
194 Ibidem.
195 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 304; Leclerq, entry Diptyques, pp. 1107–1109 and 1087.
196 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 309.

Christian diptychs

Many other examples prove the large number of consular diptychs which were modified by church traditions at whatever time and for whatever purpose. It is only logical that these rare artefacts became the model for the production of similar objects commissioned directly by the bishops, cathedrals or churches, with explicitly Christian iconography. It is possible that the model for the earliest exemplars could have been even unreshaped consular diptychs, or the method of their usage and their meaning could have been a model for Christian, in a certain sense of the word "iconic" usage. In other words, "the Church adopted the custom of the exhibition of the diptychs of high officials as symbols of their power".[197] The proof of such a use in the secular milieu are the illuminations from the 5th century in the *Notitia Dignitatum*,[198] where a Diptych appears resting on a table covered with a blue cloth (Fig. 47).[199] Christian diptychs are hence another category of diptychs, this time already created explicitly for the liturgy. "Material originally connected with the imperial majesty and dignity of their commissioners finds its use in the cult connected with Christ's kingdom and the dignity of its priests."[200] The study by Marco Navoni showed that these two functions, "representative" and "practical", do not necessarily have to be separate and that still further meanings can be added as is the case of the Milan Five-Part Diptych.

We find the first mention of a panel, which could be defined by the word "sacral" or "liturgical", in Luke's Gospel. At the birth of John the Baptist, Zacharias is asked about the name of his son. He takes a tablet into his hand and writes: "His name is John" (Luke 1,63). The Biblical text does not state which material the panel was from; ivory is not likely; it was an extremely rare material. What is substantial is that the name of the saint was written on a tablet, as it was several centuries later in connection with the Christian liturgy, when many names would be engraved on ivory diptychs; saints, bishops, neophytes, the living and the dead.[201]

It was mentioned that diptychs are a specific type of artistic production. In the area of liturgy, the word Diptych became a label for the prayer itself

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197 Wright, [Review:] W. F. Volbach.

198 *Notitia Dignitatum* is a list of the civil and military ruling officials for the eastern and western parts of teh empire and was created most likely in 395–420, see more in: Michael Kulikowski, The Notitia Dignitatum as a Historical Source, *Historia* 49, 2000, pp. 358–77.

199 Wright, [Review:] W. F. Volbach.

200 Anna Maria Roda, Gli avori, in: *Un tesoro spirituale nella materia (Quaderni del Museo del Duomo 3),* Milano 2003, pp. 107–128, p. 110.

201 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 300; More about the inscriptions on the back sides in: Jean-Pierre Caillet, Le remploi des ivoires dans l'Occident haut-médiéval (VIIe – XIe siècles), *Hortus artium medievalium* 17, 2011, pp. 115–127.

precisely considering the use of such objects. Within the semantic transformation of the word itself, then we do not see the object itself but its content, i.e. a list of names; so, in the liturgy the word Diptych becomes simply a synonym for a list of names. One proof of the public reading of the written names during the mass is a mention in one of the letters by Pope Innocent I, who died in 417, but its text shows a practice already long established. To have one's name written in a Diptych was a sign of accord with the secular and heavenly Church and was proof of orthodoxy. On the contrary, the deletion of a name was the equivalent of a real form of excommunication.[202]

diptychs were given various titles; sacred tablets, ecclesiastical *catalogues* or *Libri anniversarii*, *Eclesiae matricula*, *Liber viventium*, *Liber vitae* or *Sacrae tabulae*. Henri Leclerq proposes the division of diptychs into three groups; diptychs of the baptised, diptychs of the living and diptychs of the dead, who died in the faith and who were to be remembered during the mass. A special group is the diptychs of the holy bishops.[203] When the panels, usually ivory, were insufficient for the number of names written, books were simply arranged of them into which parchment pages were inserted. They thus became a real book with luxuriously decorated panels. They developed into autonomous liturgical books with a very precise typology, although they were not originally intended for such. From the diptychs of the holy bishops and martyrs, martyrologies were derived; the diptychs of the dead became necrologues.[204]

The inscription of the names on the back side of ivory tablets is proved by many preserved examples. For all of them, I will name e.g. the above-mentioned famous Barberini Diptych (Fig. 20)[205] or Trivulzio Diptych with the holy women at the tomb (Fig. 4).[206] Beat Brenk asks the question in connection with the last named monument of how the Christian commissioner even came on the idea of having a Diptych made in memory of the dead. He believes that the selection of an ivory Diptych was not indispensible for this liturgical act, because they were accessible only for the elite. According to him, the commissioner of the Milanese tablets of Trivulzio hence could have been only the bishop himself. According to Beat Brenk, he could have been entirely hypothetically Bishop of Milan Ambrose (374–397) who had close contacts with the aristocracy. Also the iconography might reveal Ambrose's

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202   Leclerq, entry Diptyques, p. 1051.
203   Ibidem, p. 1040.
204   Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 302.
205   Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 1976, entry No. 48, 47; Breckendridge, entry Diptych, 1980, pp. 34–35; Gaborit--Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux,* entry 9, pp. 49–54.
206   Beat Brenk, Das Trivulzio-Elfenbein und seine antiarianische Mission, in: Tobias Frese; Annette Hoffmann (eds), *Habitus*, Berlin 2011, pp. 245–257.

self-aware position towards the Arian thought opposition. The names written on the back side come from the 6th century. The author of the paper considers that they could copy inscriptions originally from the 4th century.[207] It is certain that the commissioner of the ivory could only have been someone rich and, based on the iconographic report, which he brings us it is also very likely that it could have been Bishop Ambrose himself. Yet, the hypothesis proposing its use exclusively in the milieu of the elites is disputable. As has been shown by Henri Leclerq and Marco Navoni, these diptychs were a common part of liturgical furnishings and practice.[208]

An immensely valuable source for knowledge of the medieval liturgy is an ivory Diptych of German origin from the 9th century, the two halves of which are found one in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and the other in the Stadbibliothek in Frankfurt (Fig. 48). The iconography is particular, because it is not derived from the Bible, but from the liturgy. The importance is exceptional, because it shows us the practice of the celebration in a photographic sense. It is a source for the reconstruction of how the mass took place in every detail; the clothing, face of the altar, appearance of the sacred vessels, position of the celebrant or the assistence of the ministrants. We do not know how these tablets were used in the liturgy, but one of them was later placed in a wooden frame, which increased the original form and the extended rectangular shape of the Diptych became the shape of a luxurious liturgical book.[209]

The public reading of the list of names could have been done directly from the altar, from the pulpit or from the lecturn. During the Eucharist, the remained on the altar; diptychs with the names of the saints on the altar along with the relics thus became really sacral objects, almost "iconic", whether for what they depicted or what they contained. We find the iconographic evidence of this use in the mosaic in the apse of the Basilica of St Ambrose in Milan. The bishop of Milan serves masses here at a circular altar, on which there is a patina, a chalice and an open Diptych of a rectangular, lengthways shape.[210]

Evangeliaries

So far, I have summarized examples of those diptychs, which became the bindings of books only with gradual development; for the lack of space for writing down names or perhaps more frequently they were created as an antique binding for a newly created manuscript. The second purpose, for which ivory diptychs and

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207 Brenk, Das Trivulzio-Elfenbein und seine antiarianische Mission, p. 256.
208 Leclerq, entry Diptyques; Navoni, I dittici eburnei.
209 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 306.
210 Ibidem, p. 308.

ivory panels were generally used was precisely the explicit preservation of liturgical texts (sacramentaries, antiphonaries) or sacral texts (evangeliaries). Other than covers of ivory, panels of gold and silver decorated with enamel or precious stones were made for liturgical purposes. The purpose evidently was to show the veneration, which the church dedicated to the sacral texts and especially the Gospels.[211] Although the earliest preserved examples of the connection of a manuscript with a luxurious ivory binding does not come until from the Carolingian period[212], the written sources prove this use also in the previous centuries.[213] It is the Evangeliary of Saint-Lupicin (Fig. 49). It is the connection of a manuscript from the 9th century with an ivory binding from the 6th century.[214] If the Milan Diptych really was originally the panels of an Evangeliary, it is not possible to determine it from the current state of knowledge, but even if it was from its beginning luxurious panels, it does not have to rule out these two functions of being "representative" and "practical" in my opinion.

In the 5th and 6th centuries, ivory was understood mainly as the royal material par excellence. In Late Antique society, it was connected with public ceremonial events and with the promise of the new prosperity of the Empire.[215] If the rare panels really preserved evangeliary, they were publically displayed on the altar and ritually kissed.[216] It is not, in my opinion, an accident that the church decided to use for its legitimization a medium that was connected with the power and majesty of the supreme civil officials. Not only their artistic value was important, but diptychs were able to tell the viewer that the old gave the new legitimacy and importance but also that the new justified the old. For these reasons, pagan diptychs that could be reused in Christian liturgy were preserved in churches; for these reasons the iconography was changed and the old artefacts were thus given a new meaning. Like the frescoes and mosaics in early Christian churches, the iconography of the diptychs was addreesed at those who knew what to expect and received what they expected – and that did not affect only a handful of the initiated.[217] Ivory diptychs were understood as witnesses of history and fame and played an important role in the collective memory. It is in sharp contrast to the custom and popularity of preparing ivory binding of the evangelaries in the Caro-

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211 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 309.

212 Wright, [Review:] W. F. Volbach; Frauke Steenbock, Psalterien mit kostbaren, in: F. O. Blüttner (ed.), *The illuminated Psalter*, Turnhout 2004, p. 435–440.

213 The luxurious binding of codices is mentioned in the Armenian text on the defence of images mentioning ivory bindings of the gospel books then comes from the iconoclastic period from the 7th century, see in: Sirarpie der Nersessian, Une apologie des images du septième siècle, *Byzantion* XVII, 1944–1945, pp. 58–87, esp. p. 65.

214 Gaborit-Chopin, Les ivoires, entry No. 27, pp. 74–77.

215 Abbatepaolo, *Parole d'avorio*, p. 94.

216 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 308; Der Neressian, Une apologie, 1944–1945, p. 65.

217 Anthony Culter, Il linguaggio visivo dei dittici eburnei. Forma, funzione, produzione, ricezione, in: David, *Eburnea Diptycha*, pp. 131–161, esp. p. 133.

lingian period, when such artefacts were mainly the object of the collector's interest if a cultivated commissioner.[218] Only after more than 150 years from the end of the consular office (and from the last issuance of a consular Diptych) did ivory become truly "only" a luxurious material.

The Five-Part Diptych

Besides the above-mentioned Amalarius, who left us a written description of the use of ivory tablets, a similar document from the 12th century has been preserved for us, related to the cathedral in Milan. Marco Navoni tries to connect some mentions from it with the Five-Part Diptych.[219] In it, Beroldo, the sexton of the cathedral in Milan, amassed a precise description of the actual ritual of the cathedral itself in the medieval period.[220] Beroldo specifies the conclusion of the reading by grasping the "tabulas eburneas", which are on the altar or on the lecturn. Then, when the singer entered the pulpit, he began to sing. Beroldo thus labels the use of these liturgical books generally, but a further note related to the altar at the beginning of mass when there were "*duas alas textus evangeliorum*" and the use of sacral texts par excellence, i.e. evangeliaries.[221] With this mention, it is not specified from which material the panels were made, but Marco Navoni believes that it could be the Five-Part Diptych and connects it also with the panel described by the inventory of the cathedral from 1145 with the words: "*Tabule due magne eburnee laborate ad figuras que appellantur colurne (...) pro dando pacem in ecclesia.*"[222] Thanks to the particular title *colurne* in comparison with other old documents, it is possible according to Marco Navoni to reconstruct the specific symbolic use of the two Milanese tablets and possibly also more generally other ivory diptychs.

We are informed on this still more singular and symbolic usage of ivory diptychs in the medieval Ambrosian liturgy by Beroldo, because among the various liturgical furnishings of the cathedral special importance went to the "(...) *arca, in qua libri veteris testamenti et novi positi sunt cum tabulis eburneis (...)*";[223] i.e. box, in which the ivory tablets along with the books of the Old and New Testaments were placed. In other words, the books of the Old and New Testaments used during reading in the liturgy were kept in this box along with ivory panels. These probably served as the ceremonial cover of the above-mentioned books. That the

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218   Steenbock, Psalterien mit kostbaren.

219   Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 307.

220   Marco Magistretti (ed.), *Beroldus sive Ecclesiae Ambrosianae Mediolanensis Kalendarium et Ordines saec* XII, p. l. 1894, pp. 48–50 and 62–63.

221   Ibidem, p. 65.

222   Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 307; Marco Magistretti, Due inventari del duomo di milano del secolo XV, *Archivio Storico Lombardo* 36, 1909, pp. 286–362, esp. p. 325.

223   Magistretti (ed.), *Beroldus sive Ecclesiae*, p. 54.

"*arca*" with its contents was an important liturgical furnishing of singular symbolic value is further revealed by Beroldo.[224]

Milan, as with many other important cities had two neighbouring cathedrals available. The first was on the site of today's cathedral and was called *iemale*, because the archbishop with highest clergy celebrated in it from the third Sunday in October (the feast day of the consecration of the cathedral) until Easter. The second, much larger, on the site of today's Piazza del duomo, was called *estiva*, because the archbishop with the clergy celebrated there, on the other hand, from Easter until the third Sunday in October. The transition from one cathedral to the the other on the prescisely set days involved ceremonial rituals. In the procession, 12 priests bore on their shoulders Beroldo's mentioned *arca* covered with a cloth containing the two sacral books. It was led by the highest priest who carried a green rod along with the ivory tablets. It evidently is similar to the Jewish rite of carrying the Old Testament ark in a procession (Exodus 25,10–22), which contained the tablets with the commandments, a vessel with manna and Aaron's staff. The material, covering the box in the Milanese liturgy, is in accord with the elements of the liturgy taking place in synagogues. Te decorated cloth there forms a curtain of the enclosure in which the scrolls with the sacral texts are stored.[225]

In Beroldo's description, we thus find the identical elements with the Ark of the Covenant and Jewish tradition, namely books with Biblical texts and even the green rod reminiscent of Aaron's staff. In the light of these facts and the sense of diptychs, or more generally ivory tablets are essential symbols, which explicitly refer to the Biblical ark. The panels hence cannot be considered as a luxurious binding even in the 12th century. In this particular case, it is more legitimate to see in them the Biblical tablets of the Covenant stored in an ark along with the sacral texts. They were ceremonially carried along with the ark twice a year in the move from one cathedral to the other so that it would resemble the Old Testament procession. The symbolic importance is hence far beyond mere decoration.

Artistic role: bearer of a theological message

The only thing we can be truly sure of is that in the 1st third of the 12th century the sexton from St Ambrose's recorded the presence of a Diptych among the Milanese rites and ceremonies. Marco Navoni tried to connect all of the written sources mentioning "ivory tablets", "tablets of the Evangeliary",[226] or a Diptych with the special label *colurne*[227] with the studied Five-Part Diptych. Naturally, the strong

224 Magistretti (ed.), *Beroldus sive Ecclesiae*, p. 54.
225 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, pp. 310–311.
226 Magistretti (ed.), *Beroldus sive Ecclesiae*.
227 Magistretti, Due inventari.

evidence for this connection is chiefly the place of its storage in the treasury of the Milan cathedral, but we do not have any proof that it was there from its beginning. All attempts to attribute these source reports to the Milan Diptych remain mere hypotheses. The inability to examine the back side of the tablets, where it might be possible to observe the method of attacking a possible manuscript, does not allow us ascribe with certainty the Diptych to Beroldo's mention of the tablets of the Evangeliary. If these tablets were produced for a ritual purposefully resembling the Old Testament traditions, which might have been preserved for centuries in the cathedral and if it was to serve as a ceremonial binding of a book of the Old and New Testament, then I believe also the selection of the scenes on the Diptych would be guided by that. Yet, exclusively New Testament and Apocryphal stories appear there. Its function could have changed with the introduction of a new rite, but its original purpose remains a secret.

There is one more possible counter-argument of the connection of the Five-Part Diptych with the Diptych mentioned in the inventory from the 15th century entitled *colurne*. The inventory proves that this Diptych was used in the ritual of "*pace*". Another Byzantine ivory artefact from the Milan cathdral from the 10th century was to be used for the same ritual. It is known that when the kiss of the priest and believers began to be understood as inappropriate, it was replaced by a kiss of a Eucharistic patina or liturgical book, especially an Evangeliary, on the cover of which there was usually a crucifix or cross depicted.[228] Not only do the written sources speak for the use in this ritual in the case of a Byzantine Diptych, but primarily the visible wearing on the surface. The Five-Part Diptych, however, does not show such damage, quite the opposite; the unusual state of its preservation testifies rather for a minimal practical handling. Even if we were able based on possible other written sources to connect the Milan Diptych really with the Diptych called *colurne*, it provides us only with such information that it was used seven years after its creation; its primary function hence remains unclear.

Based on the presented preserved evidence, it is, however, clear that the use of ivory tablets for representative and/or liturgical purposes was common practice in the 5th and 6th centuries as well as later. The popularity with which ivory panels whether of profane or sacral origin were produced could be proved also by the difference in the quality of the individual monuments. Diptych were often created in many copies as serial production, conducted by craftsmen of varying education or ability in large artistic centres.[229] Only such reproductions could be the bearers of the messages that were desired to be sent; as a souvenir of famous event (Venatio Diptych from Liverpool; Fig. 41), the accession of a new consul (Boethius Diptych; Fig. 5) or the sreading of political or theological messages (Trivulzio

228 Navoni, I dittici eburnei, p. 312; Idem, Saggio di iconografia liturgica, in: Idem (ed.), *Dizionario di Liturgia Ambrosiana*, Milano 1996, pp. 543–586, esp. pp. 554–556.
229 Cutler, Five Lessons, p. 17.

Panel with the Women at the Tomb; Fig. 4), namely all in possible connection with use in the liturgy (Barberini Diptych; Fig. 20). Precisely the Trivulzio Panel or the back side of the Boethius Diptych serve us as proof that for expressing a theological standpoint the medium used was perceived in Late Antique society as a representative bearer of such messages. If we start from this sketched social perception of ivory as a material and the objects produced from it, then I propose the possibility that five-part diptychs, whose preserved examples are exclusively of Christian determination, were, at least in the 5th and 6th centuries, understood as a representative medium passing society topical theological messages. The public display of diptychs was a way to show the tradition and continuity of the church by using the means utilized by the highest state officials, whether they stored rare manuscripts or not. Is it then possible to seek in the selection of the iconographic scenes of the Milan Diptych an expression of the theological disputes of the given period?