

VI. Conclusion

The 450s are a period of unending theological disputes of the dual nature of Christ. In 451, Bishop Neon accedes to the Ravennan episcopal see, who with the acceptance of the high post of a metropolitan bishop certainly had to take a clear stance on this issue. It was the bishop of Rome Leo I the Great, who was the “speaker” for the Latin, Western resolution. His position was conservative, unspeculative and focused on maintaining the traditions, stability and continuity of the church at a time when imperial Rome was disintegrating and the Monophysite crisis showed the urgency of giving the church a more compact hierarchy capable of avoiding collapse. From the above-mentioned arguments, it is justified to believe that the bishop of Ravenna shared the common interest of maintaining the unity of the church with Pope Leo I the Great and despite his authority likely recognized the primacy of Rome as the supreme authority. I have tried to propose a hypothesis that the function of the luxurious five-part ivory diptychs was chiefly to pass on theological or political ideas in the most representative way. I therefore propose the possibility that the commissioner of the Milan Diptych of Five Parts could be Bishop Neon, who commissioned ivory tablets that were similar to the contemporary production in Rome; as an ostentatious expression of his own position and as public recognition of the opinions of the bishop of Rome. It could have happened upon accession to the post of bishop in 451, when these theological questions were the liveliest to show graphically that he was prepared to participate from his new position in the spread of the mentioned ecclesiastical dogma, but rather towards the end of the 450s when it is confirmed that a workshop working for Emperor Majorian was active in Ravenna. It seems likely to me that only this can be the explanation of the uncommon iconographic similarities seen only on the diptychs of Roman origin. Furthermore, this hypothesis surprisingly casts more light on the results of the earlier studies summarized in the first chapter of this work. The authors considered the Roman milieu as the source of the scenes of the Milan Diptych, without reaching a satisfactory resolution why it is so apparent in the monuments stylistically categorized in North Italy.³⁴⁸

348 E.g. Smith, *Early Christian iconography*; Capps, *The Style of Consular diptychs*; Soper, *The Italo-Gallic*; Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires du Moyen Age*.

In this work, I have set the aim of determining the likely dating, provenience, function, possible commissioner and reason of the creation of the Milan Diptych and attribute to it also its historical significance besides its artistic importance. In seeking an answer to the questions raised, however, a much more complex question arose, which could not be a subject of this work. Indicating the need of a general reassessment of the artistic production of Ravenna in the 5th century is hence a side result. Despite two centuries of archaeological, historical and art-historical finds, it is noteworthy how little we know about Late Antique Ravenna and how much our ideas are shaped by the historian of Ravenna Agnellus (9th century).³⁴⁹ The significance of his texts is undeniable, but they cannot serve as a reliable source for understanding the social milieu. The proof is the historians' reassessment and to a certain extent rejection of the claim of Ravenna as the capital city of the Western Empire in the 5th century,³⁵⁰ chiefly its second half. Only a little attention has been given to this period even by recent studies from art history, but the Milan Five-Part Diptych is proof that despite the alternating presence of emperors there is a highly qualified workshop active in Ravenna and the highest authority is, it seems, the bishop. Through his artistic commissions, he tries to equal the imperial commissions, he is the metropolitan with oversight of a large part of North Italy³⁵¹ and in some cases shows his independence and self-consciousness by defining himself in terms of Rome.³⁵² However, in the essential questions at the time of the disintegrating empire, he recognizes the authority of the bishop of Rome and publically proclaims the main aims of his policy: the battle with the Monophysite heresy and maintenance of a firm hierarchy in the church whose unity was seriously disrupted. The Milan Diptych of Five Parts can be evidence that art works can indicate the social atmosphere and the theological and political disputes, even if direct written references are lacking.³⁵³

349 Deliyannis, *Ravenna in late antiquity*, pp. 5–6.

350 Pietri, *Les aristocraties*; Gillet, Rome, 2001; Deliyannis, *Ravenna in late antiquity*.

351 Zangara, *Una predicazione*, pp. 298–304; Deliyannis, *Ravenna in late antiquity*, p. 84.

352 Foletti, *Saint Ambroise*.

353 “Art works show the circumstances under which they were created, but the circumstances themselves on the contrary cannot explain art works”. in: Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, New Haven – London 2004, p. 164.