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Between Rome and Jerusalem: The Cross at the Center of a *Herrscherbild* Composition

Variations of the Adoration of the Cross group, where Peter and Paul flank a cross/column topped by a Christogram, appeared in Rome during the second half of the fourth century. Examples from a wide range of media represent a variety of versions and illustrate the popularity of the theme. The elevated Christogram recalls the Roman military standard and signifies Constantine's Labarum, marked with the Signum Dei that he saw before he defeated Maxentius at the Milvian bridge in 312. Thus, Peter and Paul adore a symbol of the city's past memory. It is suggested that the image was popular in the second half of the fourth century because of a Jerusalemite tradition, initiated by Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem in 351, according to which a heavenly cross was seen in the skies of the city. Cyril inaugurated a holiday dedicated to the event, turning May seventh into a repeated memory in the Jerusalemite liturgical calendar, celebrated to this day. I suggest that in Rome the Jerusalemite tradition engendered a visual echo in the group of the Adoration compositions. The cross/column topped by a labarum may represent Golgotha, Christ's victory over death and even the cross of his return, but when, in the second half of the fourth century, Peter and Paul were added, they played the role of witnesses to the local orientation, as if saying all this is very well but the vision seen by Constantine, the first, great, Staurophany of victory, was of Roman origin. The composition of Peter and Paul flanking a cross without a Christogram became popular in sixth and seventh century Palestinian art. The gap in time suggests that this is an independent group, without a direct connection to the Roman invention, but the similarity in composition might imply the opposite. At all events, the Roman representatives, Peter and Paul, seem to be recruited again, only this time to adore or guard the cross of the Holy Sepulcher. It seems that whatever the time gap, the Roman adoration group and the parallel Palestinian compositions, promoted or glorified a place by introducing a cross into a *Herrscherbild*. In the fourth century, with the Christogram representing Constantine's Labarum, it was Rome. In the sixth and seventh centuries with a monumental cross, whether on a hill or with or without Christ's bust, it was Jerusalem. The Palestinian examples show reuse of the Roman composition and representatives with a local adaptation designed to intensify or even authenticate the local heritage and *loca sancta*.