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The 'Strange Case' of the Death of Saint John the Evangelist

According to the *Acta Iohannis* - a Gnostic text well known in the Middle Ages - John, feeling that his end was near, held his last sermon, then he had his grave dug and laid himself down in it. However, the following day the faithful found that the sepulcher was open and filled with manna replacing the body of the saint that had been raised to heaven, although in a less solemn way than Mary. In another tradition, the incorruptibility granted to St John's body was interpreted as a prize for his chaste existence, making the saint a model of life for the Canons from the time of the Gregorian Reform. In the Roman area, the oldest representations of this sort of assumption are found in the twelfth century, accompanied by the depiction of the Last Sermon of the Apostle and his Self-Burial. This study will, therefore, examine the genesis and development, in narrative sources and in paintings, of this special iconography in Italy from its inception until the fifteenth century.