

**THE *TRADITIO LEGIS*:  
ANATOMY OF AN IMAGE**

**Robert Couzin**

**Archaeopress Archaeology**

# Archaeopress

Gordon House  
276 Banbury Road  
Oxford OX2 7ED

[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

ISBN 978 1 78491 081 5  
ISBN 978 1 78491 082 2 (e-Pdf)

© Archaeopress and R Couzin 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

Printed in England by Hollywell Press, Oxford

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website [www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

# Contents

List of Figures .....	ii
Preface.....	v
<b>Part I. An introduction to the image</b>	
<b>Chapter 1: The invention of the <i>treditio legis</i>.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Nomenclature .....	2
1.2 Definition .....	3
<b>Chapter 2: The corpus of monuments .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Sarcophagi.....	5
2.2 Other media.....	7
2.3 Summary .....	12
<b>Chapter 3: Dating .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Visibility .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Part II. Meaning and reception</b>	
<b>Chapter 5: The three men .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Chapter 6: The Lord's right side.....</b>	<b>24</b>
6.1 Paul.....	24
6.2 Christ.....	25
6.3 The Lord omnipotent.....	29
<b>Chapter 7: The Lord's left side.....</b>	<b>33</b>
7.1 Christ.....	33
7.2 Peter.....	34
7.3 The book.....	37
<b>Chapter 8: Framing and context.....</b>	<b>46</b>
8.1 Structures and cities .....	46
8.2 Other figures and scenes .....	47
8.3 Symbolic forms .....	51
8.4 Family representations .....	52
<b>Chapter 9: Synthesis .....</b>	<b>55</b>
9.1 Left and right.....	55
9.2 This world and the next.....	58
9.3 Eschatological, Apocalyptic or apocalyptic .....	61
9.4 Epilogue .....	65
<b>Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Sources.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Figures .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Index of Objects and Monuments.....</b>	<b>138</b>

## List of Figures

1 Sarcophagus. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums, inv. 31486. <i>Rep.</i> I.28. With inserted cast of <i>Rep.</i> II.158 (original in the Czartoryski Museum, Krakow). .....	81
2 Sarcophagus. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums, inv. 31487. <i>Rep.</i> I.58. ....	82
3 Sarcophagus. San Sebastiano, Rome. <i>Rep.</i> I.200. ....	83
4 Sarcophagus fragment. St Peter's, Rome. <i>Rep.</i> I.675. ....	84
5 Sarcophagus (detail). St Peter's, Rome. <i>Rep.</i> I.676. ....	85
6. Sarcophagus. St Peter's, Rome. <i>Rep.</i> I.679. Photograph from Wilpert 1929-36: 1.2, 12.5 (Sansaini).....	86
7. Embedded sarcophagus fragment, Christ and Paul. Farfa Abbey. <i>Rep.</i> II.127. ....	86
8. Embedded sarcophagus fragment, Peter. Farfa Abbey. <i>Rep.</i> II.127. ....	87
9. Sarcophagus fragment, <i>Rep.</i> II.131. ....	88
10 Sarcophagus of Gorgonius, front and lid. Museo Diocesano, Ancona, <i>Rep.</i> II.149. ....	88
11 Sarcophagus of Gorgonius. Museo Diocesano, left side. Ancona, <i>Rep.</i> II.149. ....	89
12. Sarcophagus. Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. <i>Rep.</i> II.150, front. ....	90
13.Sarcophagus. Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. <i>Rep.</i> II.150, rear, with lid mounted in reverse. ....	91
14. Sarcophagus. Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. <i>Rep.</i> II.150, left side. ....	92
15. Sarcophagus. Sant'Ambrogio, Milan. <i>Rep.</i> II.150, right side. ....	93
16. Sarcophagus. San Giovanni in Valle, Verona. <i>Rep.</i> II.152. ....	94
17. Sarcophagus. Cathédrale Saint-Saveur, Aix-en-Provence, <i>Rep.</i> III.25. ....	95
18. Sarcophagus. Musée départemental Arles antique, Arles. <i>Rep.</i> III.53. ....	95
19. Borghese Sarcophagus. Musée du Louvre, Paris, MR 688; no. usuel ma 2980. <i>Rep.</i> III.428, front. ....	96
20. Borghese Sarcophagus. Musée du Louvre, Paris, MR 688; no. usuel ma 2980. <i>Rep.</i> III.428, left side. ....	97
21. Borghese Sarcophagus. Musée du Louvre, Paris, MR 688; no. usuel ma 2980. <i>Rep.</i> III.428, right side. ....	97
22. Sarcophagus (drawing by Nicolas-Claude Fabbri Peiresc). Formerly in Reims (lost). <i>Rep.</i> III.465. ....	98
24. Sarcophagus. Musée Archéologique, Lamta, Tunisia. <i>Rep.</i> III.642. Photograph by Habib M'henni. ....	99
25. Sarcophagus (engraving by Bosio, 1632). Formerly in the Palazzo dell'ambasciatore di Bologna at Monte Giordano. <i>Rep.</i> I.1008. ....	100
26. Sarcophagus. San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome. <i>Rep.</i> I.724. ....	100
27. Sarcophagus fragment. San Sebastiano, Rome. <i>Rep.</i> I.288. ....	100
28. Sarcophagus fragment. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums. <i>Rep.</i> I.116.....	101
29. Sarcophagus fragment. Museo Nazionale, Ravenna. <i>Rep.</i> II.154. ....	101
30. Sarcophagus fragment. Cimitero di Domitilla. <i>Rep.</i> I.528. ....	102
31. Sarcophagus (Lat. 174). Museo Gregoriano Profano, Vatican Museums. <i>Rep.</i> I.677. ....	103
32. Sarcophagus of Concordius. Musée départemental Arles antique, Arles. <i>Rep.</i> III.65. ....	104
33. Sarcophagus of Concordius (detail). Musée départemental Arles antique, Arles. <i>Rep.</i> III.65. ....	105
34. Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. St Peter's, Rome <i>Rep.</i> I.680. ....	106
35. Sarcophagus. Saint-Victor, Marseille. <i>Rep.</i> III.299. ....	107
36. Sarcophagus. Saint-Victor, Marseille. <i>Rep.</i> III.300. ....	108
37. Sarcophagus. Cathédrale Saint-Trophime, Arles. <i>Rep.</i> III.120. ....	109
38. Sarcophagus. Museo Nazionale, Ravenna. <i>Rep.</i> II.379. ....	109
39. Sarcophagus. Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Classe (Ravenna). <i>Rep.</i> II.390. ....	110
40. Sarcophagus (detail). Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums, inv. 31511. <i>Rep.</i> I.26. ....	110
41. Lunette painting. Catacomb ad decimum, Grottaferrata. ....	111
42. Fresco, catacomb of Priscilla. Rome. ....	111
43. Vault painting of Christ, Peter and Paul. Catacomb of SS Marcellinus and Peter, Rome. ....	112
44. Pola casket, back. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Venice. ....	113
45. Pola casket, lid. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Venice. ....	113
46. Nea Herakleia casket, traditio legis. Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki (Inv. BA.71). ....	114
47. Ravenna casket. Museo Arcivescovile, Ravenna, Inv. 77. ....	115
48. Gold-glass. Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican Museums, inv. 60771. ....	115
49. Gold-glass. Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio. ....	116
50. Valencia incised glass bowl. Museo de la Ciudad, Valencia, inv. 0120/88. ....	116
51.Obernburg incised glass (reconstructive drawing). Prähistorische Staatsammlung, Munich. No. E-47/1996. ....	117
52.Incised glass fragment. Museo Sacro, Vatican Museums, inv. 60313. ....	118
53.Incised glass fragment. Museo Sacro, Vatican Museums, inv. 60315. ....	118
54.Incised glass fragment. Museo Sacro, Vatican Museums, inv. 60317. ....	119
55.Bronze medallion (sketch). Museo Sacro, Vatican Museums, inv. 60956.....	119
56.Slate mould. Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier, nr. 1985.7. ....	120
57.Marble slab. Convento delle Oblate cistercensi, Anagni. ....	121
58.Apse mosaic with traditio legis. Santa Costanza, Rome. ....	122
59.Apse mosaic with traditio clavium. Santa Costanza, Rome. ....	122
60.Cupola mosaic. San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples. ....	123
61.Apse of Old St Peter's, reconstructive drawing by P. A. Riedl. ....	124
62. Apse of Old St Peter's, Grimaldi album drawing. ....	125
63. Apse mosaic in Santa Pudenziana, Rome. ....	125
64. Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki, southwest pillar (detail).....	126
65. Polychrome fragments. Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, <i>Rep.</i> I.773. ....	126

66. Great Ludovisi Sarcophagus. Front: Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Altemps. inv. 8574 1.5 25. Lid: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz. ....	127
67. Sarcophagus of Probus. St Peter's, Rome. <i>Rep.</i> I.678. ....	127
68. Sarcophagus. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums, inv. 31525. <i>Rep.</i> I.49. ....	128
69. 'Dogmatic' Sarcophagus. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums. <i>Rep.</i> I.43. ....	129
70. Sarcophagus. Musée départemental Arles antique, Arles. <i>Rep.</i> III.38. ....	129
71. Epitaph of Asellus, loculus closure, late fourth-century. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums, inv. 285461. ....	130
72. Sarcophagus. <i>Rep.</i> II.162. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, no. 24.240. ....	130
73. Adlocutio medal of Caligula. ....	131
74. Carved wooden door panel ("Parousia"), Santa Sabina, Rome. ....	131
75. Missorium of Theodosius I. Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid. ....	132
76. Bronze lamp. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence. ....	133
77. Sarcophagus. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums. <i>Rep.</i> I.30. ....	134
78. Sarcophagus. Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican Museums, inv. 121.1. <i>Rep.</i> I.5. ....	134
79. Apse mosaic in Fundi basilica. Reconstructive drawing by C. Ihm. ....	135
80. Fresco, Mùstair, church of the monastery of St John, north apse. ....	135
81. Magdeburg Ivory ( <i>traditio legis</i> ). Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, Ms. Theol. Lat. Fol 1. Photograph by Author. ....	136
82. Ivory plaque, Westphalia, 1150-1200. Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 1979.399. ....	137
83. Fresco, San Silvestro, Tivoli. ....	137



## Preface

Art historians are more familiar with the *traditio legis* than were its original viewers. Late fourth- and early fifth-century beholders of this early Christian image relied on individual encounters. They could not consult photographic archives of comparable monuments or predict later medieval developments. The experiences of these viewers are inaccessible and cannot be replicated. A substantial number of the images, however, survive. My aim in the following pages is to approach them cautiously, imposing as few preconceptions and extrinsic constraints as possible. I have no time machine, and no way to discard my cultural and intellectual baggage. Nor would I wish to ignore the valuable and insightful work of many scholars over the past 150 years. Hindsight and historiography are unavoidable but also potentially useful in a reflection on original reception.

The present essay is a revision, reconsideration and expansion of one part of my 2013 dissertation. A substantial number of changes to the earlier text were required in order to create a free-standing study of the *traditio legis*. I also found it necessary to correct an embarrassing number of ambiguities, infelicities and outright mistakes. I express my gratitude to the Department of Art History at the University of Toronto for providing me with the opportunity to pursue my late-in-life graduate studies and especially to my dissertation supervisor, Jill Caskey, for her unflagging support and encouragement. I also acknowledge the valuable contributions of committee members Adam Cohen and Björn Christian Ewald and external examiners Dale Kinney and Joseph Bryant. Umberto Utro warmly received me at the Museo Pio Cristiano, and Aurélie Coste and Valérie Clenas at the Musée départemental Arles antique. Several others patiently responded to my queries or provided me copies of their unpublished work, including Hermann Otto Geissler, Arnold Provoost and Timothy Lim.





## Part I. An introduction to the image

Early Christian images commonly depicted narratives drawn from biblical sources. Favourite themes from the Old Testament included the adventures of Jonah, Daniel in the lions' den, the Three Hebrew Youths in the fiery furnace, the sacrifice of Isaac, the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and Noah in his ark; the most popular stories from the New Testament were miracles wrought by Jesus: the Resurrection of Lazarus, the multiplication of the loaves, the wine at Cana, healing the blind man, and so on. Apocryphal sources were also mined for images, notably the Adoration of the Magi and stories from the life of Peter.

Around the middle of the 4th century, new forms of representation were added to the visual repertoire. These bore only an indirect link to scriptural narrative. Such images as the well-known scene of Christ 'teaching' – a seated Jesus flanked by his disciples – have been labelled as doctrinal, theological or, less polemically, conceptual (*Ideenbilder*).<sup>1</sup> They may recall or evoke sacred history without purporting to depict a specific event, or even a condensation of several events, recounted in the textual sources. Among these new motifs is a composition in which Christ stands between the princes of the apostles. He raises his right hand and holds an unfurled bookroll, or *volumen*, in his left. Paul stands on the left of the image (that is to say, at the Lord's right) while Peter approaches the open scroll from the other side. This is the image that has come to be known as the *traditio legis*.

When representations are labelled by reference to the narrative theme they depict, the definition of the category is clear even if classification is not always straightforward. The construction of a given image reflects choices made by designers and artisans. It may also meet symbolic or allegorical requirements that in turn depend on the functional context, whether funerary, ecclesial or domestic. Early Christian images are rarely simple illustrations of a biblical text. Nonetheless, the sacred narratives provide an anchor. For example, when confronted with a reclining figure, a boat or a sea monster on a sarcophagus or in a catacomb fresco, the historian decides for or against its classification as a depiction of events from the Book of Jonah depending upon the congruence of the images not only with the biblical story but also with other contemporary representations of the theme. The judgment may be difficult if the monument is fragmentary or the iconographical details are unusual, but this uncertainty is a function of the state of the evidence rather than any imprecision in the category. There may have been images that were experienced as Jonah by some viewers and ascribed a completely different meaning by others, or even by the same viewer at different moments. But putting these difficult cases to one side, we think we know what we mean by a representation of the Jonah theme, even if we cannot always be entirely certain in its identification.

The *traditio legis* is a horse of a different colour. Its iconography has no direct scriptural source and probably no singular textual basis at all. As a consequence, delimiting the corpus of monuments and even assigning it a name become matters of opinion and potential controversy. The chapters of this Part I focus on a series of preliminary issues, providing an extended introduction to the consideration of the meaning and reception of the *traditio legis*, which is the subject of Part II. Chapter 1 addresses questions of nomenclature and definition. Chapter 2 proposes an inventory or catalogue of the surviving monuments from the 4th and early 5th centuries, while Chapter 3 considers the evidence for their dating. Finally, Chapter 4 examines the problem of the visibility and legibility, particularly with respect to sarcophagi.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term was adopted by Klauser (1966: 19–21).

## Chapter 1

### The invention of the *traditio legis*

In an article published in five instalments in 1857 and 1858, Count Henri-Julien Grimouard de Saint-Laurent examined a group of monuments executed in a variety of media that he defined on the basis of their shared iconography, which he described in this way: Christ is standing, usually on a mound; his right hand is raised in blessing or speech and in his left he holds an unfurled scroll; he is flanked by two other figures, Peter receiving the scroll and Paul in a gesture of acclamation. Grimouard assigned a theme to these images in the language of his title: ‘Le Christ triomphant et le don de Dieu’ – Christ triumphant and the gift from God.<sup>2</sup> His essay was dedicated to elucidating and explicating this interpretation.

The objects of Grimouard’s attention were, to quote his subtitle, ‘a series of many monuments from the first centuries’. The representations appeared in diverse media, including gold-glass, fresco, mosaic and marble relief sculpture. The manner of execution and formal detail were not consistent. Nonetheless, Grimouard regarded all these images as belonging to a natural and self-defining category that had hitherto escaped the notice of historians. He probably viewed his discovery of this group of monuments as an ‘invention’ in the archaic sense of the term (like the Invention of the True Cross), not as a scholarly classification imposed on the material evidence.

Over the succeeding 150 years, the image identified by Grimouard de Saint-Laurent acquired a name and its recognized corpus expanded, partly a result of new archaeological finds but also due to the increasing ease of access to information.

#### 1.1 Nomenclature

Grimouard’s image-type is commonly referred to as the *traditio legis* and has been for over a century. Although this Latin label is not found in his article, it is often assigned his paternity on the basis of general, incomplete or indirect citations.<sup>3</sup> Grimouard designated the monuments as a ‘don de la loi’ and while there is nothing untoward about translating such a label for convenience into another vernacular language, the appearance of the Latin expression is significant.

<sup>2</sup> Grimouard de Saint-Laurent 1857-58. His description of the typical form of representation is in his Part I, I.290.

<sup>3</sup> Bøgh Rasmussen (2001: 45n1) and Hodne (2006: 148) ascribe the expression to Grimouard without indicating a page reference and providing an abbreviated citation of his articles. Other scholars rely on a comment and footnote by Schumacher (1959a: 2, 2n4). See Cooper 2005: 68–69; Hellemo 1989: 65n1. However, Schumacher did not claim that Grimouard used these words but only that the French historian had proposed gift or transmission as the primary interpretation: ‘Die schon von G. De Saint-Laurent vorgeschlagene Deutung dieser Szene als “Traditio legis” läßt sich jedoch nicht mit der spätantiken Ikonographie ihrer Einzelmotive in Einklang bringen.’

The substitution of antique for modern terminology often betrays an agenda, whether conscious or unconscious. Bruno Bettelheim argued that Ernest Jones’s use of *ego*, *id* and *superego* to translate Freud’s *Es*, *Ich* and *Über-ich* suppressed (or repressed) the emotional impact of the German.<sup>4</sup> The retrospective application of Latin neologisms to Roman and late antique images may have a further and more direct impact on scholarly discourse, implying ancient authority for a modern term.<sup>5</sup> *Traditio legis* was not used by fourth-century producers, viewers or commentators. And while Grimouard’s *don de la loi* was already redolent with interpretive connotations, it did not falsely claim any historical authenticity. Furthermore, the particular choice of words is noteworthy. The use of *traditio* instead of the slightly less charged *datio*, a more literal translation of Grimouard’s terminology, was an important and perhaps not entirely innocent choice. It departs from the root verb in the expression *dominus legem dat*, a formula that is inscribed on a certain number of these representations, and implicitly takes sides in the long-standing debate regarding the meaning of the image. These issues will resurface in Part II of this study.

Credit for the coinage of the expression *traditio legis* is shared by Louis Duchesne and Anton Baumstark.<sup>6</sup> In 1889 Duchesne remarked that the early medieval baptismal rite in Rome included handing over the Christian law to the initiate. He labelled this ritual in both French and Latin as a ‘tradition de l’Évangile’ or ‘traditio legis christianae’. Although Duchesne was referring to an activity rather than an image, he also made the visual connection. Many catechumens, he surmised, must have been struck by the appearance of Christ standing between his two apostles depicted in the apse of a church; the image was an ‘artistic expression’ of the rite.<sup>7</sup>

Baumstark, although later in time, has a firmer claim to being the first to use the expression *traditio legis* specifically as a description of the image ‘discovered’ by Grimouard. The label appears in both the title and the text of a paper he published in 1903, which opens with this sentence:

The well-known composition grouping the three figures of the Lord and the two princes of the apostles which, representing the spiritual event of handing over of the law of the new covenant to Peter, is probably most succinctly labelled as *traditio legis [am bündigsten wohl als traditio legis bezeichnet wird]*, has hitherto

<sup>4</sup> Bettelheim 1984: 51–61.

<sup>5</sup> Compare the use of *dextrarum iunctio* for the Roman handshake motif. On the modern origins of the expression: Hersch 2010: 190.

<sup>6</sup> The literature is reviewed by Arbeiter (2007: 124n210, 129–31).

<sup>7</sup> Duchesne 1889: 289-92. Duchesne’s reference is to apse decoration in general; he does not mention any particular church.

consistently been treated by St. Laurent, Garrucci, de Rossi, de Waal, Wilpert and Swoboda only as an occurrence of a Roman-western developmental type.<sup>8</sup>

Baumstark's priority is not undermined by any of the authors to whom he refers, none of whom in fact employed the Latin terminology.

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, the great majority of scholars have adopted the expression *traditio legis* without comment. This practice is essentially universal in the English- and French-language literature. It is widely adopted in German as well, although the Latin terminology is sometimes translated back into the vernacular as *Gesetzübergabe*. As an art historical classification, *traditio legis* has two principal faults: it implies a false antiquity and interprets in the guise of describing. Occasionally the problematic character of the expression is implicitly recognized by putting the words between quotation marks or preceding them with the qualification 'so-called', practices that seem simultaneously to accept and question the claim of authenticity.

The only serious contrarian view regarding nomenclature was expressed by Walter Nikolaus Schumacher, who felt so strongly about the matter that throughout his important articles on the subject (written 100 years after Grimouard's), he stubbornly referred to the *Dominus-legem-dat-Szene*, *Dominus-legem-dat-Motiv* and *Dominus-legem-dat-Bild*.<sup>9</sup> While his proposal is theoretically attractive, it is awkward and presents other own challenges. The inscription upon which it is based is, as we shall see, relatively rare and is also found in images that are not of the 'traditio legis' type.<sup>10</sup> Schumacher's alternative terminology has attracted no appreciable following.<sup>11</sup>

Other solutions might be suggested. For example, *datio legis* would be closer to the inscription. But given a century of habit, this modest alteration is more likely to confuse than to inform. In the circumstances, this study reluctantly retains the long-established terminology of *traditio legis*. The reader should, however, remain sensitive to the fact that the expression is a modern imposition and resist granting it any independent interpretive force. *Traditio legis* is to be taken solely as a neutral and arbitrary signifier, convenient shorthand to refer to a particular image.

## 1.2 Definition

Absent an external point of reference, like a biblical story, the inventory of *traditio legis* representations depends

<sup>8</sup> Baumstark 1903. The quotation is translated from page 173. The particular works by St. Laurent, et al are listed in Baumstark's notes 1-6. He does not mention Duchesne's book on liturgy.

<sup>9</sup> Schumacher 1959a and 1959b.

<sup>10</sup> The sarcophagus of Concordius in Arles, Rep. III.65, Figure 32 and a bronze lamp in Florence, Figure 76 (see notes 254 and 255). Both monuments are discussed below in Section 7.3, The Inscription.

<sup>11</sup> Schumacher's label is explicitly preferred by Arbeiter (2002:11-12). Although Krautheimer (1987: 319-20) considered that the representation is 'better identified it seems as dominus legem dat', he nonetheless continued to use *traditio legis* in his article.

on rules established by historians for determining what is in and what is out, which iconographical elements are necessary and which are common but not essential. A monument may fall outside the defined class for a variety of reasons. It might reflect an earlier stage in the genealogy of the image or represent a deviant but contemporary version of the type. And even if the tested representation is properly regarded and denominated as separate from the *traditio legis*, this does not mean that it is entirely unrelated. The boundaries of any such definition are never perfectly sharp.

Bas Snelders, focussing on sarcophagi, proposed that three essential features should be present for inclusion in the *traditio legis* catalogue: (1) Christ is in the centre holding an open scroll in his left hand; (2) Peter is on Christ's left and Paul is on his right; and (3) Peter catches the falling end of the scroll.<sup>12</sup> Snelders was quick to point out that the three figures and the *volumen* were not the only elements commonly found in the composition; these requirements were intended not as a description of the image but a minimal standard for classification. Some such standard is necessary to protect against undue category inflation. It is not helpful to label every image of Christ enthroned between Peter and Paul as an instance of the *traditio legis*. This usage homogenizes iconographical distinctions and dilutes the typology to the point of incoherence. It presupposes that the image-makers and the viewers were indifferent to such features as the appearance of the figures, the presence or absence of an unfurled scroll and the orientation of the apostles on either side of the Lord.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the three basic criteria proposed by Snelders, others emerge from a consideration of both the corpus of monuments summarized in Chapter 2 and the iconographical examination in Part II of this study. The first is that Christ should be standing rather than seated.<sup>14</sup> This would exclude only one sarcophagus example, Lateran 174 (Rep. I.677, Figure 11) that could otherwise qualify. Another limitation concerns the physiognomy of Christ. All but a very few of the monuments that meet the basic criteria depict Christ as mature and bearded. Additional widely-adopted and semantically important iconographical details are the mound (or, on rare occasions, globe) upon which Christ stands, and the covered hands with which Peter approaches the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> Snelders 2005: 322.

<sup>13</sup> Examples: Cooper 2005: 75 (referring to both Lat. 174, Figure 31, and the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, Rep. I.680, Figure 34, as *traditio legis* monuments in a seated variation); Gennaccari 1997: 844-45, no. 9 (applying the designation to a 'teaching' scene); Donati 2000: 210, no. 53 (entry by P. Silvan) (referring to Rep. II.89, which depicts Christ enthroned holding a book between acclaiming figures of Peter and Paul); Jensen 2000: 108 (a similar mosaic in Sant'Aquilino, Milan); Snyder 2003: 119 (calling the Velletri sarcophagus, Rep. II.242, and the polychrome fragments, Rep. I.773, Figure 65, early representatives of 'the traditional *traditio legis*'). Geissler (2002: 29-36) discusses a number of monuments that have sometimes been included as part of the *traditio legis* corpus but that he excludes from his own list.

<sup>14</sup> This rule is adopted by Bøgh Rasmussen (2001: 22).

These additional criteria will be used in this study not as exclusionary rules but rather to define a ‘standard’ *traditio legis* image: a ternary representation in which the bearded figure of Christ stands centrally on a mound holding an open *volumen*; he is flanked by the princes of the apostles, with Peter on his left catching or supporting the scroll with covered hands. Such variations as the youthful Christ do not meet the ‘standard’ form but will be noted along with some others that offend the rules in interesting ways. Additional elements are almost always found — palms, rivers of paradise, sheep, and so on. Their presence is consistent with rather than a deviation from the standard.

Any taxonomy risks being too narrow or too broad, too rigid or too loose. Ideally, the category comprehends all

and only those monuments that were identified by the original producers and viewers in a particular way. Absent any documentary evidence, that is an unattainable goal. The repetition of the standard *traditio legis*, particularly on sarcophagi, nonetheless suggests that Grimouard’s insight was basically correct; there is a recognizable group of monuments even if its precise boundaries cannot be absolutely fixed. At the same time, the definition of a standard *traditio legis* must not be allowed to mask variations in its appearance. No two of these monuments are the same. Even excluding the outliers, every element of the composition is subject to significant, sometimes idiosyncratic, alternative renderings. Many of these suggest different understandings of the form of representation and demonstrate the challenge posed by its complexity.